



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

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Virginia T. Lodge, Commissioner
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The mission of the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) is to improve the well-being of economically disadvantaged, disabled or vulnerable Tennesseans through a network of financial, employment, rehabilitative and protective services.

Each month, 5,400 DHS employees assist almost one million Tennesseans through more than 20 different types of services. With 133 office locations, DHS is one of the few state agencies with offices in all 95 counties.

History

When Tennessee became a state in 1796, the administration of “poor relief” became a county duty and was placed in a court system which extended into the most remote sections of each county. In 1827, new legislation allowed the counties to establish almshouses to provide for the poor and any other persons who could not care for themselves because of disability or incompetence.

In 1925, the Welfare Division in the state Department of Institutions was created. The Tennessee State Relief Administration was organized in 1933 and later changed into the Tennessee Welfare Commission. It further evolved into the Department of Institutions and Public Welfare and then the Department of Public Welfare. In May 1975, the agency’s name changed to the Department of Human Services.

That same year, the federal government mandated that each state operate a child support program under the Title IV-D of the Social Security Act. In 1977, the Tennessee General Assembly passed enabling legislation designating the Department of Human Services as the agency responsible for administering the program. Services are delivered directly by departmental staff and/or through contractual agreements with public or private agencies, courts or individuals.

The department grew even larger in 1983 when the Division of Rehabilitation Services and its vocational rehabilitation programs moved from the Department of Education to the Department of Human Services.

In September 1996, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, created through the Social Security Act of 1935, was replaced with a new federal welfare reform program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Tennessee’s TANF program is called Families First. The program, designed with an emphasis on education, work and training, was operated through a waiver from the federal government for nearly 11 years. That waiver expired on June 30, 2007, at which time Tennessee’s TANF program was required to follow all federal TANF requirements. Changes in the Families First state law were made during the 105th General Assembly session. The revised program began on July 1, 2007.

In June 2000, a comprehensive Child Care Reform Bill was signed into law. Aimed at improving the health and safety of children and the quality of child care programs, reforms include lower adult/child ratios at child care centers and mandatory criminal background checks for operators, employees and others involved with facilities. These efforts and other measures undertaken in subsequent years to further improve child care quality have resulted in national recognition for the overall quality of the state's licensed child care system.

In July 2002, DHS became the state agency responsible for determining TennCare eligibility. In January 2005, the department created a new division of Appeals and Hearings and began hearing TennCare eligibility appeals. In addition, this division handles appeals for other Family Assistance programs, Child Support and Vocational Rehabilitation.

Services

Adult and Family Services. The Adult and Family Services division provides public assistance to low-income citizens directly through the county DHS offices and indirectly through contracts with social services agencies across the state. This division also includes sections responsible for protecting vulnerable adults and for regulating child care and adult day care agencies.

Families First. This is the department's TANF program. In Families First, parents are expected to work to gain independence from welfare by entering or re-entering the work force. The Families First program helps the participants reach this goal by providing transportation, child care assistance, education, job training, employment activities and other support services. Temporary cash assistance is also provided to families with dependent children when at least one parent is incapacitated, unemployed, dead, or absent from the home, and the family is unable to pay for essential living expenses.

Food Stamp Program. This program helps low-income families buy the food they need to maintain good health. DHS staff determines eligibility of applicants based on guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Tennessee has an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) system for dispensing food stamps and Families First benefits.

TennCare/Medicaid. DHS Family Assistance counselors determine eligibility for TennCare/Medicaid, the state and federal medical assistance program for families with children, elderly and/or disabled citizens.

Child and Adult Care Services. This section oversees the licensing of child care centers, family child care homes, group child care homes and adult day care centers. It works with communities to develop new child care resources, provide training and technical assistance to child care providers, and provide child care resources and referral information to consumers. Under Tennessee's Child Care Report Card System, every licensed child care agency must undergo an annual evaluation and post a report card of the results where parents can clearly see them. Licensed child care providers can also participate in the Star Quality Program. This program recognizes child care agencies that exceed minimum licensing standards. These agencies can receive a rating of one, two or three stars.

Adult Protective Services. Adult Protective Services staff investigate reports of abuse, neglect (including self-neglect) or financial exploitation of adults who are unable to protect themselves due to a physical or mental limitation. APS staff assess the need for protective services and provide services to reduce the identified risk to the adult.

