



# Health and Human Services

## Aging Texas Well Advisory Committee

February 4, 2026

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*This summary contains supplemental information from reliable sources where that information provides clarity to the issues being discussed. Power Point tables used in the presentations may also be used in this summary. Names of individuals may be misspelled but every attempt has been made to ensure accuracy. Tables and Text have been used from executive and legislative agencies and departments' presentations and publications.*

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[Aging Texas Well Advisory Committee](#) advises HHSC and makes recommendations to state leadership on implementing the Aging Texas Well Initiative.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry issued an [executive order \(PDF\)](#) in April 2005 creating the Aging Texas Well Advisory Committee. The order formalizes the ATW initiative and charges the department to continue its work identifying and discussing aging policy issues, guiding state government readiness, and promoting increased community preparedness for Texas' older adult population.

Under the executive order, the advisory committee shall advise the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and make recommendations to state leadership on implementation of the ATW initiative. A comprehensive, strategic, master plan is developed by HHSC to carry out the orders mandates and guide aging policies and priorities.

HHSC also leads a planning effort to ensure the readiness of all Texas state agencies to serve an aging population by identifying issues, current initiatives, and future needs.

#### **Members**

**Ramsey Longbotham, Chair**

Representing: People who are age 50 or older  
Region 8, Victoria

**Shakita Johnson, Vice Chair**

Representing: Area Agencies on Aging  
Region 3, Fort Worth

**Mallory Freitag Hejja**

Representing: Aging and Disability  
Resource Centers  
Region 6, Houston

**Demetress Harrell**

Representing: Caregivers of older adults  
50+ (nonprofessional or family  
caregivers)  
Region 5, Lufkin

**Konette Horton**

Representing: Providers of Residential  
Setting  
Region 4, Mesquite

**Dr. Michael Poku**

Representing: Aging services delivery  
network; Providers from a community  
setting  
Region 7, Plano

**Dr. June Sadowsky**

Representing: Older adults; Aging  
services delivery network  
Region 6, Houston

**Charles Scoma**

Representing: Advocates of people over  
50 (organization)  
Region 3, North Richland Hills

**Michael Zendejas**

Representing: Caregivers of older adults  
50+ (professional)  
Region 8, San Antonio

**Angela Medina – Ex Officio**

Representing: Department of Family and  
Protective Services  
Region 7, Austin



**Gladys Maestre**

Representing: Academic Community  
Region 11, Rancho Viejo

**Natalee Oliver**

Representing: Caregivers of a person  
who is age 50 or older (non-professional  
or family caregiver)  
Region 7, Fort Worth

**Crystal Stark – Ex Officio**

Representing: Texas Workforce  
Commission  
Region 7, Austin

**Lynda Taylor - Ex Officio**

Representing: Department of State  
Health Services  
Region 7, Austin

**Resources.** <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/about/community-engagement/age-well-live-well/aging-texas-well>

**1. Welcome, opening remarks, and roll call.** The meeting was convened by Ramsey Longbotham, Chair. A quorum was present. The Chair introduced four new members.

**2. Consideration of December 9, 2025, draft meeting minutes.** The minutes were approved as drafted.

**3. Consideration of amendments to ATWAC bylaws.**

**Summary** The Committee considered amendments to their bylaws; discussion covered the review process and timing, with clarification from staff on why annual (not quarterly) reviews are preferred due to coordination and legal review requirements. Clarifications were sought and provided regarding advocacy and communication boundaries for committee members in relation to HHSC representation. Motion to amend annual review timing was withdrawn after discussion. Bylaws were ultimately approved by required majority.

**Discussion**

Clarification was sought on the role of the committee in developing the report to the Commissioner. Staff assured the committee that they will be engaged.

**MOTION.** to amend the bylaws by the end of the first quarterly meeting. Staff clarified that this is a standard template and adoption would put the committee in line for compliance with the adoption requirement.



