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5 Year Strategic Plan
Fiscal Year 2027-2031

1. Comprehensive Mission Statement:

It is the mission of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), to provide appropriate and comprehensive services to Mississippians with disabilities in a timely and effective manner. Programs and services assist individuals with disabilities to gain employment, retain employment and to live more independently.

2. Philosophy

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services is committed to being recognized as the premier agency for Mississippians with disabilities by creating a culture of care with compassionate, valued, and knowledgeable staff. We will promote an environment where customers and staff work together to achieve our common goal of empowering and improving the lives of Mississippians with disabilities.

3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks

In reviewing the Statewide Strategic Plan for Performance and Budgetary Success document entitled “Building a Better Mississippi,” we noted the nine key policy areas. These areas included (1) Economic Development, (2) Education: Public Schools, (3) Education: Higher Education, (4) Public Safety and Order; (5) Health; (6) Human Services; (7) Natural Resources; (8) Infrastructure; and (9) Government and Citizens. In reviewing these nine key policy statements, below are respective areas and associated Goals and Benchmarks the MS Department of Rehabilitation Services strives to meet.

(1) Economic Development

Statewide Goal #1. To develop a robust state economy that provides the opportunity for productive employment for all Mississippians.

1. **Relevant Benchmark 1 (Business Climate):** State business tax climate (comparison of more than 100 variables across five major areas of taxation: business taxes, individual income taxes, sales taxes, unemployment insurance rates and property taxes).
2. **Relevant Benchmark 2 (Job Growth):** Net job growth
3. **Relevant Benchmark 3 (Employment and Income):**
 - i. Percentage of the civilian non-institutional population 16 years and over employed.

- ii. Percentage of Mississippians receiving workforce training services who are employed one year to five years after receiving training and their average salary.
- iii. Unemployment rate (unemployed persons actively looking for a job as a percentage of the size of the labor force: the sum of employed and unemployed persons).
- iv. Wage and salary disbursements (total earnings)
- v. Average annual pay
- vi. Median household income
- vii. Percentage of workers whose family income falls above 150% of the federal poverty guidelines.

(2) Education: Higher Education

Statewide Goal #2: To make available an accessible, quality public higher education at an affordable cost that prepares Mississippians to become productive, financially self-sufficient members of society while meeting the human resource needs of Mississippi and its employees, including the creation of new jobs through the commercialization of university-based research.

A. Relevant Benchmark (Workforce Development):

- a. Percentage of AAS (technical) graduates employed in jobs in their field of study within a year of graduation (job placement rate).
- b. Percentage of certificate graduates employed in jobs in their field of study within a year of graduation (job placement rate).
- c. Percentage of students trained through workforce educations and training programs customized to meet the needs of local industries who successfully complete the program.

(3) Health

Statewide Goal #3: To protect Mississippians from risks to public health and to provide them with the health related information and access to quality healthcare necessary to increase the length and quality of their lives.

A. Relevant Benchmark (Access to Care):

- a. Number of individuals on waiting lists for home and community-based services.

(4) Human Services

Statewide Goal #4: To ensure that Mississippians are able to develop to their full potential by having their basic needs met, including the need for adequate food and shelter and a healthy, stable, and nurturing family environment or a competent and caring system of social support.

A. Relevant Benchmark (Vocational Services):

- a. Percentage of the population of persons with a disability who are employed.
- b. Percentage of individuals completing vocational rehabilitation services who obtain employment.
- c. Percentage of individuals completing vocational rehabilitation services who obtain employment with hourly rate of earnings equal to the federal or state minimum wage rate, whichever is higher.
- d. Percentage of individuals who obtain employment following completion of vocational rehabilitation services who remain employed (one-year and five-year follow-up).

4. Overview of the Agency 5-Year Strategic Plan

The MS Department of Rehabilitation Services maintains four program offices. These offices are (1) The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, (2) The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, (3) The Office of Disability Determination Services, and (4) The Office of Special Disability Programs. Within these four major programs we identify various goals and benchmarks that support the State of Mississippi's statewide goals and benchmarks. A summary of each program is noted below:

1. Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (described in conjunction with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind below)
2. Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

It is the primary goal of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind to provide appropriate and comprehensive services to Mississippians with disabilities in a timely and effective manner and assure that services within the scope of Vocational Rehabilitation Services are available to assist eligible individuals with an individualized plan for employment (IPE) in achieving their career goals. Through providing services to Mississippians with disabilities and assisting them in obtaining or retaining successful employment, the Mississippi

Department of Rehabilitation Services will provide workforce development and vocational services, improve the business climate, increase job growth and improve employment and income for all of Mississippi.

