



Disability Benefit Specialist Program

2016 Summary Report

A **Disability Benefit Specialist (DBS)** serves people with disabilities who are **aged 18-59**. DBSs help clients access Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, health insurance, and other public and private benefits. DBSs help people avoid common errors by explaining benefit eligibility criteria, appeal options, and deadlines. When appropriate, DBSs also help by filling out paperwork, gathering documents, and preparing clients for hearings.

Disability Benefit Specialists are Available Statewide.

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

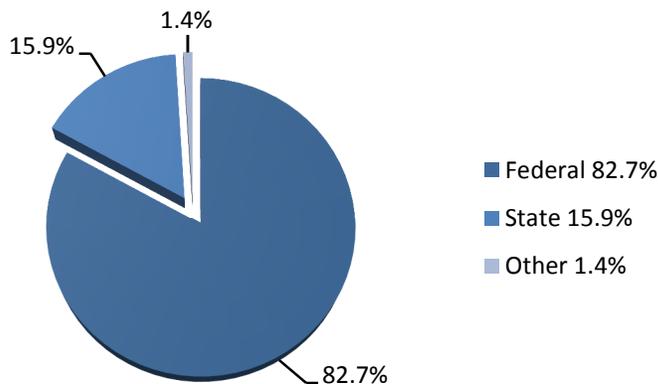
The Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council employs two DBSs to reach **tribal members** who live on or near a Wisconsin reservation.

The Department of Health Services, Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, employs a DBS to serve **individuals who use American Sign Language**.

DBS Services Make a Positive Impact.

DBS services help people with disabilities access insurance, food, shelter, and medical care. In 2016, over **\$76 million** worth of services for Wisconsin residents with disabilities helped to stabilize household budgets and lessen the pressure on local crisis and emergency services. Federal funds accounted for 82.7% of the benefits provided, while state (15.9%) and other funds, such as private donations (1.4%), made up the remainder.

2016 Funds Provided



Estimated statewide impact of DBS services in 2016:

\$76,438,900

Average monetary impact* of one full-time DBS in 2016:

\$955,486

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



DBSs Help with a Wide Range of Benefit Issues.

A single client's case may involve multiple interrelated issues. For example, a single case could involve Medicaid, Medicare, and FoodShare eligibility. For cases closed in 2016, the top 10 case issues are listed below.

Top 10 DBS Case Issues of 2016	Percent of 2016 Cases
Assistance with Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Eligibility	40.6%
Medicaid Purchase Plan (MAPP)	14.6%
Medicare Part D Options/Enrollment	14.6%
Medicare Savings Programs	8.7%
FoodShare	7.9%
SSI/SSDI Post-Entitlement Issues	7.5%
Benefit Check-Up	6.9%
BadgerCare Plus	5.9%
Medicaid Financial Eligibility	4.3%
Medicare Eligibility	4.1%

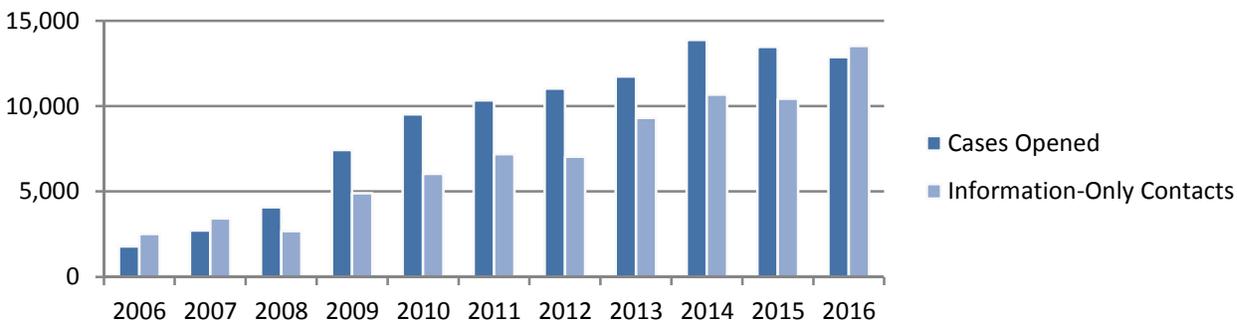
DBSs Maintain a High Caseload.

A DBS opens a client "case" for each issue or set of interrelated issues that he or she helps 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 2016		Statewide	Average for One Full-Time DBS*
Number of Cases	Carried Over from 2015	3,967	50
	Opened in 2016	12,871	161
	Closed in 2016	12,571	157
Number of Information-Only Contacts		13,523	169

*These averages are calculated based on 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 since the program's inception. Data below demonstrate this growth.



DBSs Reach Diverse Populations.

DBSs serve people, aged 18 through 59, regardless of income level or disability type. DBSs assist youth with disabilities who are transitioning to adult benefits. Additionally, DBSs serve adults who may be seeking disability benefits for the first time, weighing their Medicare options, or facing post-entitlement issues. Elder Benefit Specialists provide similar services to adults aged 60 and over.