**The motion was withdrawn**

**MOTION:** adoption of the bylaws prevailed

#### **4. Special topic presentations – Texas Workforce Commission, Older Individuals Who Are Blind**

**Summary.** The presentation was made by Matt Berrend (Program Manager) and Crystal Stark (Program Specialist) describing OIB services, eligibility, and philosophy. OIB serves Texans 55+ with significant visual impairment, aiming to maximize independence and covers all 254 Texas counties. Due to increased funding, TWC recently expanded staff; for the under 55 population, TWC partners with local Centers for Independent Living.

Funding is 90% federal, 10% state; most services are free or low-cost. There are six focus areas: adjustment to blindness, independent living, travel/orientation, communication, support systems, and quality of life. Key services include technology training, diabetes education, peer support, and group skills training (SKIP program), with expansion underway.

The OIB HelpLine and self-referral portal is available statewide and; outreach is ongoing in underserved areas. The extensive Q&A covered program funding, service delivery, criteria, backlog/waitlists for training, and relationships with eye care professionals.

#### **Presentation.**

**Eligibility Criteria** The program serves Individuals 55 years and older\* who:

- Have a significant visual impairment;
- Whose ability to function independently in the home, with family, or in the community is substantially limited due to visual impairment; and
- For whom the delivery of services will substantially improve their ability to function, continue functioning, or move toward functioning independently in the home, family, or community.

\* Individuals below the age of 55 are referred to local Centers for Independent Living for Independent Living for Services (CILS).



### **Common Eye Conditions Addressed**

- Macular degeneration
- Cataracts □ Glaucoma
- Diabetic retinopathy
- Retinitis pigmentosa
- Many others - OIB services are not limited to the conditions listed above and eligibility criteria is not based on the eye condition, but significance of vision loss, along with other criteria listed on previous page.

The OIB Program has OIB Service Specialists covering every square inch of Texas, covering all 254 counties in Texas and can meet customers virtually, or in person as needed.

Services provided through the OIB Program are usually at no cost to the customer. However, if some services are agreed upon by the customer and OIB Service Specialist the customer may be responsible for part of the cost of services if their total income is 300% above the Basic Living Requirement (BLR), or Federal Poverty Level which is determined by the Federal Government every year. For more information about BLR, see the and Human Services Poverty Guidelines USC §9902(2). [Poverty Guidelines | ASPE](#)

The OIB Program promotes the philosophy of independent living through:

- Case Management,
- Referrals to Community Resources, □ Peer Support,
- Self-determination,
- Equal access, and
- Advocacy.

The goals of the OIB Program are to maximize the leadership, empowerment, independence, and productivity of people 55 years of age or older who are blind or visually impaired and to ensure their integration and full inclusion into society.

The OIB Program utilizes the Texas Confidence Builder philosophy to help OIB customers adjust to blindness and become independent.

While receiving TWS-OIB services, all customers are expected to achieve basic abilities that cover six aspects, also known as "The Big Six," of the Texas Confidence Builders



philosophy. Services provided go in tandem with helping customers achieve independence in The Big Six areas.

### **The Big Six**

1. Adjustment to Visual Impairment
2. Independent Living Skills
3. Travel Skills
4. Communication Skills
5. Support Systems
6. Quality of Life

### **Potential OIB Services Available\***

- Referrals to numerous organizations assisting with services for the blind and visually impaired
- Low Vision Aids
- Low Vision Glasses/Magnifiers
- Independent Living Skills Training
- Cooking Skills
- Braille Training or resources
- Referrals
- Orientation and Mobility Training
- Diabetes Education
- Assistive Technology Devices
- Peer Support.

*\* Services are available to customers based on their individual needs, informed choice and determined by the best value and after all other comparable benefits have been utilized.*

**S.K.I.P. Training** TWC-OIB offers the Senior Keys to Independence Program (S.K.I.P.) through a collaborative partnership. S.K.I.P. training is provided by Envision Dallas, Vibrant Works (San Antonio Lighthouse for the Blind), and Austin Lighthouse for the Blind. This specialized 4-day program is designed to enhance the independence of OIB customers and empower them to thrive in their homes and communities. The TWC-OIB Program provides funding to cover the costs of this valuable training, including hotel accommodations, travel expenses, and meal allowances, for eligible participants. S.K.I.P. sessions are offered monthly at various Lighthouse locations, accommodating up to eight participants.

