Low Vision Resource Guide 2017

For Providers Serving Low Vision Elders in Greater Boston
Dear Reader,

FriendshipWorks’ enduring mission is to end elder isolation and replace it with the warmth and comfort of caring and dedicated friends. In this vein, we are committed to addressing the myriad of conditions that can precipitate an elder becoming socially isolated. Many do not realize how much the loss of vision affects an elder’s life. This is why we took on this project. Most of us as we age have some loss of vision, but for some elders this loss is life-altering and can lead to social isolation and loneliness.

Elders with low vision may be afraid of going out of their house for fear that they might miss the curb and fall. They may be late on paying bills or responding to mail in a timely manner because they cannot read the fine print. Their low vision will affect their ability to get around as it may not be safe for them to drive anymore. Slowly the loss of vision impacts the quality of life for elders.

In our commitment to serve elders and end social isolation, we want to share that there are resources out there to help low vision elders. Our volunteers walk with elders, helping them feel safe to get out of the house, they help read and organize mail, they accompany low vision elders on their medical appointments, and they offer the support of a caring friend visiting each week. Other organizations help by providing low vision devices and home skills to make sure that the elder maximizes the vision they do have. This Resource Guide is a testament to the network of supports that are available for low vision elders. Many are here to help. Our hope is that this guide gives people education and support services so that they do not have to go through this difficult time of vision loss alone.

This guide will also be available on our website www.fw4elders.org. If you would like to update any information found in this guide, please contact our office.

Sincerely,

Janet Seckel-Cerrotti
Executive Director
Terms & Definitions........................................7

Associations & Organizations....................... 10

Association of Blind Citizens
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind
BRIDGE Program
Carroll Center for the Blind
Mass. Assoc. for the Blind
Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission
Perkins School for the Blind
Veterans Administration: Blind Rehabilitation

Books & Adaptive Devices............................... 16

Perkins Library
Boston Public Library: Access Center
Descriptive Video Services

Support Groups............................................. 18

BRIDGE Program
Mass. Commission for the Blind
Vision Aware

Low Vision Assessments................................... 19

William P. Beetham Eye Institute Joslin Diabetes Clinic
Carroll Center for the Blind
Mass. Eye & Ear Infirmary
Boston University Eye Associates
New England Eye Center
New England College of Optometry for Eye Care
Contents

Perkins New England Eye Low Vision Clinic
Veterans Administration Low Vision Clinic

Volunteers .......................................................... 21

FriendshipWorks
Somerville Cambridge Elder Services
Jewish Family and Children’s Service
Neighbors Who Care

Elder Care Referral Services ....................... 23

ASAPs for Boston and Brookline
  Boston Senior Home Care
  ETHOS
  Central Boston Elder Services
  Brookline Council on Aging

Boston ElderINFO
MassOptions
What is low vision?
Low vision is when an individual cannot perform their routine visually guided tasks even with glasses, contact lenses, or other supportive devices. It could start with the inability to read mail and extend through difficulties driving. Visual impairment and legal blindness are both subcategories of low vision.

Someone who is legally blind would need to be within 20 feet to read the lettering that a person with 20/20 vision can see at 200 feet. Additionally, when a person’s tunnel vision is more restricted than looking through a paper towel tube, the person is legally blind due to reduced side vision. Legal blindness does not mean total blindness or that all vision is lost. About 70% of legally blind persons have some degree of vision remaining.¹

Definition of Legal Visual Impairment in Massachusetts
Central Vision or Visual Acuity of not more than 20/70 in the better seeing eye with correction (eye glasses).¹

How common is low vision in older adults?
Low vision is not inevitable with aging. While there are some normal changes to our eyes as we age, this does not normally result in low vision. “Most seniors have low vision loss largely due to age-related eye diseases such as glaucoma, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, and macular degeneration.”² Nationally, 21% of persons over 65 experience some type of vision impairment.¹
**What is low vision rehabilitation?**
Low vision rehabilitation is the treatment that allows persons with visual impairments or challenges to continue performing daily tasks. This is achieved by picking the appropriate low vision devices, and teaching low vision persons how to optimize their remaining vision and use it effectively. Vision rehabilitation services may include a home safety assessment, lighting and glare evaluations, teaching adaptive readings and record keeping techniques, modifying appliances with tape markings, help with medication management, and recommending adaptive reading aids and magnification devices.