Community Contract Services. Staff in this area administer a variety of federal grant programs by negotiating contracts with private and nonprofit agencies for social services that supplement those provided directly by DHS. Those federal grant programs include the Community Services and Social Services Block Grant programs, Child Care Food program, Summer Food Service programs, Low Income Energy Assistance, Weatherization, and the Child Care and Development Fund.

Child Support Services. The Child Support Services division provides assistance to families in obtaining and collecting support for their children. This assistance includes locating absent parents, determining paternity, establishing or enforcing court-ordered child support and distributing support payments.

DHS has numerous enforcement tools at its disposal to collect current and overdue child support. Some of these methods include Automatic Wage Withholding, Financial Institution Data Matches, License Revocation, Treasury/Administrative Offset (interception of IRS tax refunds), and Passport Denial. The division issues debit cards to custodial parents so they can more quickly and easily access their children's support funds.

Rehabilitation Services. This division provides a wide range of services to Tennesseans with disabilities through the following programs:

Vocational Rehabilitation Services. These services include diagnosis, counseling, physical therapy, medical and surgical treatment, education and vocational training, job placement and follow-up.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. This section offers four specialized programs for visually impaired individuals, including Rehabilitation Services, Tennessee Business Enterprises, Rehabilitation Teaching Services and Register of the Blind.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. In 2005, this unit was established to provide specialized services that enable clients to enter, retain or return to competitive employment.

Tennessee Rehabilitation Facilities Network. This program is comprised of the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center at Smyrna, the state's only comprehensive residential vocational rehabilitation center, and 17 community rehabilitation centers for individuals with disabilities in rural communities. Day services are provided in the community rehabilitation centers.

Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The council coordinates communication, information, personal counseling, public awareness, and advocacy services for deaf or hard of hearing citizens through six regional community service centers.

Tennessee Technology Access Program (TTAP). This program provides Tennesseans who have a disability and their families with timely, comprehensive information about assistive technology devices and related services. TTAP also provides funding to five assistive technology centers located in Memphis, Jackson, Nashville, Chattanooga and Knoxville.

Disability Determination Services (DDS). This program processes Social Security disability insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applications for the Social Security Administration. DDS is fully funded by the Social Security Administration.

Appeals & Hearings. This division receives appeals and conducts fair hearings for applicants and clients who believe they did not receive the services and/or benefits from the Department of Human Services to which they are entitled. The division handles appeals for all programs administered by the

department, including eligibility for TennCare/Medicaid, Food Stamps, Families First, Child Support and Vocational Rehabilitation cases. The Division of Appeals and Hearings strives to timely resolve appeals while ensuring due process and maintaining the highest standards of independence and objectivity.

Administrative Support Services. Administrative support is provided to the various divisions of the department through the following sections:

Finance. This section prepares the annual departmental budget submission, processes contractor/vendor payments, prepares federal expenditure reports, provides contract technical assistance, performs ongoing fiscal analysis, and monitors federal programs for cash management.

Information Systems. This section oversees analysis, design, development and maintenance of DHS computer-based systems, as well as computer hardware installation and maintenance.

Office Services. In addition to managing the purchase, lease and/or rental of equipment and services, this area is responsible for inventory, printing, telephones, office space and mail services.

Human Resources. This section manages recruitment and placement, insurance, classification/compensation, and leave and attendance. Staff provides interpretation and guidance regarding civil service rules and regulations as they relate to performance evaluation, the disciplinary process, Americans with Disabilities Act and grievance procedures.

Communications Office. This office coordinates the agency's public information and public relations efforts and responds to media requests.

Office of the General Counsel. This office provides legal advice to DHS programs, legal representation in judicial and administrative litigation affecting the department, prepares departmental rules, and prepares legislation for and analysis of legislation affecting the department.

Office of Inspector General. The Office of Inspector General includes oversight of the department's independent accountability functions. Those functions include Internal Audit, Investigations, Quality Control and Program Review. This division conducts compliance and quality control reviews of DHS programs, investigates referrals of (possible) fraud and abuse in the programs, handles adjudication and processes collections of claims overpayment, and conducts internal audits and investigations for the department. By combining these sections, DHS is ensuring greater integrity and accountability within the department.

Commissioner Virginia T. Lodge
Tennessee Department of Human Services



Virginia T. Lodge was appointed Commissioner of the Department of Human Services in January 2003 by Governor Phil Bredesen. Originally from Annapolis, Maryland, Commissioner Lodge has been a Tennessean since 1978. She has a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Hawaii, a master's degree in English Literature from the University of San Francisco and a master's degree in business administration from Vanderbilt University. Commissioner Lodge is active in community and nonprofit organizations.