Through outreach, education, and marketing efforts targeted to individuals with disabilities, VR will continue to broaden the population of individuals with disabilities being served. VR will continue to target individuals with disabilities who are already working to return to or progress in employment, previous VR consumers who may have lost employment to become reemployed, college students nearing completion of their academic programs, high school transition age youth with disabilities, individuals with blindness and visual impairments, individuals with deafness and hearing impairments, and youth and adults with the most significant disabilities.

3. Office of Disability Determination Services

It is the primary goal of the Office of Disability Determination Services is to provide accurate, prompt, and cost-effective disability decisions for individuals with physical and mental disabilities who apply for benefits through the Social Security Administration (SSA).

MDRS will ensure continued success of this program through objectives which include: continuing to clear the number of dispositions as set by SSA, attaining a processing time threshold that meets or exceeds standards set by SSA, meeting or exceeding accuracy rates as measured by SSA, and meeting or exceeding the Production per Work Year goals as set by SSA. In recent years, the number of claims filed has been decreasing, which has affected our budgeted workload. SSA has generally asked that we clear as many claims as we receive.

MDRS anticipates external changes with this program through factors such as: SSA's continuing focus on aged claims, addressing the nationwide backlog, keeping Continuing Disability Review (CDR) claims current, and the ongoing improvements and updates to the new claims processing system.

4. Office of Special Disability Programs

It is the primary goal of the Office of Special Disability Programs to provide timely and quality services to individuals with severe disabilities that will enable and empower

them to live as independently as possible within their home and community. The Office of Special Disability Programs embraces the concepts of participant input, participant choice, expansion of services, outreach to minorities and accountability in its mission. Through services provided, the MS Department of Rehabilitation Services will ensure Mississippians with severe disabilities are provided access to care and are able to develop their full potential by having their basic needs met.

Programs:

Home and Community-Based Waivers provide long-term services and supports to individuals in their homes and communities with nursing home level of care as an alternative to nursing home care in order for them to remain independent in their homes and communities.

The Independent Living Grant provides funding for solutions that help individuals with disabilities regain more independence in their environments.

The Traumatic Brain Injury/Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund provides direct services to individuals who have sustained traumatic brain injuries and spinal cord injuries. Innovative programs are also provided to focus on the awareness, education, and prevention of these conditions.

The State Attendant Care Program provides personal care services to individuals who have severe disabilities and are not eligible to receive these services through other sources. Participants cannot be eligible to receive duplicate services under any other program.

MDRS will ensure continued success of this program through objectives, which include the following: providing supports and services through our waiver programs; creating cost savings to the Division of Medicaid through home and community based services as opposed to institutional care; ensure training and certification standards that promote high-quality services; and deter abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Additionally, MDRS will continue to work with the Division of Medicaid to maintain a Long Term Services and Supports system for all waivers. MDRS will continue to train staff, work with our federal and state partners, and provide communications to our participants and personal care attendants to ensure compliance with new federal requirements and the use of the new state tracking system.

5. Agency's External / Internal Assessment

1. Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. The Rehabilitation Act was reauthorized and passed by Congress and signed by the President in July 2014. The Act is known as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), and the WIOA Final Regulation was made available on June 30, 2016. Through this regulation, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind must place a greater emphasis on serving students and youth with disabilities and providing services that provide eligible individuals measurable skills gains so that they can compete for jobs and careers in today's labor market. Because of these changes, successful rehabilitations will take much longer, and counselors will be able to serve and rehabilitate fewer clients. Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind are now subject to common indicators of performance as included in WIOA.
2. Affordable Care Act. Effective January 1, 2015, employers employing over 100 FTE's are required to provide health insurance through the Affordable Care Act. Under this Act, any employee working on average 30 or more hours per week during the agency's respective look-back period must be offered health insurance. The health insurance premiums are funded by both the employer and the employee. This requirement under the Affordable Care Act affects the Office of Special Disability Programs and the Spinal Cord and Traumatic Brain Injury Program in the Home and Community-Based Waiver programs they administer through an agreement with the Division of Medicaid. MDRS is required to offer insurance to those eligible Personal Care Attendants. Although the employee mandate is no longer in effect, the employer mandate remains. Health Insurance will continue to be offered to eligible Personal Care Attendants in the foreseeable future.
3. Disability Case Processing System. As of 2023, the Mississippi DDS has fully transitioned from processing claims in the old (legacy) system to now utilizing the newer Disability Case Processing System (DCPS). This includes the processing of both federal and non-federal workloads. And, in looking towards the future, DDS continues to work with SSA on ways of incorporating Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies to help limit inefficiencies and further improve processing times.