### **SKIP Concentration Areas:**

- Home Management / Daily Living Skills
- Meal Preparation / Kitchen Safety
- Personal Care / Grooming
- Mobility Training
- Assistive Technology

- Recreation and Leisure



**OIB Helpline** Partnership with Envision Dallas where 3 Customer Service Representatives:

- Receive incoming calls
- Are available M-F 8am-5pm
- Obtain info for potential OIB applicants
- Speak multiple languages
- Make outbound / return calls
- Provide Outreach
- Provide information on OIB, VR or other resources

## OIB Helpline

**Older Individuals who are Blind Program**

Help Line: **844-NEED-OIB (633-3642)** Email: [oib.info@twc.texas.gov](mailto:oib.info@twc.texas.gov)


 If you are 55 or older and have vision loss that makes everyday tasks difficult, the Older Individuals Who Are Blind program may be able to help you gain the confidence you need to live independently!
 



### Why Call the Helpline?

- Do you or someone you know need help to accomplish everyday tasks because of vision loss?
- Gain a better understanding about your vision impairment
- Regain confidence you may have lost!

### What Services are Provided?

Services vary depending on an individual's needs, but may include:

- Independent living skills training, provided in the home or community
- Orientation and mobility training
- Low vision evaluations and low vision devices, including video magnification, hand-held magnifiers, and other identified devices
- Diabetes education
- Deafblind evaluations and equipment
- Counseling on adjustment to blindness



**TEXAS**  
**WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS**  
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

### Who is Eligible?

- ✓ Individuals must be 55 and older
- ✓ Who have significant visual impairment;
- ✓ Whose ability to function independently in the home, family, or community is substantially limited due to visual impairment; and
- ✓ For whom the delivery of independent living services will substantially improve their ability to function, continue functioning, or move toward functioning independently in the home, family, or community.

For purposes of the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind program, the Vocational Rehabilitation agency receives 90 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For the 2022 Federal fiscal year, the total amount of grant funds awarded are \$2,202,209. The remaining 10 percent (\$244,690) are funded by Texas State Appropriations. Revised May 2023.

**Interested in Services?** OIB Helpline: 1-844-NEED-OIB / 1-844-633-3642

Email: [oib.info@twc.texas.gov](mailto:oib.info@twc.texas.gov)

Website: <https://twc.texas.gov/programs/independentliving-services-older-individuals-who-are-blind-programoverview>

Application link: [OIB \(Older Independent Blind\) Self-Referral | ServiceNow](#)





## **Discussion.**

Are the OIB specialists contract or state employees? The speaker stated that there are 24 state employee specialists and occasionally will contract for services.

What is the determination for reaching basic abilities? TWC stated through research and advocacy groups identified the big six areas that help people regain independence. It is always individualized through an assessment. Some people will not need all big six services.

As part of case management, you all provide referrals to other resources? TWC answered in the affirmative.

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Is there a backlog for SKIP services. Each site in three regions has eight slots per month and they are booked for the next several months. The new funding will open some slots.

What is the current funding source and amount? TWC will send it to all members. 90% of the \$2.2 million comes from the Department of Education. The partial shut down has ended so funding should be flowing (under the VR division). The VR division may be moved to the department of labor. Continued state funding will be necessary.

Do you all work with medical eye specialists? TWC answered in the affirmative.

Regarding the SKIP training are referrals taken from outside the region where the three sites are located. TWC answered in the affirmative and travel is paid to the service sight.

## **5. Division updates:**

**Medicaid and CHIP Services**—Dual demonstration has been implemented January 1. Dual SNIP (D-SNIP) has been implemented in several counties. Medicaid has different rules compared to Medicare for enrollment. Some misinformation is out there. The only counties where alignment is required is in the five counties where the dual demonstration is operating.





