



Disability Benefit Specialist Program

2015 Summary Report

Disability Benefit Specialists (DBS) help people with disabilities **ages 18-59** to understand and access Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, health insurance and other public and private benefits. They work with people to avoid common errors by explaining benefit eligibility criteria, appeal options, and deadlines; filling out paperwork; gathering documents; and helping find legal representation for people who require a hearing.

Disability Benefit Specialists Are Available Statewide

All Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) across Wisconsin offer DBS services.

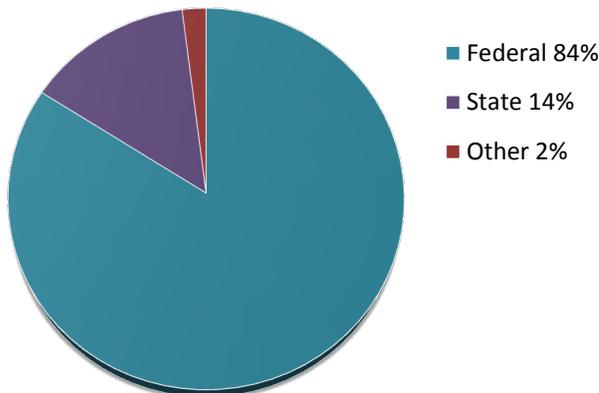
The Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council has employed two disability benefit specialists since April 2010 to reach **tribal members** who live on or near a Wisconsin reservation.

The Department of Health Services, Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH), has employed a disability benefit specialist since 2007 to serve **individuals using American Sign Language (ASL)**.

DBS Services Make a Positive Economic Impact

When people are able to access insurance and other programs that help with food, shelter, and medical expenses, their local communities also experience a positive economic impact. DBS report the approximate value of any benefits that they help someone to obtain or retain, and these data are compiled to calculate the monetary impact of DBS services. In 2015, DBS services helped to net over **\$83 million** in public benefits for Wisconsin residents, stabilizing household budgets and lessening the pressure on local crisis and emergency services. **Federal funds accounted for 84% of the benefits gained**, while state (14%) and other funds, such as private donations (2%), made up the remainder.

2015 Monetary Impact



Estimated statewide impact of DBS services in 2015:

\$83,887,041

Average monetary impact* of one full-time DBS in 2015:

\$1,048,588

*This average is based on a total of 80 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions



DBS Help With a Wide Range of Benefit Issues

Disability benefit specialists help people resolve a wide range of benefit issues. A single case may involve multiple interrelated issues. The top 10 issues reported for DBS cases closed in 2015 are listed in the chart below.

Top 10 DBS Case Issues of 2015	Percent of Cases 2015
Assistance with Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Eligibility	44%
Medicaid Purchase Plan (MAPP)	14%
Medicare Part D Options/Enrollment	14%
FoodShare	8%
Medicare Savings Programs	7%
SSI/SSDI Post-Entitlement Issues	7%
BadgerCare Plus	6%
Benefit Check-Up	6%
Medicaid Financial Eligibility	5%
Medicare Advantage Options/Enrollment	4%

