RSM 2
VR & IL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL
SECTION 300

CASE MANAGEMENT

Updated: 08/23

301 DORS Case Management System

DORS uses the Accessible Web-based Activity and Reporting Environment (AWARE™) for case management. AWARE™ streamlines documentation, purchase of goods and services and data collection and provides both caseload, regional and statewide reports to support attainment of federally-required performance standards and indicators. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB), Pre-Employment Transitions Services (Pre-ETS) and Workforce & Technology Center (WTC) are included as distinct "case types."

301.01 DORS Staff Responsibilities and System Integrity

a. Staff are responsible for learning and fully utilizing AWARE™.

b. Staff are responsible for assuring that reports and letters provided to consumers are identical in content to information retained in AWARE™. While letters and reports may be reformatted, staff shall not change content of written information from the reports and letters provided in

AWARE™. The integrity of the system depends on information provided in hard copy to the consumer being identical to what is retained electronically.

302 Terminology

In AWARE™ the following terms have the meaning specified:

- **Activity Due** – An alert system that provides the DORS counselor advance notice of due dates for certain required activities.
- **Attachment** – A file attached to a referral record, case record, or service authorization. The file may have originally been received in hard copy format and then scanned for purposes of attaching in AWARE™, or it may have originally been received as an email attachment.
- **Authorization** – Purchase Order; document used to purchase goods and services.
- **Business Practice** – Policies, procedures, practices; the routine way things are handled.
- **Case Note** – Narrative that documents interaction between the DORS counselor and the participant and others involved with providing services to participants.
- **Case Search/Case Management** – Caseload Browse; listing of cases within a caseload.
- **Caseload Number** – Number assigned to each caseload (begins with VR for VR cases, IL for IL cases).
- **Center Services** – AWARE™ module for WTC services.
- **Custom Activity Due** – An alert created by a staff member, as a reminder of or as a request for a specific activity to be performed in the case.
- **Delayed Status** – Individuals who have been determined eligible but cannot be served due to Order of Selection and waiting list issues.
- **Disability Priority** – Order of Selection.
- **Education Goal** – A record created in the Educational Goal Grid on the Education Page to document the highest education goal which the individual has achieved as well as current education pursuits, whether secondary or post-secondary.
- **Extension to Application Status** (e.g., App-E, App-T) – Extension beyond 60 days in determining eligibility:
    - Eligibility Determination Extension – Need a specified amount of additional time to determine eligibility, more than 60 days extension.
    - Trial Work Experiences.
- **Federal Follow-up** – Annual Review of ineligibility; Annual Review of participant in supported employment not earning minimum wage; Annual Review of individual in extended employment.
- **PES** – Post-Employment Services.
- **Plan** – Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE); Independent Living Plan (ILP).
- **Plan Development Extension (Eligible-E)** – Extension beyond 90 days in plan development.

- **Plan Review** – Annual Review of the IPE; Semi-Annual Review of the ILP; 90-day Review of Trial Work or Extended Evaluation Plan.

- **Recurring Authorization** – Means of providing maintenance, transportation and other allowances (payments directly to consumers).

- **Responsible Reporting Structure** – Unit, District or Region (depending on level of module, but usually unit or district for purpose of participant work).

- **Responsible Staff Member** – DORS counselor assigned to caseload or to referral.

- **Service Authorization** – Request for WTC services.

- **Student with Disability** – An individual between age 14 and 21 (less than age 22) who is enrolled in either secondary or post-secondary education as documented in the Education Goal grid on the Education Page.

- **Vendor Authorization** – Request for goods or services from DORS-approved vendor.

- **Warrant** – Check or payment to vendor or consumer.

- **Youth with Disability** – An individual between 14 and 24 (less than age 25).

303 Official Record of Services

The official record of services, sometimes referred to as the "case record" for the applicant or eligible individual is a combination of the hard copy record and the electronic record (AWARE™).

Information provided by DORS staff in the record of services will be factual, legible and objective. The Case Note in AWARE™ will be used to document contacts and relevant information. Handwritten notes shall be transferred to AWARE™ Case Notes as soon as possible. Once entered in AWARE™, Case Notes shall not be modified by the original writer or another staff person. If there are changes, a follow-up Case Note shall be prepared and entered into AWARE™. The DORS counselor shall assure that the current status of the individual is evident from the information in the record (combination of hard copy and electronic).