4. Continuing Disability Reviews. Mississippi DDS continues to strive to meet workload targets for Continuing Disability Reviews, which are established by SSA annually.
5. Federal Funding Awarded to MDRS. Nearly 90% of the funding received by the MS Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) is derived from federal sources. As a result, MDRS must pay particular attention to any news regarding the federal budget to ensure we can sustain current operations in the event of a federal shutdown.
6. Development of Workforce and Succession Planning. Workforce development and succession planning is extremely important to MDRS to ensure that the agency continues providing the most effective and efficient services to our clients. MDRS maintains a succession program known as LEADRS that provides leadership training to employees. Through this training process, program participants have direct access to all executive staff, as well as receive management training from certified trainers. In addition, in-house training is provided to managers on a quarterly basis.
7. Long Term Services and Supports. The Division of Medicaid has developed, in conjunction with other State Agency partners, an automated tracking system for Long Term Care Services and Supports in Mississippi. Electronic tools have also been developed for the system. Maintaining the expansion of the Independent Living and Traumatic Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Waivers continues to be the responsibility of MDRS. An additional enhancement to the automated tracking system, Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) has been implemented. This enhancement is a result of the passing of the Cares Act. This enhancement will be utilized for personal care attendant services and in home respite services.

MDRS maintains a strong partnership with the Federal granting agencies as well as participates in the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) to ensure MDRS is made aware of any federal changes or amendments to federal requirements in a timely manner. MDRS also partners with other state agencies in Mississippi to ensure services provided and funding expended best benefits our clients and the taxpayers of Mississippi. Also, through regular staff meetings of the Executive Support Team, management is made aware of each program administered by MDRS and any challenges the programs are facing as well as the outcomes of each program. Lastly, MDRS annually has audits by independent accounting firms

in adherence to requirements set forth by the Yellow Book requirements and the Single Audit Act.

6. Agency Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Measures by Program for FY 2027 through FY 2031

A. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) provides services designed to improve economic opportunities for individuals with physical and mental disabilities through employment. In addition to general vocational rehabilitation services, programs include Supported Employment, Transition Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, and a network of 15 community rehabilitation centers ([AbilityWorks](#)) located throughout the state. These centers provide vocational assessment, job training and work experience for individuals with disabilities.

It is the primary goal of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide appropriate and comprehensive services to eligible individuals with disabilities that will assist them in obtaining and retaining competitive integrated employment that is consistent with the individual's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, and capabilities.

B. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (VRB) specializes in working with individuals with blindness and low vision to optimize their opportunities for inclusion into the workforce, community, and home. Counselors provide and coordinate services leading to employment which include vocational training, job placement, on-the-job training, orientation and mobility training, independent living skills training, career counseling and guidance, low vision aids and appliances, and job modification including adaptive technology. In addition to the specialized counselor's services, other program supports include the Addie McBryde Center for the Blind, the Business Enterprise Program, the Independent Living Services for the Blind, and the Mississippi Partners for Informed Choice. These programs provide an array of services intended to provide the skills to enable clients to remain independent in their homes, as well as to provide the confidence to seek their highest level of employment, regardless of the nature of the employment.

It is the primary goal of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind to assist an

Individual in achieving or maintaining an employment outcome that is consistent with his/her unique strengths, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice.

Overall Goal

It is the primary goal of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind to provide appropriate and comprehensive services to Mississippians with disabilities in a timely and effective manner, in order to assist them in obtaining, retaining and advancing in competitive integrated employment.

Due to changes in the Rehabilitation Act and with the enactment of WIOA, measures for performance changed from Standards and Indicators to the Common Performance Measures effective July 1, 2017. Therefore, Objectives 1 and 2 in this section are no longer required by the federal grantor to be measured. However, as an agency, we feel that these objectives are still noteworthy and provide valuable information to the reader. For this Strategic Plan, these two objectives (Objective 1 and Objective 2) are being included for informational purposes only.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind are primarily responsible for assuring that services within the scope of Vocational Rehabilitation Services are available to assist eligible individuals with an individualized plan for employment in achieving their goals.