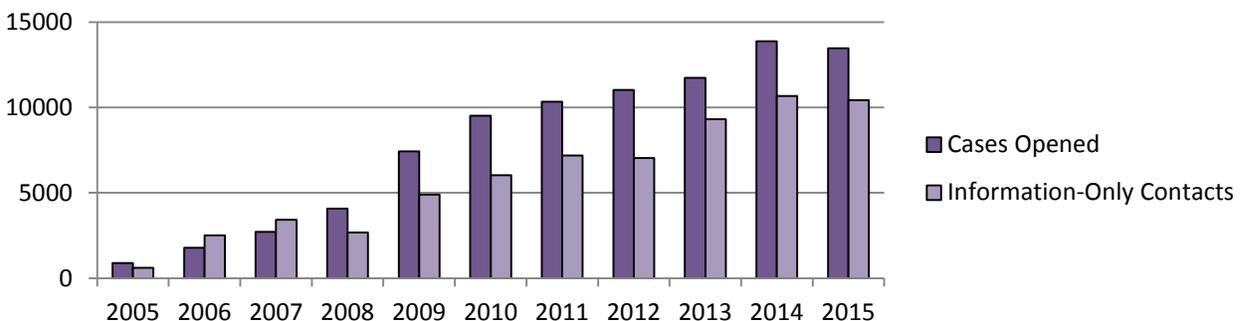
DBS Program Reach

A specialist opens a “case” for each issue or set of closely interrelated issues that he or she assists a person to resolve. A case may remain open for one day or several months, depending on the nature of a person’s issue(s). Customer issues that require less than 30 minutes to resolve are recorded as “information-only” contacts.

DBS Activities in 2015		Statewide	Average for One Full-Time DBS*
Number of Cases	Carried Over from 2014	4,615	58
	Opened in 2015	13,473	168
	Closed in 2015	14,013	175
Number of Information-Only Contacts		10,436	130

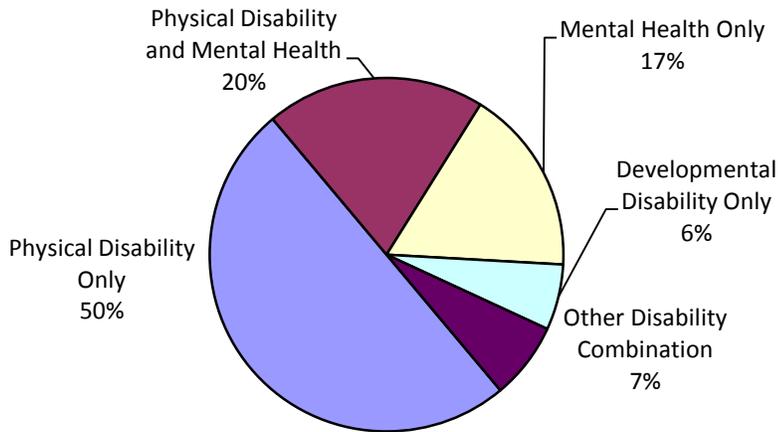
*These averages are calculated based upon a total of 80 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions.

Due to recent program expansion, DBS services are now available statewide. Mirroring the expansion of the program, the number of people receiving DBS services has grown significantly over time. Data below demonstrates this growth.



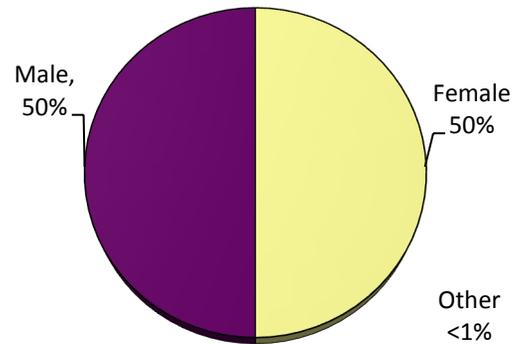
DBS Reach Diverse Populations

DBS provide services to people regardless of income level or disability type. The program serves people aged 18 to 59, including youths with disabilities who are transitioning to adult benefits, and adults who may be seeking disability benefits for the first time, weighing their Medicare options, or dealing with post-entitlement issues such as overpayments or a disability reviews. Elder Benefit Specialists (EBS) provide similar services to adults aged 60 and over.