303.01 Information in the Hard Copy Record

Information will be placed in the hard copy file chronologically, beginning with the most recent in the front, and shall include:

a. Documentation from outside sources supporting eligibility determination, priority (Order of Selection category) and service provision.

b. Information related to interests, capabilities, abilities and the informed choice of the individual.

c. Documentation related to due process (appeal hearings; mediation), as applicable.

d. Copies of required DORS forms not part of AWARE™.

e. Copies of all AWARE™ documents requiring the participant's signature (e.g., Application; IPE or ILP; Trial Work Plan; Extended Evaluation Plan).

   While the use of a virtual personal network (VPN) (see **Section 307**) will minimize the need for use of hard copy forms when meeting consumers off site, signed copies of hard copy documents completed off site, in large print or as a contingency per **Section 313** may be considered the official documents and retained in the hard copy record. While the information from such applications and plans must be entered into AWARE™ as soon as possible, it is not necessary to have the individual sign the AWARE™ document under these circumstances.

f. A copy of the AWARE™ Eligibility Report and/or Eligibility Extension Report signed by the DORS counselor.

g. File copies of all Authorizations.

h. Original copies of all invoices.

It is not necessary to keep print copies of AWARE™ letters or Case Notes in the hard copy file. The letters and Case Notes are stored electronically and are available through Case Note Layout.

303.02 Attached Information in the Electronic File

Information received in hard copy or electronically by DORS relevant to a DORS consumer shall be attached in the AWARE™ record of services chronologically. Information received electronically shall be attached in AWARE™ in its entirety. This business practice is required to maintain the integrity of the original electronic communication, and may be accomplished by printing the email to PDF, which can be saved and attached in AWARE™. Should an email refer to more than one consumer, staff shall copy the entire email including To, From, Date/Time, CC, and Subject information into a case note and redact any reference to other consumers.

Staff shall attach all pertinent documentation, including at a minimum the following:

a. Documentation from outside sources supporting eligibility determination, priority (Order of Selection category) and service provision.

b. Information related to interests, capabilities, abilities and the informed choice of the individual.

c. Documentation related to due process (appeal hearing; mediation), as applicable.

d. All documents signed by the participant or DORS representative after all required signatures have been received.

e. Progress reports submitted by the consumer, community rehabilitation programs, or other service providers.

f. Documentation of consumer wages supporting to the consumer’s employment record.

g. Documentation submitted for review along with Administrative Approval requests.

h. Documentation provided as background information accompanying referrals to the Workforce & Technology Center.

304 "Hybrid" Cases

The official record of services of individuals served by DORS includes a combination of hard copy documentation and AWARE™ on-line case management.

305 Case Statuses

Case statuses provide the means to track progress of the applicant or eligible individual through the rehabilitation process. Standards related to the movement to the next status, e.g., 60 days from applicant status to eligibility, have been established to assure that service provision and decision making is timely. Staff will be alerted to approaching due dates, e.g., deadline to determine eligibility, through "Activity Due" in AWARE™.

305.01 Case Statuses – VR

Following are case statuses in the Vocational Rehabilitation program:

- Referral (in Referral Module only)
- Application
- Extension:
  - Eligibility Determination Extension – More than 60 days needed for eligibility determination
  - Trial Work
- Eligibility
- Plan Development Extension (Eligibility-E) – more than 90 days needed for plan development
- Delayed Status
- Service (begins once IPE start date has been entered)
- Service Interrupted (Service-I)
- Job Ready (Service-J)
- Service-E (Employed, no Stable Date)
- Employed (Employed with Stable Date)
- Employed-X (Employed with Stable Date and receiving Youth Extended Services funded by DORS)
- Closed Rehabilitated
- Closed Other

305.02 "Services Interrupted" Case Status

The "Services Interrupted" status may be used for two reasons:

a. When consumers experience an interruption in their rehabilitation program primarily for medical reasons of the consumer or family member and request an interruption in services.

b. When the consumer has been inactive for at least six months and closure is being considered.

Services Interrupted: Consumer Request – The Services Interrupted status may be used when consumers experience an interruption in their rehabilitation program primarily for medical reasons (e.g., exacerbation of the consumer's disability or illness/injury of the consumer or his/her family member; other reasons may also apply). Use of "Services Interrupted" will enable recognition of the reason and timeframe for the discontinuation of VR services and a timeline for continuation. It also may be a better option than case closure which would require the individual to re-apply for DORS services and possibly be placed on a waiting list for a second time.

The following applies:

a. An initial case note is required, describing the circumstances and timeframe for the expected interruption; use the "Services Interrupted" case note category.

b. The DORS counselor shall complete the rationale on the Services Interrupted page.

c. If the interruption extends beyond three months, supervisory approval is required and shall be documented on a case note.

d. A case note update is required at least every six months. A system-generated activity due, "Service Interrupted-Status Review," will appear and can be manually converted from "Pending" to "Completed" after the case note is created.

e. Written confirmation shall be provided to the consumer who is being placed in this status via the "Services Interrupted – Consumer Request" AWARE™ letter (in "Information to Consumer" letter group).

