



Association for Education and  
Rehabilitation of the Blind and  
Visually Impaired

# VRT Town Hall

ACVREP's Decision to Create a  
Specialist OT Certification

October 18, 2022

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# Purpose of this Meeting

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- AER Leadership will listen to its members and the field before taking any action or making a response.
- Carefully listen to the official statement from ACVREP about the OT certification.
- Explore the issue through a summary of the main concerns and themes from the recent listserv discussion.

# Agenda

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1. Welcome and introduction of AER/VRT Division
2. AER VRT Division Summary of Listserv Concerns and Questions
3. Comment from attendees via open chat
4. ACVREP's Official Statement
5. Next Steps

# Housekeeping

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- Comments may be posted in the chat when it is made available.
- If you wish to have your concerns heard more anonymously, please email [lee@aerbvi.org](mailto:lee@aerbvi.org)
- We request comments be phrased respectfully.

# VRT Division Leadership



Executive Director

Lee Sonnenberg



Chair

Daniel Norris,  
CVRT, COMS, TVI



Chair-Elect

Polly Abbott, CVRT



Secretary

John McMahon,  
CVRT



Social Media

Tina Laffer, CVRT

# A Word from the VRT Division Board Chair: Dan

- A history of the events in which they took place
  - Throughout the past year and a half, the AVLNC have been discussing the use of OTs to address the shortage of VRT professionals. The CVRT SME did discuss with Kathie Zieder, the possibility of an ACVREP vote to explore a medical path for OT Certification.
  - In the late spring the CVRT serving on the Board requested a letter from the SME Category 2 sub-committee with possible avenues for Category 2 to be reopened and concerns the SME had about a separate medical path.
  - In July 2022, AER passed a resolution at the international conference to investigate how the OT body of knowledge compares to all certifications (not just CVRTs) in order to identify what an OT would need to be eligible for ACVREP's certification.
  - Vote was announced to the SME on the 22nd of Sep. that the board was moving to create a special certification for OTs to become a Blind and Low Vision Rehab. specialist- specifically noting that it would not include braille instruction
  - ACVREP announced that the board voted to move forward with the development of the certification to the AVLNC on the 29th of September.
  - An email was posted on October 1st to the listserv alerting members of the addition to the ACVREP certifications.

# A Word from the VRT Division Board Chair: Dan

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- This topic is deeply emotional, for we are passionate in our pursuits to support our clients, ensuring that they have the highest quality services from highly trained professionals.
- We recognize that ACVREP made their decision with the best possible intentions in mind to address a need in our field.

Summary of  
Concerns from  
those who have  
Contributed on the  
Listserv



# Clarifying Statements

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- Generalist OTs (without additional certifications) do not possess the skills to appropriately serve people with blindness or low vision.
- VRTs also have training to support clients with many additional health and disability issues. Collaboration between OTs and CVRTs is logical.
- Generalist OTs are currently working in the field in positions that are for CVRTs, COMS, TVIs, and CLVTs.
- Recruitment into the field is a challenge—due to lack of awareness of the existence of vision rehabilitation professionals.

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- Although CVRTs and OTs both hold Master's level degrees, salaries for OTs are frequently higher.
  - Most employers do not require ACVREP certification. The V.A. does require certification and OTs working with veterans are ACVREP certified.
  - Vision rehabilitation professionals are not easily found by individuals due to lack of awareness in the medical field.

# Motivation for Certification?

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- OTs should have a way to recognize achievement of specialized knowledge. The AOTA (American Occupational Therapy Association) has cancelled the SCLV certification for low vision as only about 100 OTs sought it.
- If employers do not require ACVREP certification, what is the motivation for any graduate to seek it or maintain it?
- OTs have been able to obtain CLVT certification for years. Both CLVT and O&M have category 2 paths to eligibility. This has not translated into more CLVTs than CVRTs. How do we know this new certification will be desirable?