**Can elders have both an annual eye exam and low vision exam in the same year covered by insurance?**
Yes, elders can have both a regular annual eye exam and a low vision exam in the same year, with both covered by insurance, since these are two different examinations. Doctors understand how to bill for these different medical visits.

**How does the low vision exam measure functional vision?**
The low vision evaluation measures visual “function” using special tests that determine how large the print needs to be for the person to read it. Special aids will be prescribed and appropriate referrals made to resources such as state services, home visits, and financial benefits.

**What are some examples of low vision devices and assistive devices?**
Examples of low vision devices include hand magnifiers, LED hand magnifiers, handheld electronic magnifiers, CCTVs, high power reading spectacles, and telescopes.

**What is Orientation and Mobility Therapy?**
An Orientation and Mobility (O&M) therapist is a specialist who teaches safe, efficient, and effective travel skills to people of all ages:
“Orientation” refers to the ability of a person to know where they are and where they want to go, whether they are moving from one room to another or walking downtown for a shopping trip. “Mobility” refers to the ability to move safely, efficiently, and effectively from one place to another, such as being able to walk without tripping or falling, cross streets, and use public transportation.3

Where can I receive large print books, talking books and other library resources?
Any local library should be able to provide elders with any published book in large print. Certain titles may take some time for a local library to acquire, but the Library of Congress has copies of all books in large print. Other library resources are library specific and a list is included in this resource guide for your low vision needs. Most libraries have an audio book section, but for talking books, audio described movies, and large print braille, check out Perkins Library.

1Richard J. Jamara, OD, FAAO, New England School of Optometry
2CDC Vision Health Initiative (VHI)
3Vision Aware; www.visionaware.org
Associations & Organizations

What are the associations and organizations that assist people with low vision and how can they help elders?

Association of Blind Citizens (ABC)

Phone: (781) 961-1023 Fax: (781) 961-0004
P.O. Box 246 Holbrook, MA 02343
Website: www.blindcitizens.org
Email: president@blindcitizens.org

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<th>Cost</th>
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<tr>
<td>Legal blindness, visual impairment</td>
<td>Free</td>
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The purpose of the Association of Blind Citizens (ABC) is to advance relevant causes, increase opportunities in education, employment, cultural, recreational and other life activities, as well as enhance the social, political, and economic well-being for all persons who are blind or visually impaired.

Some Services Include:

♦ Publications
♦ Informative meetings
♦ A special radio show titled In Focus
♦ Education, employment, recreational, and cultural opportunities to promote full inclusion in society
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB)

Phone: (617) 626-7462   Email: Karen.Hatcher@State.MA.US
MCB Boston Office
600 Washington St., Boston, MA 02111
Website: www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/mcb/

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<td>Legal Blindness</td>
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<td>MA Residency</td>
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MCB is a state agency mandated to provide services to legally blind individuals of all ages.

**Some Services Include:**

- The BRIDGE program
- Assistive technology
- Rehabilitation teaching
- Independent living social services
- Orientation and Mobility Therapies

BRIDGE (Blind Reintegration for Independence, Development and Growth for Elders) is a program of MCB that provides independent living services to elders aged 55 and older who are legally blind.

**Some Services Include:**

- Information and referrals for additional services both within and outside MCB
- Essential skills training to increase elders’ ability to live independently
- Peer support groups
- Advocacy
- Assistive listening devices
- Instruction on the use of low vision devices
Carroll Center for the Blind

Phone: (617) 969-6200 x225
770 Centre Street, Newton, MA 02458
Website: www.carroll.org
Email: maureen.foley@carroll.org

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<td>Blindness, Low Vision</td>
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The Community Essential Skills Program is a 7-week course helping those who struggle with:

♦ Grocery shopping
♦ Keeping track of mail and bills
♦ Keeping track of medications
♦ Other daily living tasks

Some Services Include:

♦ Diabetic self-management
♦ In-home visits by vision rehabilitation teachers
♦ Low vision assessments through the NEE Low Vision Clinic
♦ Community Essential Skills Program
Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (MABVI)

Phone: (888) 613-2777
200 Ivy Street, Brookline, MA 02446
Website: www.mabcommunity.org/mabvi/home.html
Email: mabvi@mabcommunity.org

Some Services Include:

- Low vision evaluations
- Vision rehabilitation
- Support groups
- Technology assistance
- Orientation and Mobility resources
- Counseling to assist with adjusting to vision loss

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

Community Living Division
Main Phone: 1-800-245-6543
Independent Living and Assistive Technology
Direct Line: (617) 204-3600
600 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02111
Website: www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/marc/

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission provides information about Independent Living Centers serving individuals with disabilities, including those who are visually impaired.
Founded in 1829, Perkins is a global leader in education for people who are blind, deafblind, or visually impaired with additional disabilities. Perkins provides a wide range of programs, services, and tools for infants, children and adults who are blind, as well as families, educators, and advocates in the U.S. and internationally.