Services Interrupted: Inactive/Consideration of Closure – The "Services Interrupted" status may be used when consumers have been inactive and not in communication with DORS for at least six months and closure is being considered. The record shall include multiple attempts to reach the consumer (i.e., phone, email, regular mail).

The following applies:

a. An initial case note summary is required, describing the circumstances and previous efforts to contact the consumer; use the "Services Interrupted" case note category.

b. The DORS counselor shall complete the rationale on the Services Interrupted page (i.e., "inactive-consider closure").

c. The Supervisor shall review the documentation and, if approved, enter a case note indicating such approval, using the "Supervisor/Administrative Approval" case note category. If not approved, the supervisor shall indicate other appropriate action to be taken.

d. A case note update is required at least every six months, indicating any change in consumer status and whether the case can be closed. A system-generated activity due, "Service Interrupted-Status Review," will appear and can be manually converted from "Pending" to "Completed" after the case note is created.

e. Written confirmation shall be provided to the consumer who is being placed in this status via "Services Interrupted – Inactive-Consider Closure" AWARE™ letter (in "Pre-Closure" letter group).

Review of Service Interrupted Cases – DORS counselors and supervisors may easily identify service interrupted cases for review by selecting Open-Status: "Service-I" in the Participant Module case search.

305.03 Case statuses – Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB)

Case statuses in Independent Living are as follows:

- Referral (in Referral Module only)
- Application
- Eligibility Determination Extension (more than 60 days needed for eligibility determination)
- Eligibility
- Service (begins once ILP has been entered)
- Closure

305.04 Case Statuses – Pre-Employment Transition Services

Case statuses in the pre-employment transition services case type are as follows:

- Referral (in Referral Module only)
- Application (all services are provided while in application status and tracked using Special Program Indicators specific to the Pre-ETS case type.)
- Closure

306 AWARE™ Security and Access

306.01 AWARE™ Access and Security Levels

A system of security is in place in AWARE™ to assure confidentiality of records of participants and to support varying levels of authority of staff, for example, to approve eligibility, plans and authorizations (i.e., spend money). Security involves DORS management establishing different levels of access to information in AWARE™. Some security is parallel to approval levels in place for expenditure of funds, e.g., any purchase over $5,000 requires that regional management, rather than the DORS counselor, approve the authorization. Other security settings assure that only DORS counselors, assigned support staff, management and a back-up counselor have access to the electronic records of participants for whom the DORS counselor is the responsible staff member.

a. **"Caseload Access"** is established so that the assigned DORS counselor, support staff, the supervisor, regional management and a back-up counselor have access to the electronic record of individuals served on a caseload or within a reporting structure.

b. **"Guest Access"** can be granted by the DORS counselor, management or the AWARE™ staff specialist to others who need access to records for a defined period of time, e.g., staff of the Maryland Business Enterprise Program, and Rehabilitation Teachers of the Blind/Visually Impaired. The level of access or security (e.g., "read only," "read only with case notes") is determined by the staff member providing the access at the time access is granted.

Establish guest access by going in to the participant's Case Management page in AWARE™, navigating to Pages and selecting New Guest Access. Enter the name of the person to be given guest access (using Staff Search), date range for Guest Access, and the type of security; close page by selecting Finish.

Note that WTC staff will automatically have "read only" access to key pages in the Participant module once the field counselor has authorized services using the Center Service Authorization.

Standard access and security levels have been established for positions within DORS and will be programmed and described to new staff as part of orientation. Consistent application of these security standards is crucial to assure accuracy of federal reporting and accountability. Random audits may be conducted to verify that staff have appropriate access based on job classification.

306.02 Procedures for Requesting Increased AWARE™ Access

a. **WTC Staff** – Discuss need for additional AWARE™ access with the WTC Assistant Director, Administration through supervisory channels. The Assistant Director will advise about procedures and forms, determine if additional access is needed, and coordinate provision of enhanced access.

b. Office of Field Services, Office for Blindness & Vision Services and Office of Administration & Financial Services:

   1. Discuss with supervisor the need for additional access.

   2. Regional Director/Program Manager completes the AWARE™ Staff Security Change Request Form, available the AWARE™ Resources section. Provide specific information about the reason for the exception, which modules are affected and what specific changes need to be made.