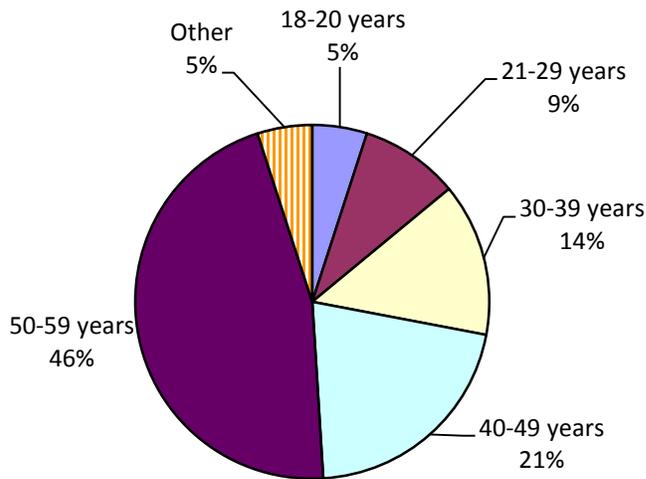


Customer Disability*

Lives with others	66%
Lives alone	28%
Homeless or shelter	4%
Residential care	<1%
Nursing home	<1%



Customer Gender*



Customer Age*

Customer Income*

Seventy-five percent (75%) of DBS customers had incomes at or below 120% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)

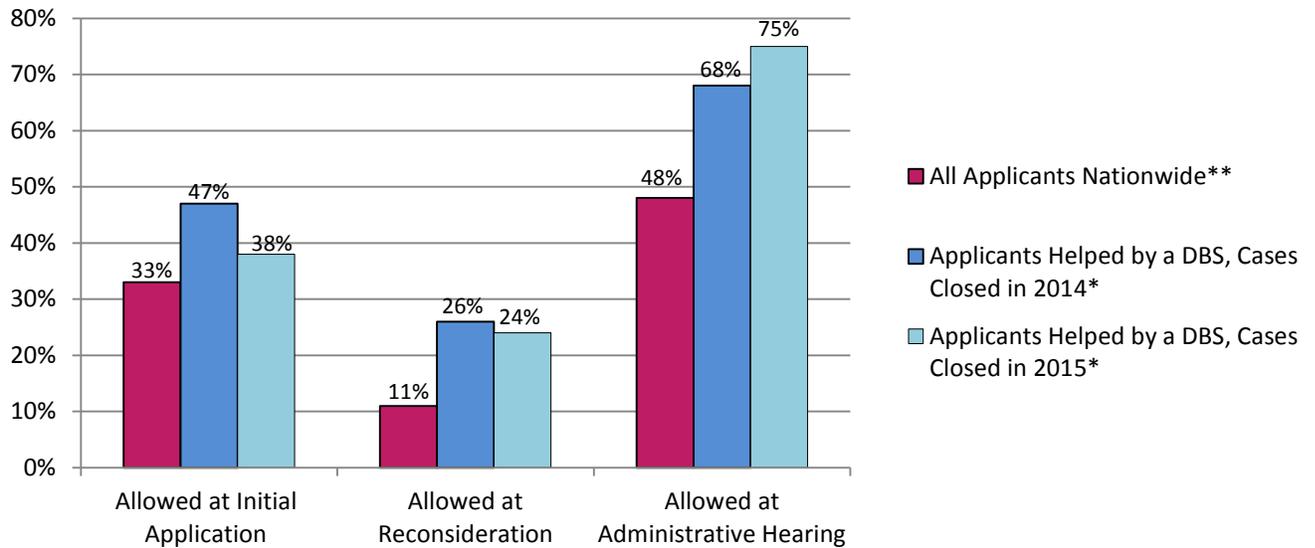
*All DBS customer demographic data are based on people for whom a case was opened in 2015 and exclude people whose demographic status was unknown or unreported.