Some Services Include:

| ♦ Comprehensive low vision eye exams | ♦ Occupational and Physical Therapy |
| ♦ Orientation and Mobility Therapy | ♦ Practical alternatives for functioning with low vision, including low vision devices |
The Veterans Administration supports blind and low vision Veterans and active duty service members regaining their independence and quality of life to enable their successful integration into family and community life.

Additional support is provided for family and significant others to help them better understand visual impairment and foster the provision of appropriate support, to assist in enhancing home environments, and to reduce caregiver burden.

Some Services Include:

- Intermediate and advanced low vision clinics
- Vision Impairment Services in Outpatient Rehabilitation Programs (VISOR)
- Inpatient Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRC)
- Visual Impairment Centers to Optimize Remaining Sight (VICTORS) Programs

To schedule an eye exam, contact your local VA facility. To find the facility closest to your location, go to: www.va.gov/directory/guide
Where can elders get large print books, audio books and adapted media devices that help with low vision?

Perkins Library

Phone: (617) 972-7240 or (800) 852-3133 (New England only)
Fax: (617) 972-7363, TTY: 617-972-7690
175 North Beacon Street, Watertown, MA 02472
Website: www.perkins.org
Email: library@perkins.org

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The Library provides the following to individuals unable to read regular print due to a visual, physical, or reading disability:

- Talking books and playback equipment
- Audio described movies
- Large print braille materials
- Downloadable audio books

Institutions providing services to individuals with disabilities are also eligible for the program.

Other Services Include:

- Reference and reader advisory services
- The Newsline program (telephone-based and online access to daily newspapers)
- Foreign language materials
- Presentations to community groups

The library also offers several newsletters including Dots & Decibels, PerKIDS, and El Narrador (in Spanish). It also operates a brailer repair program; a CCTV and Perkins Brailer loan program; and has in-house adaptive computer equipment available for borrowers’ use. Fee-for-service braille production and digital audio recording services are also available.
Special formats, equipment, and materials are focused in the center to serve library patrons with disabilities including legal blindness and visual impairment. Some examples include computers equipped with ZoomText and JAWS. A staff member at the library can help when using this equipment.

Descriptive Video Service is a Division of the Media Access Group at WGBH

For more than 40 years, the Media Access Group at WGBH has been providing accessible media services to the millions of Americans who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired. They invented captioning and video descriptions for television, and today they apply those services to movies, the website, museums, educational institutions, theme parks, and other venues.
Support Groups

Where can elders find support services?

BRIDGE Program (Blind Reintegration for Independence, Development and Growth for Elders)

BRIDGE has a very active program of peer support groups throughout the state, including more than 300 elders sharing experiences and learning together how to better cope with blindness. For eligibility and contact information, see Associations and Organizations.

Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (MABVI)

MABVI support groups are highly active, and provide practical and emotional support to individuals coping with serious sight loss. Additionally, support groups provide the opportunity for participants to share fears, frustrations, coping mechanisms, and resources as vision changes occur. These support groups are located throughout many communities in Massachusetts. Phone number specific to support groups: (617) 926-4232. For eligibility and contact information, see Associations and Organizations.

Vision Aware

Vision Aware is a website that helps adults who are losing their sight continue to live full and independent lives by providing timely information, step-by-step daily living techniques, a directory of national and local services, and a supportive online community. Joining a support group may be the most important thing a person can ever do if they have been diagnosed with an eye condition, have a family member so diagnosed, or have become a caregiver for a person with low vision. Whether online or in a local community, such groups offer the opportunity to talk to others, share common concerns, frustrations and stories, and find solutions to vision-related difficulties. Phone: (413)-747-7337.