   3. Submit the Request Form to the Office Director for approval.

   4. If approved, the Office Director will forward the request to AWARE™ Field Support for implementation.

307 Off-Site Case Management

DORS staff using a virtual private network (VPN) have full access to AWARE™ functionality. This enables counselors to meet with their consumers away from the DORS office, at locations which may be more convenient for the consumer (e.g., at community rehabilitation programs or schools). Off-site case management can be a significant efficiency for the DORS counselor and consumer, eliminating the need to complete documentation by hand and then enter it into AWARE™ at a later time, or send documents through the mail for signature.

DORS staff interested in off-site usage of AWARE™ shall apply for a VPN through established procedures. DORS will monitor off-site usage of AWARE™ to determine effectiveness and efficiency, and may discontinue its availability to staff underutilizing the service.

308 Communication with Consumers

It is critical that DORS counselors maintain contact with consumers throughout the rehabilitation process. Frequent contact is recommended so that issues and concerns can be addressed at the earliest time possible, and to promote completion of services necessary for achievement of employment. Contact is especially important during service provision and also once consumers achieve employment to assure that they are making satisfactory progress on the job.

308.01 Face-to-Face Meetings

When possible, considering disability and other pertinent issues, DORS staff shall conduct meetings, especially the initial interview, in a face-to-face setting with the consumer. This promotes establishment of an effective professional relationship and enables the counselor to observe body language, attire, interpersonal skills and other characteristics that impact employment.

308.02 Staffings

Staffings will be conducted as determined necessary by the counselor or supervisor based upon such factors as the request of the applicant or eligible individual or, as appropriate, the individual's representative; progress in meeting goals, objectives and established timelines; provision of services; etc. Given the complexity of cases and the number of issues facing consumers, staffings can be useful in assuring communication of issues and plans to all involved.

While in-person staffings are often preferable, use of teleconferencing for all or some participants may be considered.

Staffings shall be documented on a Case Note or in a letter (e.g., Meeting Follow-up Letter) which shall become part of the official record of services.

308.03 Participant Forms, Letters and Attachments

a. Forms used in case management are available as follows:

    1. Forms and letters provided as part of AWARE™ must be used to document case status and activity. These include the Application, Eligibility form and letter, Individualized Plan for Employment, Independent Living Plan, Trial Work Plan, Extended Evaluation Plan, and PES Plan.

    2. Many required forms are now available through Participant Letters in the DORS Forms Letter Group. These forms, once completed, are stored in Case Notes. Those not in AWARE™ are available through InDORS, which can be opened and minimized while working in AWARE™ and easily accessed.

3. A few forms are only available in print copy and are supplied by Central Office.

b. **Requirement to use AWARE™ forms and letters** – Staff are required to use AWARE™ forms and letters. Use of an off-line letter (i.e., a letter not in AWARE™) is permitted only in exceptional circumstances, must be justified and requires approval of the regional director. Off-line letters must be attached in AWARE™. All AWARE™ letters must be stored in Case Notes. The check box on the Letters page that states "Save Case Note When Done" defaults to being checked and must remain checked.

c. **Requirement to use AWARE™ attachments** – All forms, whether signed by the consumer or a DORS staff member, must be attached in the electronic case record after all required signatures have been received. Forms in the electronic case record must be identical to those in the hard copy record and reflect all signatures. For a list of documents to be attached in AWARE™, see **Section 303.02**.

308.04 Large Print Forms and Letters

a. **Application and Plans** – An individual who requires large print format for forms can select Always Large Text as default Report Text Size Preference on the Preferences page in the Staff Module of AWARE™. The signed large print document shall be provided to the individual as the official document with a copy retained in the hard copy record of services.

b. **Letters in AWARE™** – Many of the AWARE™ letters are available in large print from the menu. If a needed letter in AWARE™ is not available in Large Print, notify your supervisor for submitting a request to the AWARE™ Staff Specialist.

308.05 Other Means of Electronic Communication

a. **Facebook™ and other Social Media** – Communicating with consumers via the staff person's personal Facebook™ or other social media account is inconsistent with DORS Ethics policy and could compromise confidentiality and establishment/maintenance of an appropriate professional relationship with the consumer.

b. **Phone/Videophone** – DORS staff shall contact consumers via their preferred method of communication, including reaching them by phone.

c. **Email** – DORS staff shall contact consumers via their preferred method of communication, including email. Prior to communicating with a consumer via email, DORS staff will emphasize the importance of encrypting emails containing confidential information, and will review **Notification Regarding Protection of Personal Information (RS-2d)** with the consumer.

d. **Text Messaging** – Consistent with the preferred communication methods of the consumer as indicated in the application and initial interview, staff may text brief messages to consumers to supplement other means of communication.