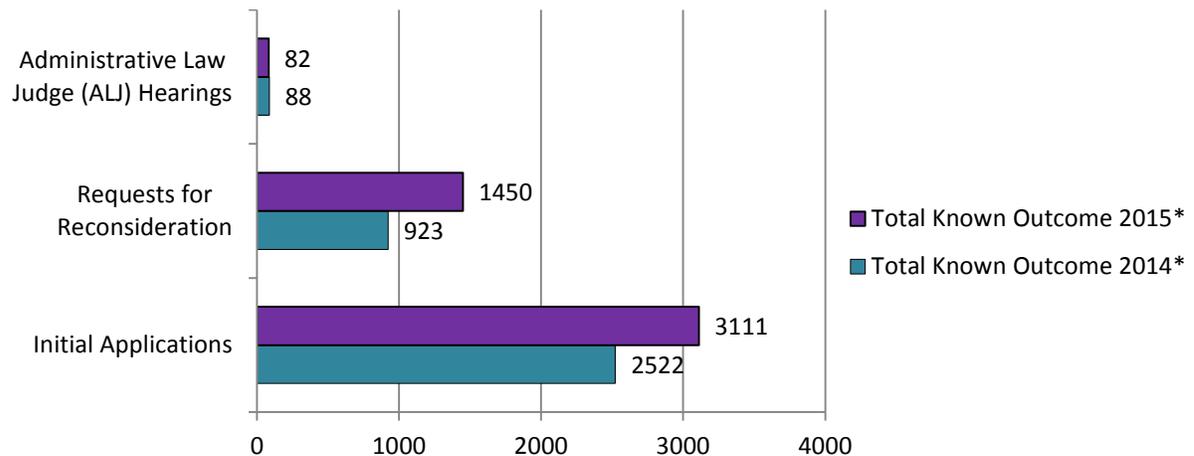
DBS Play a Key Role in Disability Determination Cases

DBS have a key role in helping people to access needed disability benefits such as Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicare, and Medicaid. As illustrated below, Wisconsin's program data indicates that people who obtain help from a DBS are more likely to receive a favorable decision.

DBS Allowance Rates Compared with National Rates



DBS Assistance with SSDI, SSI, and Concurrent Applications, Reconsiderations, and Hearings



* This data includes SSI, SSDI, and concurrent issues at the application, reconsideration, and ALJ appeal stage. The data excludes cases with the outcome listed as unknown or pending, and those for whom the application or appeal was withdrawn prior to the issuance of a decision. Reasons for a pending or unknown outcome at case closure may include the provision of information-only services; client withdrawal or lack of contact; or referral to a private attorney.

** Social Security Administration (SSA) Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 Budget Justification, FY2013 Disability Workload, p. 144, available at: <https://www.ssa.gov/budget/FY15Files/2015FCJ.pdf>



DBS Receive Extensive Training and Technical Assistance

DBS are a trusted resource and provide accurate, current information. They receive extensive training, are provided opportunities for skill-building, and have access to expert technical assistance.

Wisconsin Disability Benefits Network (WDBN) coordinates initial training for newly hired DBS, with subject matter expertise provided through a sub-contract with Disability Rights Wisconsin. In 2015, WDBN training was provided to 12 new DBS hires; initial training was also available to newly hired DBS assistants and supervisors. The standard training program for a new DBS includes 40 hours of online training, four days of in-person training, and job shadowing of an experienced DBS.

Disability Rights Wisconsin provides ongoing training, technical assistance, and case oversight to all disability benefit specialists. A staff of eight program attorneys, one training coordinator, and one managing attorney are employed under contract with the Department. Training topics in 2015 included:

- End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD)
- DBS Confidentiality Standards
- Disability Determination Explanation (DDE)
- Ethics and Boundaries
- Vocational Experts
- Interviewing Clients
- Introduction to Social Security and Social Security Administration (SSA) Advanced Topics
- Health Insurance Topics and Scenarios
- Submission of Adverse Evidence
- Mock Social Security Hearing
- Mental Health Listing Criteria
- Intellectual Disability Listings
- Compassion Fatigue
- A Guide to Wisconsin Legal Service Programs

Wisconsin Judicare, Inc. provides program attorney services to the disability benefit specialists employed by Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, including training on benefit issues unique to tribal members, technical assistance, and case oversight.

More Information about DBS Services is Available

For more information about DBS services, including local agency contact information and customer survey results, visit the Wisconsin Department of Health Services website at <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/benefit-specialists/dbs.htm> or contact the Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources at 608-266-2536.