The following link can help a contact utilize a directory of local support groups in area. For website information specific to seniors with vision loss, go to: www.visionaware.org
Where can an elder get a low vision assessment from a specialist to help them register with the associations, receive referrals, and prescribe low vision devices?

William P. Beetham Eye Institute Joslin Diabetes Clinic
1 Joslin Place, Boston, MA 02215
Phone: (617) 309-2554
Website: www.joslin.org/care/eye.care
For additional lists of accepted insurance providers, go to: www.joslin.org/care/accepted-insurance.html

Insurance information: accepts Medicare.

Carroll Center for the Blind
New England Eye (NEE) Low Vision Clinic
770 Centre Street, Newton, MA 02458
Phone: (800)-852-3131 x225
Contact Maureen Foley for an appointment at NEE
Email: dina.rosenbaum@carroll.org
Website: www.carroll.org

Insurance information: phone the Low Vision Clinic and ask about accepted insurances.

Massachusetts Eye & Ear Infirmary
Vision Rehabilitation Center
243 Charles Street Boston, MA 02114
Phone: (617) 573-4177, Fax: (617) 573-4178
Website: www.masseyeandear.org

Insurance information: to determine if an elder’s insurance plan covers the service, contact their health insurance representative. To ensure proper billing for service, it is important to bring current insurance card(s) to all appointments.
Boston University Eye Associates
Boston Medical Center, Yawkey Clinic
850 Harrison Ave, 3rd Floor, Boston, MA 02118
Phone: (617) 414-4020, Fax: (617) 414-4028
Insurance information: On the day of your appointment, bring your insurance cards with you. If your insurance requires a referral, please request one from your primary care physician prior to your appointment.

New England Eye Center
Main Office:
260 Tremont St., Biewend Building, 9-11th Floors
Boston, MA 02116
Mailing Address:
New England Eye Center
c/o Tufts Medical Center
800 Washington St. #450, Boston, MA 02111
Phone for Boston appointments: (617) 636-4600
Website: www.neec.com

New England College of Optometry Center for Eye Care
930 Commonwealth Ave, Boston, MA 02215
Phone: (617) 262-2020, Fax: (617) 236-6323
Website: www.necoeyecare.org

Perkins New England Eye Low Vision Clinic
175 North Beacon St., Watertown, MA 02472
Phone: (617) 972-7296, Fax: (617) 972-7297
Website: www.perkins.org/community-programs/low-vision-clinic/
Email: lowvision@perkins.org

Veterans Administration Advanced Low Vision Clinic
VA Boston Health Care System
150 South Huntington Ave, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
8th Floor, Rm 813-52
Phone: 1-800-857-3384 ext. 4553
What agencies provide volunteer supports for low vision elders?

FriendshipWorks
105 Chauncy Street, Suite 801, Boston, MA 02111
Phone: (617) 482-1510
Website: www.fw4elders.org
Email: Friend@fw4elders.org

FriendshipWorks has matched volunteers in Boston and Brookline with their elderly neighbors free of charge since 1984. We serve people 60 and older, and 55 and older for those with hearing or vision loss.

Our Volunteer Programs:
- **Friendly Visitors**—visit elders weekly in their homes, offering friendship and support. They help low vision elders read mail or go for walks while offering much needed social support.
- **Medical Escorts**—accompany elders on their medical appointments—for low vision elders this service is essential to attending doctor’s appointments in a safe and dignified way.
- **Friendly Helpers**—assist with short-term tasks, including shopping packing, and organizing.
- **PetPals**—visit nursing homes, assisted living facilities and individual elder homes with their dogs, cats, and other pets.

We also have 3 Neighborhood Offices:
- **La Cadena de Amistad**—provides all of our services in Spanish and English as well as our music program MusicWorks that brings music into the homes of elders.
- **Allston/Brighton Office**—serves elders in Allston and Brighton and offers the Missing Piece Project, which matches older adult volunteers with appropriate service opportunities in the community.
- **South End/Roxbury Office**—our newest neighborhood office housed at Union United Methodist Church provides our core services, with attention to the unique needs and gifts of these neighborhoods.
Somerville Cambridge Elder Services
61 Medford Street, Somerville, MA 02143-3429
**Phone:** (617) 628-2601, **Fax:** (617) 628-1085
**Website:** www.eldercare.org/home/

A non-profit elder services agency dedicated to helping people maintain independence and well-being at home by providing services, supports, and information.