Objective 1: At a minimum meet or increase the number of individuals who successfully become employed after receiving VR/VRB Services.

FFY	Number Rehabilitated
2027	2,880
2028	2,900
2029	2,920
2030	2,940
2031	2,960

Strategy A.1.1 The number of individuals with disabilities with significant/most significant disabilities that exited the VR/VRB program that achieved an employment outcome during the current performance period compared to the number that achieved an employment outcome in the previous performance period.

Output: Number of clients rehabilitated

Objective 2: Meet or increase the number of individuals served through VR/VRB.

FFY	Number Served
2027	17,200
2028	17,250
2029	17,300
2030	17,350
2031	17,400

Strategy A.1.1 The number of individuals with disabilities with significant/most significant disabilities served through the VR program shall meet or exceed the number served in the previous performance period.

Output: Number of clients served

Objective 3: Implement a statewide model for more effectively serving high school youth and students with disabilities including individuals with visual and/or hearing impairments.

Strategy A.1.1 The number of youth applying for services shall meet or exceed the number served in the previous performance period.

Output: Number of youth participants

FFY	Number of Youth Participants
2027	5,900
2028	5,950
2029	6,000
2030	6,050
2031	6,100

Strategy A.1.2 The number of youth that enter training or exit with an employment outcome shall meet or exceed the number served in the previous performance period.

Output: Number of youth who exit high school in training or with an employment outcome.

FFY	Number of Youth with an Employment Outcome
2027	390
2028	400
2029	410
2030	420
2031	430

C. The Office of Special Disability Programs (OSDP) offers programs and services that specialize in assisting individuals with severe physical disabilities and neurological impairments to remain active in their homes and communities. Services are provided based on need as determined by functional assessment and are provided through an individualized plan of services and supports.

D. Spinal Cord and Traumatic Brain Injury Program offers programs to enable individuals who have sustained a severe traumatic brain or spinal cord injury to resume the activities of daily living and reintegrate into the community with as much dignity and independence as possible.

Programs:

Home and Community-Based Waivers provide long-term services and supports to individuals in their homes and communities as an alternative to nursing home care.

The Independent Living Grant provides funding for solutions that help individuals with disabilities regain more independence in their environments.

The Traumatic Brain Injury/Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund provides direct services to individuals who have sustained traumatic brain injuries and spinal cord injuries. Innovative programs are also provided to focus on the awareness and prevention of these conditions.

The State Attendant Care Program provides personal care services to individuals who have severe disabilities and are not eligible to receive these services through other sources. Participants cannot be eligible to receive duplicate services under any other program.

Overall Goal

It is the goal of the Office of Special Disability Programs to provide timely and quality services to individuals with severe disabilities that will enable and empower them to live as independently as possible within their home and community or to be maintained in employment. The Office of Special Disability Programs embraces the concepts of participant input, participant choice, expansion of services, outreach to minorities and accountability in its mission.

Objective 1. Home and Community-Based Services — Waivers. Provide supports and services through Medicaid waivers in homes and community settings that will enable individuals with disabilities and who qualify for nursing facility care but can be served at home or in the community to maintain their independence and prevent institutionalization.

Outcome: Provide Home and Community-Based Waiver services to Mississippians with severe disabilities. Note: numbers served are contingent upon match funding received.

Note: Total numbers served by fiscal year:

FY	Number Served
2027	4,150
2028	4,200
2029	4,250
2030	4,300
2031	4,350

Outcome: Reduce the waiting time for Mississippians with severe disabilities who are eligible for home and community-based waiver services.

Strategy A.1.1: Request adequate state funding from MS Legislature to provide state match on Home and Community-Based Waiver services to ensure eligible participants can be served.

Output: Number of individuals receiving waiver services.

Output: Reduction of waiting time for Waiver services.

Strategy A.1.2: Provide supervisory review of case files and referral lists to ensure participants are served according to guidelines and efficiently.

Output: Improve quality assurance.

Output: Reduction of waiting times for waiver services.

Objective 2. Cost Savings to the State of Mississippi. Provide individualized services not to exceed institutional cost. These services are provided to individuals who can be served in their own home and community through the Home and Community Based Waiver programs.

Outcome: Provide cost effective services to individuals eligible for Home and Community Based Waiver (HCBW) services.

Strategy A.1.1: Monitor costs to ensure costs provided through HCBW services are below institutional costs.