   In discussing texting as a means of communication, DORS staff will need to consider that the consumer may be charged a fee for each text message, unless he/she has an unlimited texting plan.

   Appropriate use of text messaging may include advising consumers of upcoming events, reminding about meetings or activities, asking consumers to call, and asking consumers to check their email for communication beyond the limitations of texting.

   If the consumer requests to receive communication via text messaging, the counselor will need to obtain the full text messaging email address (phone number@provideremailaddress; e.g., for Verizon, 5555555555@vtext.com). This text messaging address shall be recorded in AWARE™

in Personal Information, Miscellaneous Personal Characteristics, ID numbers. See **RSM 2, Attachment 300-1, Personal Information**.

To send a text message using the text message address stored in AWARE™, be sure to highlight the entire text messaging address and copy and paste it into an email.

309 Required Signatures

DORS does not have the capacity for electronic signatures. Therefore, all forms in AWARE™ which require the participant's signature shall be printed out, signed and dated and retained in the hard copy file of the participant, and attached to the electronic case record.

If the participant is a minor, i.e., not yet 18 years of age, or has a legal guardian, or is in high school, all forms requiring signature of the applicant or eligible individual shall be signed by the individual's representative, including but not limited to the:

- **DORS Intake Form (RS-1c)**
- **Consent for Disclosure of Information (RS-2b)**
- **Individualized Plan for Employment (RS-6)**
- **Independent Living Plan (RS-6g)**
- **Trial Work Plan (RS-4k)**

310 Entering Dates in AWARE™

In most instances, dates entered in AWARE™ may be backdated up to seven calendar days, except that no backdating may be done into a previous quarter (March 31; June 30; September 30; and December 31 mark the end of the quarters). Case notes may be backdated up to 14 days. Note that AWARE™ retains the date the case note or employment record was created and/or updated.

311 Transfer of Records of Services

If requested or otherwise necessary, a record of services will be transferred based upon the residence of the individual, the nature of the individual's disability, the availability of services, and the individual's best interests. The transfer will be accomplished as follows:

a. The counselor shall discuss the transfer with the individual, except for referrals where contact with the individual has not yet been made.

b. The counselor shall complete a case transfer summary in the electronic case record. The summary shall include the reason for the transfer request, the individual's participation in the rehabilitation program to date, updated contact information (phone, street address, email), any recommendations of the transferring counselor, and any other pertinent information to facilitate the consumer's achievement of employment.

c. The counselor shall ensure that all required documentation has been attached to the electronic case record. See **Section 303.02**.

d. The counselor shall advise the supervisor of the AWARE™ record to be transferred. The supervisor will forward the request to regional management for review, approval and consultation.

e. For transfers within the region, regional management will complete the transfer once approved.

f. For inter-regional transfers, the regional director or designee initiating the transfer will, if appropriate, discuss the transfer with the receiving regional director or designee who will submit the hard copy record of services to the supervisor for assignment to the appropriate counselor and complete the transfer via AWARE™.

g. Timeframe for transfers:

   1. For an intra- or interregional transfer, access to the electronic record shall be provided to the receiving counselor no later than two weeks after the request has been made by the consumer. Additional time for a transfer requires:

      - Justification by the sending OFS program manager or OBVS Supervisor, and
      - Approval of the Office Director.

   2. The receiving counselor shall meet with the transferred consumer within two weeks following case assignment in AWARE™.

   3. For case transfers from the Eligibility Determination Unit (EDU) to local Field Office, the EDU supervisor will electronically transfer the case by assigning to the appropriate Regional Director, who will oversee case assignment to the local office. Case assignment to counselor caseload will be completed within 10 days from the date of Eligibility Determination.

      Within 10 days of the counselor case assignment in AWARE™, the field counselor or designee will contact the consumer to introduce themselves, discuss next steps, and schedule an appointment to begin plan development.

312 Staff Caseload Communications

Staff are encouraged to develop efficient communication with supervisors and others within DORS so that case work can be accomplished in a timely manner. This may include in-person contact, phone, messaging and e-mail. Attaching files to a referral or case record provides information which supervisors/managers often require for case management decisions, including administrative approvals.

To ensure staff have access to formal written communication from consumers regarding complaints/ inquiries, the written communication shall be attached in the consumer’s electronic case record using attachment category: "Formal Complaint or Inquiry Received." Likewise, any resolution to the complaint/inquiry shall also be recorded in the consumer’s electronic file using attachment or case note category: "Formal Complaint or Inquiry Response."

313 Contingency Work Plan

In the event that the Network is down, staff will use paper forms until the system is available. Work done on paper copies will be transferred to the electronic (AWARE™) file when the system is available.