January 2027 will be expanded to all health plans in those five counties. There will not be any changes made to the model. January 2030 is the target for taking the model statewide. Then alignment will be necessary statewide for DSNIP ( and only DSNIP)

#### Integrated D-SNPs Operating in 2026

##### **Bexar County**

Molina Health Plan

##### **Dallas County**

Molina Health Plan

Superior Health Plan

##### **El Paso County**

Molina Health Plan

##### **Harris County**

Molina Health Plan

UnitedHealthcare

##### **Hidalgo County**

Molina Health Plan

Superior Health Plan

**Integrated D-SNP Model Features** Integrated D-SNP provides a higher level of integration than a traditional D-SNP by offering:

**Easier enrollment.** Federal rules require states to operate exclusively aligned enrollment (EAE), and Texas has chosen a model where the member's choice of their primary insurance (Medicare's Integrated D-SNP) will result in automatic enrollment into the STAR+PLUS (Medicaid) plan affiliated with the D-SNP's parent company. Integrated member materials. There is one ID card and one member handbook for both Medicare and Medicaid coverage.

**Integrated appeals and grievances processes.** There's one letter explaining Medicare and Medicaid coverage and appeals decisions and a single contact for members to call about these decisions.

#### **Integrated D-SNP Model Resources**

- [MMP to Integrated D-SNP cover page template – 2026 \(PDF\)](#)
- [D-SNP to Integrated D-SNP cover page template – 2026 \(PDF\)](#)

A question was asked regarding the future plans for services provided by the state? Staff stated all STAR PLUS services will be provided. Expansion of Medicaid is not necessary at this time.

#### **Quality Monitoring Program**—had a few announcements

Annual Conference August 25 and 26 and the work shops are still being developed. There should be 35 workshops and CEUs should be available.



Center for Excellence project is continuing and eight LTC modules have been created, and 4,000 credits have been granted.

**Long-Term Care Regulation**—Nursing facility rules and administrator, nursing, and nursing aid rules are in process. Informal comment is expected this summer. The rules implement legislation from the 2025 session including licensure from other states for military service members and spouses. Other legislation is also being implemented through rules. Plain language requirements are being implemented and stakeholder engagement, on all the numerous rule revisions, is ongoing.

**Office of Aging Services Coordination**—Multisector plan session was successful and divided up into workgroups for each sector: access, age-friendliness, caregiving, and healthy aging. Disaster preparedness funding is used for new trainings and resource development. Collaboration with external groups on emergency preparedness materials was encouraged.

A question was asked regarding the funding for dementia research. Will you be interfacing with that? Staff stated they will be watching that and interacting when appropriate.

Council of Government has developed materials around “Know What to Do” that could be helpful. [NCTCOG-Training-Material-Part-0-Overview.pdf](#)

A suggestion was made to develop a subcommittee to address this issue. Perhaps the ad hoc committee can look at this before the next meeting.

**6. ATWAC members updates** Members “show and tell” was conducted and addressed.

- The ongoing challenge of providing utility and housing assistance to older adults with limited resources.
- Updates on hospice care, aging and dementia education, and upcoming conferences.
- Advocacy and legislative priorities from the Texas Silver Haired Legislature, including input solicitation for upcoming session resolutions impacting older Texans.



- Area Agency on Aging and ADRC efforts to expand programming, partnerships, and community engagement.
- Workforce Commission expansion and outreach in vision services for older adults.
- Adult Protective Services focus on rule compliance and community partnerships.
- Alzheimer's program expansion and new support networks.
- Announcements were made regarding key upcoming conferences:
  - Texas and New Mexico Hospice Conference in March (Round Rock) [2026 Texas New Mexico Hospice & Palliative Care Annual Conference | Texas New Mexico Hospice & Palliative Care Organization](#)
  - Aging in Texas Conference, July 29–31 (San Angelo) [Aging in Texas Conference - Texas Association of Regional Councils](#)
  - Quality and Long-Term Care Conference, August 25–26 (Austin) [Save the Date: 2026 Quality in Long-Term Care Conference | Texas Health and Human Services](#)

**7. Public comment**. No public comment was offered.

## **8. Review of action and agenda items for next meeting.**

**Next meeting** is May 6<sup>th</sup> where a vote on a vice chair will occur.

### **Agenda Items**

- Members were asked to send agenda items to the committee liaison
- We should add discussion of the report that is due in August.
- **Aging in Texas Conference July 29-31 in San Angelo**

**9. Adjourn**. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.



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