# Agency Services for Youth with Disabilities: An Overview

**Coordinated planning** across home, school and community increases the success of children and youth with disabilities as they grow up and move into adulthood.

**Coordinated services** among various agencies serving young people with disabilities and their families can improve their ability to achieve their goals. When different agencies and disciplines work together they can expand opportunities that lead to improved outcomes. Working together assures that the person receives supports that can lead to living, working and playing in the most integrated settings possible.

**This document provides an overview of the most common services** to which young people with disabilities and their families may be connected to or may need to be connected to, and which may need to be coordinated. Knowing what services and supports are available and how to access them gives young people, families and service providers the basic information they need to make informed choices.

**State policies promote and sometimes require interagency coordination.** The state of Minnesota has several policies regarding interagency service coordination to develop and implement a coordinated, multidisciplinary service system for children ages three through 21 with disabilities (Minnesota System of Interagency Coordination):

* Interagency Services for Children with Disabilities Act; [MN Statute 125A.023 and .027](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=125A.023). The State Interagency Committee, described within that law, has spearheaded a project to enhance interagency coordination using evidence-based coordination and person-centered practices in IEP meetings.
* The [Minnesota Olmstead Plan](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&Rendition=Primary&allowInterrupt=1&noSaveAs=1&dDocName=dhs-297402) outlines the state’s obligation to provide individuals with disabilities opportunities to live, work, and play in integrated settings. [Person-centered practices](https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/program-overviews/long-term-services-and-supports/person-centered-practices/) are fundamental to Minnesota's Olmstead Plan, but not limited to it. It is a vital companion to interagency service coordination.

This overview includes introductions to:

* Education services
* Social services
* Employment services, and
* Health

# Education Services

## What is Special Education?

The [Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)](https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/) defines special education as “specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.” The umbrella term “special education” broadly includes the academic, physical, cognitive and social-emotional instruction offered to children who have one or more disabilities. Students become eligible for special educational services through comprehensive evaluations conducted by school staff.

## What is the Purpose of Special Education?

IDEA Regulations §300.1(a) define the purpose of special education:

*To ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.*

## What is an IEP?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires public school districts to develop an individualized plan for every child who qualifies as having one of the [thirteen disability categories](http://www.understandingspecialeducation.com/13-categories-of-special-education.html) identified by IDEA as a **qualifying condition** for special education. An [Individualized Education Program (**IEP**](https://teach.com/iep-individualized-education-program/)) outlines the unique strengths and needs of the student and the goals that will help the student make educational progress. This includes things like accommodations and modifications to support a student’s learning. Beginning in Grade 9 a student’s IEP will address planning for post-secondary education, employment and independent living to support them moving into adulthood. For more information see MDE [secondary transition page](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/sped/sec/). [http://education](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/sped/sec/).

# Social Services

## What are social services?

Social services are supervised by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and administered and delivered through counties and tribes. Programs include Medical Assistance, MinnesotaCare, Minnesota Family Investment Program, General Assistance, Child Protection, Child Support, and other child welfare services and services for people who are mentally ill, chemically dependent or have physical or developmental disabilities.

Some specific programs and services for people with developmental disabilities or mental health concerns are:

* [Home and Community Based waiver services](https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/people-with-disabilities/services/home-community/programs-and-services/hcbs-waivers.jsp)
* [Case management](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id_000815)
* [Personal Care Assistance](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=DHS16_137828)
* [Family Support Program Grants](https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/people-with-disabilities/services/home-community/programs-and-services/fsg.jsp)
* [Consumer Support Grants](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=id_000860)
* [School-linked Mental Health Grants](https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/policies-procedures/childrens-mental-health/school-linked-mh-services/)

Note: This is not a comprehensive list of services administered through the county/tribe, nor do all counties/tribes provide all services. [Contact the county/tribe where you live](https://mn.gov/dhs/general-public/about-dhs/contact-us/counties-and-regional-offices/) to understand what services are available and how to start the intake process.

## Social services and employment

Counties and tribes administer Home and Community Based (HCBS) Waivers. Waivers support people with significant disabilities to live and work in the community. Waivers include services that help people with disabilities get and keep competitive integrated employment along with other community based services. You can find information on waivers [here](https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/people-with-disabilities/services/home-community/programs-and-services/hcbs-waivers.jsp).

Some counties/tribes use local funds (not federal Medicaid dollars which fund waivers) to help people find and keep a job. [Contact your own county/tribe for more information.](https://mn.gov/dhs/general-public/about-dhs/contact-us/counties-and-regional-offices/)

# Employment Services

## What is Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS)?

Vocational Rehabilitation Services, or VRS, is the part of the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) that offers supports for people with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, maintain and advance in competitive integrated employment. VRS has a counselor assigned to every high school in Minnesota, you can find the counselor assigned to your school [here](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/transition-school-directory_tcm1045-131183.pdf). You can find more information on VRS services [here](https://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/).

VRS Pre-Employment Transition Services for students in grade nine through age 21 can include:

* Job exploration counseling
* Work-based learning experiences
* Postsecondary education counseling
* Workplace readiness training
* Instruction in self-advocacy

# Health

Good health is an important part of being successful in work, school and other activities. A crucial element of a successful transition for all young people, but especially those with health concerns or disabilities, is gaining the knowledge and learning the skills needed to sustain health and wellness. Identifying current and potential future health-related needs is essential to the student’s learning to manage and advocate for their health care needs.

Developing the capacity for self-care is a complex process. It depends in part on the youth’s health needs and cognitive abilities, as well as family and cultural factors. Health and education are inextricably tied and linked to lifelong health and wellbeing.

For students that are eligible for special education services, part of the initial and ongoing evaluation is asking: Does this child have a health condition or need medications that could interfere with learning? Examples include asthma, ADHD, GI problems, cardiac condition, concussion, etc.

School nurses can be a valuable resource to the IEP team, bridging health care and education, providing care coordination, and advocating for quality student-centered care and collaboration. Health topics that may be addressed in the IEP include:

* making healthy choices in daily life
* managing health conditions
* accessing health care
* understanding health implications for employment

Find out what is available through your local school district and initiate collaboration with the student's primary medical provider/clinic.