



Initial Training for New Disability Benefit Specialists



In order to effectively serve clients, Disability Benefit Specialists (DBSs) must develop and maintain an in-depth knowledge of the wide array of benefits available to individuals with disabilities, as well as the skills to appeal eligibility decisions and pursue other advocacy strategies. For this reason, the Department of Health Services (DHS) requires that all DBSs complete initial and ongoing training (ADRC Contract, Section III. F. 7. a).

Initial training, coordinated by the Wisconsin Disability Benefits Network (WDBN) at Employment Resources, Inc. (ERI) and Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW), is provided to all newly hired DBSs. This initial training includes an online course, four days of in-person foundation-level training, a one-day event at the Disability Determination Bureau, and four webcasts. Throughout this initial training period, the DBS is encouraged to seek technical assistance and support from his/her assigned program attorney as often as needed.

1. Online Coursework

A series of online course modules, coordinated by the WDBN, are designed to provide new DBSs with basic information about a wide array of benefit programs. Course topics include: the benefit specialist's role, Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, Medicare Savings Programs, BadgerCare Plus, the Health Insurance Marketplace, Continuation of Benefits Reform Act (COBRA), Wisconsin Heat and Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP), FoodShare, and Native American benefits.

Each online course may include a variety of components, including Adobe Connect Pro presentations, DHS webcasts, videos, written assignments and quizzes.

The courses are designed to be completed at your own pace. However, there are mandatory pre-requisite courses you must complete prior to attending in-person portions of the training. You will receive a list of which courses must be completed before attending in-person trainings.

Your assigned program attorney will track your progress as you work through the online courses. You should seek help from him or her if you have any questions about course content.

Enrollment in the course is not time-limited. You may revisit course materials at any time.



2. In-Person Training

Each new DBS will attend four days of in-person training designed to build upon and integrate the information provided in the online course. This in-person training is conducted by DBS program attorneys from Disability Rights Wisconsin. The four days are broken into two, 2-day sessions. One of the 2-day sessions focuses on Social Security benefits including the disability determination process, medical and nonmedical eligibility and case advocacy. The other 2-day session focuses on health care benefits such as Medicare, Medicaid and individual or employer-sponsored insurance. It will not matter which session you attend first. Each of the 2-day sessions will be offered three times during a calendar year. The location of these events will vary depending upon the needs of a given class of students. Occasionally, if there is not adequate demand, a scheduled session may be cancelled.

Each of the 2-day sessions will require certain pre-requisites as a condition of attendance. Most of these pre-requisites consist of the modules described above. DRW will provide the pre-requisite assignments to the Basic Training attendees for that session approximately a month prior to the scheduled in-person training.

3. Job Shadowing (*one or more days*)

All new DBSs should spend a minimum of one day shadowing an experienced DBS either in his/her own place of employment and/or at the ADRC of the experienced DBS. Your assigned program attorney will assist you in identifying one or more DBSs whom you can shadow. By observing an experienced DBS at work, you will have the opportunity to learn more about day-to-day processes such as maintaining case files, interviewing clients, and filling out online applications.

4. Orientation to the Disability Determination Bureau (*one day*)

Each year, newly hired DBSs attend a day-long event at the Disability Determination Bureau in Madison, featuring a series of presentations by bureau staff. Past presenters have included examiners, medical and vocational experts, and others.