Output: Ensure participants receive high-quality services in a cost efficient manner.

Objective 3. Certification. MDRS will ensure continued success of this program through objectives; which include the following: providing supports and services through our waiver programs, creating cost savings to the Division of Medicaid through home and community based services as opposed to institutional care; ensure training and certification standards that promote high-quality services; and deter abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Outcome: Quality services to participants by enrolling personal care attendants through annual participant specific training.

Strategy A.1.1: Continued review of service provision.

Output: Case reviews.

Output: Quality services.

Output: Abuse, neglect, and exploitation deterrent.

Objective 4. Information Technology. Enhance automated systems that assist the end users in becoming more efficient and effective in their service delivery.

Outcome: Efficient and effective services to participants to ensure participants are not at risk of losing certification.

Strategy A.1.1: Work jointly with the Division of Medicaid in the development and/or enhancement of automated systems.

Output: Attend meetings with Medicaid regarding system changes.

Output: Monitor reports generated by automated systems to ensure systems provide efficient and effective data.

- E. The Office of Disability Determination Services (DDS)**, which is funded entirely through the Social Security Administration, establishes eligibility for Mississippians with severe disabilities who apply for Social Security Disability Insurance and/or Supplemental Security Income.

Overall Goal

The primary goal of the Office of Disability Determination Services is to provide accurate, prompt, and cost-effective disability decisions for physically and mentally disabled individuals who apply for benefits under the Social Security Administration (SSA).

Objective 1. Dispositions. Clear the projected number of case dispositions as set by the Social Security Administration.

Outcome: Provide accurate dispositions of cases.

Outcome: Ensure those applying for disability receive a determination in a timely manner.

Strategy A.1.1: Request SSA funding for adequate staff necessary to ensure MDRS clears the proper number of case dispositions as set forth by SSA.

Output: Number of Case dispositions.

Output: Number of staff assigned to process claimant cases.

Strategy A.1.2: Provide technical advice and training to staff to ensure cases are cleared as efficiently as possible.

Output: Amount of training offered.

Output: Knowledge and experience of staff performing case dispositions.

Note: Total anticipated case dispositions by year:

FY	Dispositions
2027	65,000
2028	65,000
2029	70,000
2030	70,000

2031	70,000
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Objective 2. Processing Time. Attain a processing time threshold for Initial Disability Claims as established by the Social Security Administration.

Outcome: Provide dispositions of cases in a timely and efficient manner.

Outcome: Ensure those applying for disability receive a determination in a timely manner.

Strategy A.1.1: Provide proper supervision of examiner staff to ensure cases are processed timely.

Output: Average processing time per case.

Output: Number of staff assigned to process claimant cases.

Efficiency: Provide processing times of cases that meet or exceed that required by SSA.

Strategy A.1.2: Provide technical advice and training to staff to ensure cases are cleared as efficiently as possible.

Output: Amount of training offered.

Output: Knowledge and experience of staff performing case dispositions.

Note: Total processing time by year:

FY	Processing Time
2027	125 days
2028	120 days
2029	120 days
2030	120 days
2031	115 days

Objective 3. Accuracy Rate. Meet or exceed the quality of Initial Title II and Title XVI disability decisions standards as measured by the Social Security Administration on its yearly Net Accuracy Report.

Outcome: Provide disability determinations in an accurate manner.

Strategy A.1.1: Provide proper supervision of examiner staff to ensure cases are processed timely.

Output: Accuracy of determinations made.

Strategy A.1.2: Provide technical advice and training to staff to ensure cases are cleared as efficiently as possible.

Output: Amount of training offered.

Output: Knowledge and experience of staff performing case dispositions.

Efficiency: Provide determinations that meet or exceed that accuracy rate as set forth by SSA

Note: Required accuracy rate for each year as set forth by SSA

FY	Accuracy Rate
2027	97%
2028	97%
2029	97%
2030	97%
2031	97%

Objective 4. Production per Work Year. Meet or exceed the National Production per Work Year (PPWY) as set by the Social Security Administration.

Outcome: Comply with SSA's PPWY for each fiscal year.

Strategy A.1.1: Provide proper reporting and supervision by management to ensure PPWY exceeds the National PPWY.

Output: Meet or exceed the National Production per Work Year (PPWY) as set by SSA.

Note: Total Production per Work Year for each fiscal year.

FY	Production per Work Year
2027	300
2028	300
2029	300
2030	300
2031	315