



## **New York Vision Rehabilitation Association**

Position of the New York Vision Rehabilitation Association, November 2009

The New York Vision Rehabilitation Association (NYVRA) is a volunteer led charitable 501c4 entity whose members are individuals and organizations that provide, support and promote vision rehabilitation, education and quality services for New Yorkers with vision loss.

Represented within our membership are eleven (11) of the NYS private nonprofit vision rehabilitation agencies, New York State Industries for the Blind, a large specialized school in NYC, Hunter College Programs in Visual Impairment, the professional association in NYS (AERBVI), the NYC NAPVI Chapter and four (4) chapters of ACB representing consumers in Long Island, New York City, Westchester and the New York State Chapter.

### **Goals that we urge the New York State Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, the New York State Legislature and the Governor to support:**

New York State licensure of vision rehabilitation professionals and their continuing development and growth as a profession

Rates of reimbursement sufficient to provide quality services

Adequate funding for an array of specialized programs serving people of all ages who are blind or visually impaired throughout all the counties of New York State

A shared agenda between providers and consumers for promoting programs and policies that achieve independence and employment of people of all ages who are blind or visually impaired

Public awareness education regarding the abilities and needs of people of all ages who are blind or visually impaired as well as the professionals who serve them

Mandatory reporting to a state registry that would identify people with severe vision loss who would be referred to NYS CBVH

Mandatory screening for vision problems in all schools (public and private) when a child enters a new school, when a person is admitted to the hospital (for any procedure) and when general health services are provided in a community clinic

Expanded government funded transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities to enable both populations to access local services

Funding for specialized services for people who are blind or visually impaired to enable them to age in place in the least restrictive environment, receive home and community based services and access information in a format of choice.

NYVRA member organizations offer a wide array of services for individuals of all ages with vision loss. Many of these organizations have celebrated more than 100 years of service for New Yorkers.

The NYVRA members employ thousands of professionals and educators who are nationally recognized leaders of high quality, expert and innovative programs. Collaboration on issues with consumers and advocates is a hallmark of NYVRA's philosophy.

Unlike the medical model that will fund a cast or a walker along with four sessions of physical therapy when an individual breaks a leg, when someone loses functional vision due to age-related macular degeneration they do not have a direct referral from the optometrist or ophthalmologist to vision rehabilitation services. So although the New York statewide delivery model boasts 19 private nonprofit organizations, for far too many New Yorkers, the transition from diagnosis and medical treatment to vision rehabilitation therapy and mobility leaves a large majority without these important services.

NYVRA believes that at issue is the need for NYS to align vision rehabilitation services funding and support with the mission to serve individuals with visual impairments from birth to seniors including those with a severe visual impairment who are not legally blind. NYVRA has identified the following barriers to this goal:

- 1) Lack of sufficient government funding for services and capital needs.
- 2) Failure to declare vision rehabilitation services or durable equipment like canes, and adaptive aids as eligible for Medicare reimbursement.
- 3) A shortage of trained vision rehabilitation professionals and teachers of children with vision impairment caused by a dearth of training institutions that offer these programs and lack of knowledge by students of these professions.
- 4) Lack of New York State established scope of practice standards normally gained through licensure of professionals.
- 5) A dearth of transportation options (especially outside the urban areas) that enable people to participate in programs, services, and employment.
- 6) Lack of knowledge and/or reluctance on the part of the general population to seek out diagnosis, treatment and vision rehabilitation when facing eye disease and vision loss.
- 7) An unacceptably high unemployment rate of people with vision loss.
- 8) Exponential growth expected in the population with vision loss, particularly seniors.

Through the years, NYVRA members have worked with CBVH, the State Education Department, parents, local colleges and universities and municipalities to tackle these issues with limited success. Even after years of intense commitment, persistence and hard work by individuals and organizations, many of these vital issues remain unresolved. Most of the solutions that have been developed have come directly from our own members.

Examples include:

- 1) In response to the vision rehabilitation staffing shortage, Hunter College of the City University of New York established a free graduate training program and added a free distance learning program;
- 2) ABVI-Goodwill in Rochester, CABVI of Utica, NABA in Albany, AVRE in Binghamton and STAVI in the Southern Tier created new businesses employing hundreds of people with vision loss (i.e. manufacturing jobs, call center jobs, etc.)
- 3) VISIONS in NYC expanded services for 100 blind youth's offering both summer and after school work experiences.
- 4) Helen Keller Services for the Blind expanded screening children for eye disease across all of Long Island and to parts of the City including Kings County.

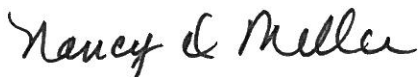
5) NYVRA led the way in New York State with the national Vision Serve Alliance in securing a Medicare Demonstration project, still underway. This project studies the impact that vision rehabilitation services have on mitigating falls and other health problems of seniors.

6) NYVRA members have lobbied extensively in Albany on behalf of the licensure bills that are currently in the State Senate and Assembly committees on Higher Education.

For the past 10 years NYVRA has spearheaded an advocacy effort to secure a bill in the NYS legislature that would license Vision Rehabilitation Professionals. This legislation would elevate the profession, insure proper credentials and high standards for vision rehabilitation professionals and entice more people to consider entering the field. When passed, this legislation will place NY State as the leader in ensuring quality services in the field of vision rehabilitation and will encourage other states to follow suit. Licensure in any field has been found to dramatically increase the number of professionals entering that field and is recognized by the public as a needed measure to ensure safety.

In spite of the many systemic barriers, the organizations, schools and groups that make up NYVRA have leveraged their assets and established strong community ties to enhance the lives of tens of thousands of blind people, enabling them to achieve independence and dignity and contribute within their families and communities.

Submitted on behalf of NYVRA by:



Nancy D. Miller, LMSW  
President



Dr. Grace Ambrose-Zaken  
Vice President

**NYVRA, Nancy D. Miller, President, [nmiller@visionsvcb.org](mailto:nmiller@visionsvcb.org)**

**500 Greenwich Street, Suite 302, New York, NY 10013-1354**

**Phone: 917-859-9184, Fax: 212-219-4078**

**The New York Vision Rehabilitation Association is a non-profit coalition comprised of members, organizations and agencies located across New York State, addressing issues that impact services for people who are blind or partially sighted.**