# Concerns from the Field

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- There are not enough certified professionals to serve clients optimally.
- The certification process is costly for both ACVREP and for individuals seeking to gain and maintain one or more certifications.
- Beginning salaries are generally not high enough to make the vision rehab professions attractive.
- Employers generally do not recognize or value certified employees over non-certified (or even staff without formal education/agency trained).
- The scope of practice of VRTs is increasingly performed by other professionals, working outside their scope of practice, due to pressure from employers.

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- The development of a new category of certification represents a significant cost to ACVREP. Have the numbers of OTs interested been substantiated and will there be enough to recoup the expense?
  - If OTs do not choose ACVREP certification, what will be the impact on current certificate holders as ACVREP tries to balance its budget?
  - The new certification will create an unnecessary duplication of professions. Clients do deserve the highest quality of specialized services and this standard has already been identified by ACVREP. A client who needs VRT and yet is served by a professional not fully a VRT is NOT receiving the highest quality.

# Possible Impact on VRT and others

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- Further confusion for medical field and employers on scope of practice of VRT vs other professions.
- If more employers continue to hire OTs in preference to VRTs, fewer clients will come into contact with VRTs and have access to braille and our specialized approach.
- Staff dollars to support both a CVRT and an OT may cause employers to fill positions with OTs and leave no room for CVRTs. Will the higher cost of OT salaries keep blindness professional salaries unattractively lower, resulting in a ripple effect of fewer CVRTs, COMS, TVIs, entering the field?

# Concerns about the Process

- VRTs are under-represented on the ACVREP board in comparison to the other certifications.
- VRTs do not have a board member on the VRT SME (Subject Matter Expert) committee. How did this impact the voting?
- Stakeholders, such as AER, were not part of ACVREP's process.
- Was the ACVREP VRT and other related SMEs permitted to fulfill their assigned role?
  - To continuously review and recommend further development of The Academy's professional standards and certification eligibility criteria. ([www.acvrep.org](http://www.acvrep.org))
- These structural and procedural concerns, fortunately, are straightforward. It is to everyone's benefit to have equal representation and transparent communication.



## ACVREP announces it is developing an in- depth certification for licensed/registered Occupational Therapists in blindness/low vision

**Why:** All people who are blind or low vision deserve to receive services from highly qualified professionals to ensure they have the skills needed to be independent and be engaged in family and community life, regardless of the age at which they lose their sight and where they live in the world.

**Why Now:** By 2030, 15 million Americans 65 and older will need access to quality services for blindness or low vision in order to live optimally full lives. Worldwide, the challenge is greater with an estimated population near by 2050 of 61 million people living with significant vision loss. Think about someone you know who is over 65—your mother, your grandmother, or a friend—who will need to learn how to live with blindness or low vision. If action is not taken now, most of these individuals will not be able to obtain vision rehabilitation services because there are not enough well-trained quality professionals who can help them maintain their independence. For services to be available to this growing population of individuals we must expand the number of quality service providers. **Action is needed now to meet the need.**

As of the end of September 2022, there are only 593 Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (CVRT) in the US and many are not currently practicing but are in administrative positions. Retirements have been offsetting new certificants. In the past 20 years the number of CVRTs has only grown 11% in total. The growth rate of Certified Low Vision Therapists is higher, but there are still only 456 CLVTs in the US.

Developing a new certification to embrace an expanded field of service providers to meet the growing need is not replacing any of the existing professionals or their certifications, but rather expanding the number of professionals qualified to provide vision rehabilitation.

**How:** ACVREP uses the tool of certification to advance professional competency. When a new certification is launched, ACVREP forms a subject matter expert committee to develop a scope of practice, establish quality standards through certification criteria, establish a Code of Ethics and develop a rigorous certification exam. Before certification criteria are finalized, they are posted for a 30-day public comment period that will include other vision rehabilitation and education professionals as well as consumers. This process takes 18-24 months.

**What:** **Expanding the number of people who have access to high quality services by launching a new certification for occupational therapists working with adults with blindness or low vision.**

**Blindness and low vision can impact anyone.** People with blindness or low vision often have other medical issues in addition to vision loss, requiring the services of an occupational therapist (OT). These may include traumatic brain injury, dementia, diabetes, stroke, arthritis and Parkinson's among other medical conditions.

