**AER Resolution 2022-03: Concerning Consensus-Building to Promote Vision Rehabilitation Therapy**

Whereas research has shown that at least half of Americans aged 65 and older are at high risk of eye diseases that can lead to impaired sight, and as our population ages, the number of older people experiencing vision loss will grow exponentially; and

Whereas vision rehabilitation services can make a substantial impact on older people with vision loss allowing them to remain safely independent in their homes and to care for themselves; and

Whereas the level of federal funding for the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program has remained static for more than a decade, and has not kept pace with the demand for vision rehabilitation services. Currently the federal appropriation serves fewer than 60,000 people, while the latest estimates show that there are far more than four million people aged 55 and older who are blind or visually impaired; and

Whereas the Aging and Vision Loss National Coalition is focusing its efforts to significantly increase the availability of vision rehabilitation services to the other 97 percent of eligible individuals currently not receiving services; and

Whereas existing traditional personnel preparation programs for Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (VRTs), Orientation and Mobility Specialists (O&Ms), and Low Vision Therapists (LVTs) have historically been unable to successfully recruit enough students to even adequately serve the 3 percent of consumers receiving some measure of services today; and

Whereas it is important to preserve, safeguard and continue to advance the body of knowledge accumulated by the VRT, O&M, and LVT professions during the past 60 years; and

Whereas the number of Occupational Therapists electing to pursue a career in vision rehabilitation has been increasing during the past decade; and

Whereas there have been more programs established to enhance OTs' knowledge in vision rehabilitation, such as the graduate certificate program at the University of Alabama and Salus University in Philadelphia; and

Whereas by training, Occupational Therapists do possess a similar general professional orientation to that of VRTs, focusing on the maximization of skills for independent functioning; and

whereas a large percentage of older individuals with vision loss report age-related chronic conditions which need to be considered in providing services; and

Whereas OTs are able to secure third-party reimbursement from Medicare and private insurance providers, thus significantly increasing the amount of available funds for vision rehabilitation services; and

Whereas interested OTs have recently established the Vision Rehabilitation OT Association without any apparent input from AER and its professional divisions.

Now, therefore, be it resolved, by the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), on this the 24th day of July, 2022, in the city of St. Louis, Missouri, that:

1. This organization, through its Board of Directors, shall establish a task force for the purpose of developing an interdisciplinary consensus and recommendations concerning how the vision-rehabilitation-related professions can agree on each other’s scope of work and the specialized training needed to complement and maximize each other’s interventions.

2. This task force shall be comprised (as appointed by the task force co-chairs) of individuals: representing each of the AER Divisions whose members are or may be certified by ACVREP; representatives of VRT personnel training programs and other preparation programs as deemed appropriate; leaders from UAB's graduate certificate program, Salus University and any other OT programs engaged in the provision of low vision/vision rehabilitation personnel preparation; the newly established Vision Rehab OT Association; and any other identified parties (e.g., representatives of individual nonprofit organizations offering direct vision rehabilitation services, accrediting/certification bodies such as AERAC, ACVREP and any equivalent body representing Occupational Therapy, ETC).

3. It is anticipated that this task force will spur the need for and interest in the establishment of new in-service training programs to assist new “general” OTs interested in pursuing specialization in vision rehabilitation.

4. This task force will present its findings to the AER Board of Directors by a date certain designated by the AER Board and, once approved, the recommendations will be disseminated to all interested parties through all available media, including online webinars.

ADOPTED