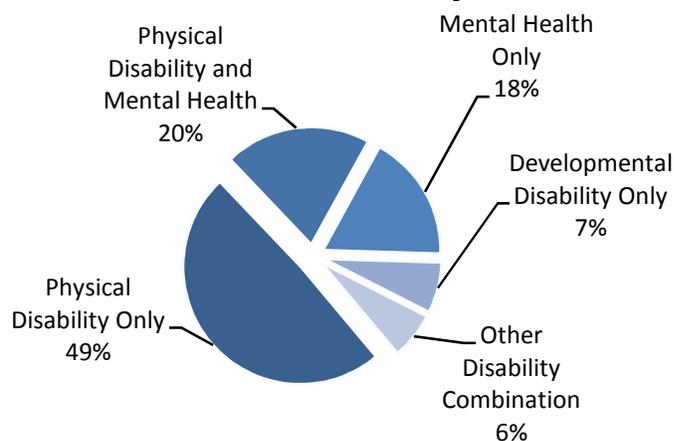
Customer Income*

Over 75% of DBS customers had incomes at or below 120% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).

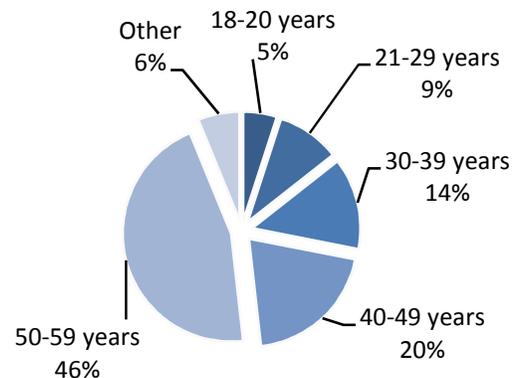
Customer Gender*

In 2016, 51% of DBS customers identified as male, and 49% of DBS customers identified as female.

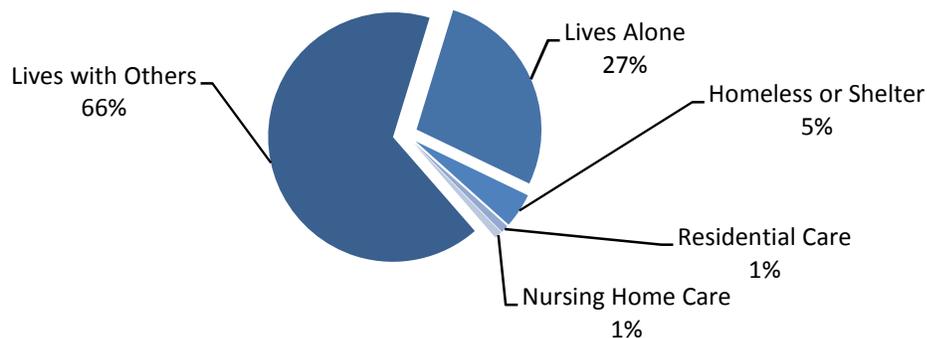
Customer Disability*



Customer Age*



Customer Living Arrangement*



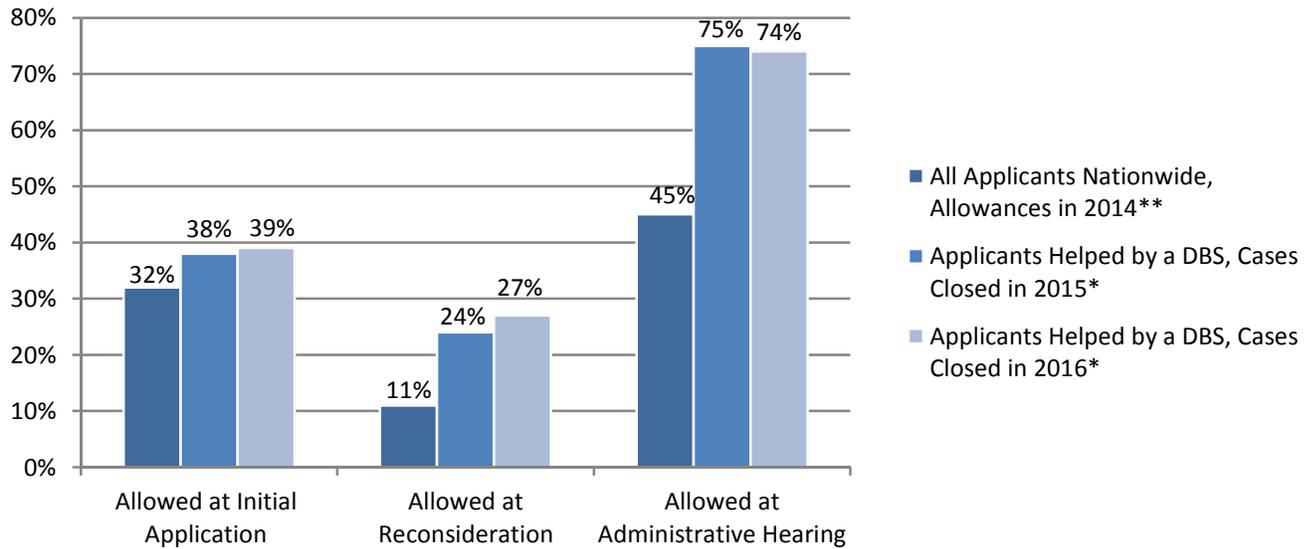
*All 2016 DBS customer data are based on clients for whom a case was opened. The data exclude people whose demographic status was unknown or unreported.