An OT with in-depth specialty training in blindness and low vision builds on their OT Scope of Practice by using a holistic approach to evaluate and provide rehabilitation to adults with blindness or low vision, taking into consideration their other medical needs. OTs work within the medical system and therefore are much more likely to intersect with people who are blind or low vision, especially in the aging population. The new certification will provide a means of determining which OTs have the in-depth knowledge and training to provide quality services to effectively meet the rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness or low vision.

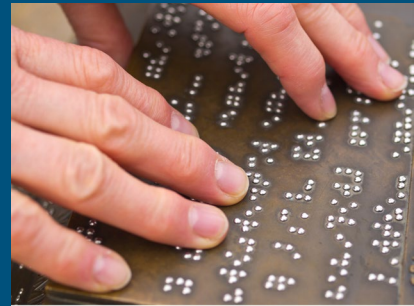
**ACVREP's commitment:** ACVREP remains committed to the growth of all certifications and will continue to work diligently with all subject matter expert committees and the field to promote recruitment and certification of those who provide services to individuals who are blind or low vision worldwide.



# Town Hall Comment Via Chat

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Please contribute to the chat at this time and let us know what concerns we have missed or left unaddressed.



What  
can we do?



# Current Actions:

1. The Division 11 Webpage is being overhauled. We hope to provide VRTs with a landing page to get them all the info they need and resources to enhance their skills. It will continue to be refined and we welcome feedback and suggestions.
2. The (FILA) Functional Independent Living Assessment – Kendra Farrow of OIB-TAC has developed a VRT Assessment which is currently being piloted (and needs more sites to validate it) which will give us a standardized assessment tool for our profession. Getting this established would help us immensely! Please volunteer to help!
3. The ACVREP SME is working to develop a manual that, if adopted by all the VRT Programs, will help us standardize the guidelines and paperwork you will follow and fill out as a CVRT Mentor to Graduate Interns. No more will you have to have multiple handbooks if you mentor students from different programs. This will also help codify the expectations and guidelines of all graduate interns nationwide.
4. The ACVREP SME is updating our Code of Ethics
5. The ACVREP SME is working to find a viable path for Category 2 again, which would allow for those practicing VRTs who want certification but do not have a bachelor's degree and cannot move to Illinois to get their Certification. It could likewise be a potential path for other related service providers without getting a Master's or Graduate Certificate.

# Suggestions for actions continued

7. [#RecruitCVRT](#) is a joint initiative between AVRT and AER which has been going on now for about a year. We have developed a YouTube Channel, Twitter Account, Instagram Account and Facebook page. At AVRT, we will have a table in the vendor hall where you can record your stories and tell what great work you do. We are calling it VRT Confessionals at the moment. You do not have to attend AVRT to participate; you can send in your stories or log in to social media and send them through the social media channels yourself.

8. The SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threats) committee which consists of AER and AVRT CVRTs presented the findings of the SWOT survey sent out earlier this year at AER in July. We gathered feedback from those present and condensed the participants' remarks into several actionable items, which we will report on at AVRT and later publish in the New Review. It is hoped that this feedback can be taken by the primary stakeholders in our field as well as each of us individually as CVRTs and develop a 5-year plan we can all agree upon as a profession to move forward united and productive in our growth and influence. You can get involved here too!

9. The Aging and Vision Loss National Coalition. They are working on multiple efforts to establish national standards. They have NUMEROUS initiatives and want volunteers to help them. This is another initiative that needs more CVRTs involved and helping.

# Town Hall Comment Via Chat

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Please add any additional ideas for action that we can share with the AER board and inform the SWOT team.



For all AER Division 11 members

Our next meeting is November 8, 7:30 EST

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Are you connected with us?

<https://aerbvi.org/about/divisions/vision-rehabilitation-therapy-division/>

Follow us on:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVvIWpsMUe4bBIQRHRCUyTQ>

<https://www.instagram.com/recruitcvrt/>

# Thank You



We realize that we are not gathering this evening under

“5 Star Circumstances”

Thank for joining, sharing, and listening.