Jewish Family and Children’s Service (JF&CS)
18 Shepard Street, Brighton, MA 02135
**Phone:** (781) 647-JFCS (5327)
**Email** via contact page link: www.jfcsboston.org/Contact-Us/Request-for-More-Information

Jewish Family & Children’s Service cares for individuals and families by providing exceptional human service and health care programs, guided by Jewish traditions of social responsibility, compassion, and respect for all members of the community. JF&CS offers comprehensive, compassionate geriatric care to help senior adults live healthy, independent, and meaningful lives.

Neighbors Who Care
174 Moody Street, Waltham, MA 02453
**Phone:** (781) 893-1860
**Website:** www.neighborswhocare.net

Neighbors Who Care has celebrated the lives of elders in the greater Waltham area (Lexington, Newton, Arlington and Watertown) for over 11 years. Their vision is to alleviate the loneliness and isolation of those who may find themselves without much-needed support.
There are other important elder service providers that can assist low vision elders. Services include caregiver support, case management, coordinated care programs, day programs, in-home supports, personal care services, food and nutrition services and much more. Many services for elders are delivered through a network of Aging Service Access Points (ASAP).

ASAPs for Boston and Brookline

**Boston Senior Home Care**  
89 South Street, 5th Floor, Suite 501  
Boston, MA 02111  
Phone: (617) 451-6400  
Website: [www.bshcinfo.org](http://www.bshcinfo.org)

**ETHOS**  
555 Amory Street  
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130  
Phone: (617) 522-6700  
Website: [www.ethocare.org](http://www.ethocare.org)

**Central Boston Elder Services**  
2315 Washington Street  
Boston, MA 02119  
Phone: (617) 277-7416  
Website: [www.centralboston.org](http://www.centralboston.org)

**Brookline Council on Aging**  
93 Winchester Street  
Brookline, MA 02446  
Phone: (617) 730-2777  
Website: [www.brooklinema.gov/245/Council-on-Aging](http://www.brooklinema.gov/245/Council-on-Aging)
To find the ASAP closest to you, call the **Massachusetts Office of Elder Affairs at 1-800-243-4636.** The Office of Elder Affairs also has a statewide information and referral number, **1-800-AGE-INFO.**

The following free services connect elders with available resources and information in Boston.

**Boston ElderINFO**
Assist elders, disabled individuals, and their families in accessing a comprehensive range of services that address health care needs. They provide information and referral for elders throughout Boston.

**Phone:** (617) 292-6211  
**Website:** [www.800AgeInfo.com](http://www.800AgeInfo.com)

**MassOptions**
Connects elders, individuals with disabilities, and their caregivers with agencies and organizations that can best meet their needs.

**Phone:** 1-844-422-6277 (1-844-422-MASS)  
**Website:** [www.massoptions.org/massoptions/](http://www.massoptions.org/massoptions/)
Thank You to the FriendshipWorks Farsighted Team

This Resource Guide would not be possible without the insight, expertise, and support of our Farsighted Team of experts who are working together to address social isolation for elders with low vision.

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<td>Dr. Cathy D. Stern, OD, FCOVD</td>
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<tr>
<td>The New England College of Optometry</td>
<td>Board Certified in Vision Therapy, Developmental Optometry, Neuro-Optometric Rehabilitation</td>
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A special thanks for resource guide content and design:

- Alicia Hanley, New England College of Optometry, class of 2018
- Joni Waybright, Artist and lover of design software
- Danielle Morin, FriendshipWorks Marketing and Social Media Associate
In addition to the downtown office, FriendshipWorks has three neighborhood offices:

**Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Office**
*La Cadena de Amistad, Sherrill House*
135 South Huntington Ave.,
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
**Phone:** (617) 482-1510x141
**Email:** lhebbert@fw4elders.org

**Allston/Brighton Neighborhood Office**
*Presentation School Foundation Community Center*
640 Washington St., Suite 103, Brighton, MA 02135
**Phone:** (617) 823-7050
**Email:** scowan@fw4elders.org

**South End & Roxbury Neighborhood Office**
*Union United Methodist Church*
485 Columbus Ave.
Boston, MA 02118
**Phone:** (617) 455-5056
**Email:** mmohamed@fw4elders.org
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Boston Commission on Affairs of the Elderly