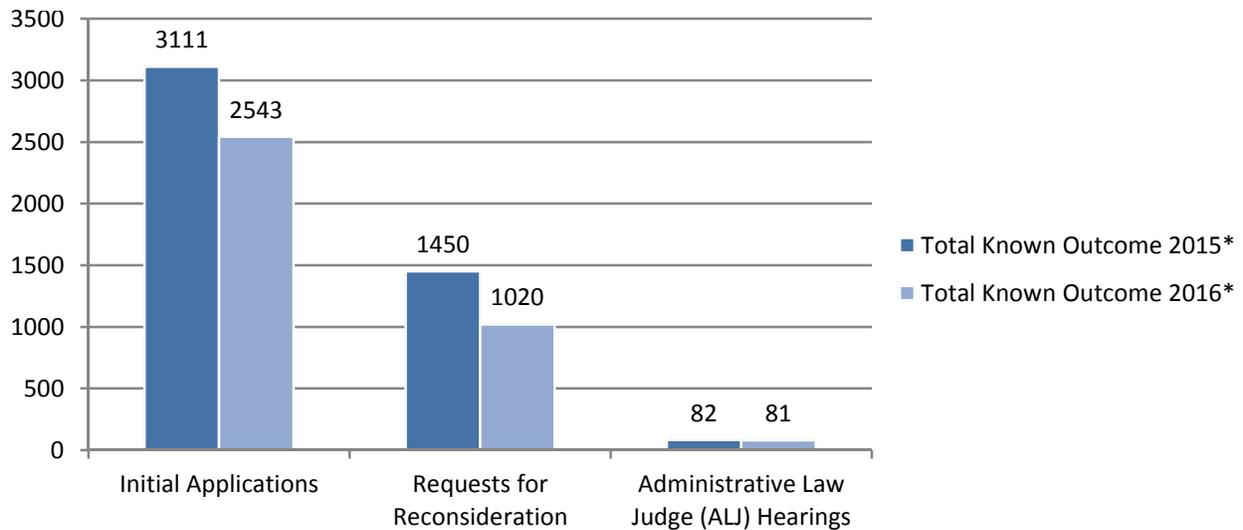
DBSs Play a Key Role in Disability Determination Cases.

DBS help people access needed disability benefits, including SSDI and SSI. As illustrated below, Wisconsin's program data indicate that people who obtain DBS assistance are more likely to receive a favorable decision.

DBS Allowance Rates Compared to National Allowance Rates



DBS Assistance with SSA Benefit Applications, Reconsiderations, and Hearings



* The data include SSA benefits matters at various stages, including initial application, reconsideration, and ALJ appeal. The data exclude cases with outcomes listed as unknown, pending, or withdrawn prior to the issuance of a decision. Reasons for a pending or unknown outcome 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) 2016 Budget Justification, FY 2014 Disability Workload, p. 143, available at <https://www.ssa.gov/budget/FY16Files/2016FCJ.pdf>.



DBSs Receive Extensive Training and Technical Assistance.

DBSs are trusted to provide current information. Accordingly, they receive extensive training, opportunities for skill building, and expert technical assistance.

Wisconsin Disability Benefits Network (WDBN) coordinates initial training for newly hired DBSs, with subject matter expertise provided through a subcontract with Disability Rights Wisconsin. In 2016, initial training was provided to 17 new DBSs; this 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 an experienced DBS.

Disability Rights Wisconsin provides ongoing training, technical assistance, and case oversight to all DBSs. A staff of eight program attorneys, one training coordinator, and one managing attorney are employed under contract with the Department of Health Services. Examples of 2016 training topics are listed below.

- DBS Confidentiality Standards
- Disability Determination Explanation (DDE)
- Ethics and Boundaries
- SSI Financial Eligibility
- Diabetes
- Health Insurance Topics and Scenarios
- Mental Health Listing Criteria
- Housing Accommodation Requests
- Case Strategy Development
- SSA Overpayments

Wisconsin Judicare, Inc. provides program attorney services to the DBSs 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.

