
A Guide to Navigating LHON with Money in Mind

**Information & Resources for the
Ohio LHON Community**

May 2024

Purpose

Individuals who carry an LHON mutation can experience sudden-onset blindness at any age. When this occurs, it is a life-changing event for the individual affected, their family, and loved ones.

There are many ways in which LHON onset can have a significant financial impact on all involved. Fortunately, there are also many resources available that can help mitigate that financial impact.

The goal of this document is to help the Ohio LHON community become familiar with resources that can limit negative financial impacts. While designed for the LHON community, some of the information may be of value to others with vision loss. It provides descriptions and contact information of agencies and programs that can create a better financial outcome for affected patients and their loved ones. Unaffected carriers can also benefit by being better prepared in case they experience LHON vision loss one day.

The organizations and services listed in this document are those that provide free or low-cost assistance. There are many other valuable fee-for-service agencies available. In some cases, those may be a better fit for you. To access them simply search blind or low-vision services in your city/region.

This document is intended as a general guide only. It was developed by LHON volunteers and is subject to change. It does not purport to provide legal, financial or tax guidance. You should check with each listed provider and your own advisors for your specific situation.

Table of Contents

TRAINING & TECHNICAL RESOURCES	5
American Council of the Blind of Ohio	5
Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired	5
Cleveland Sight Center	5
Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired	6
The Department of Veterans Affairs – Blind Rehabilitation Services	6
Hadley	6
National Federation of the Blind	7
Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities: Bureau of Services for the Blind and Low Vision	7
The Outreach Center for Deafness and Blindness	8
Philomatheon Society for the Blind	8
VisionAware	8
DISABILITY INSURANCE	9
Family Medical Leave	9
Long-Term Disability Insurance	9
SOCIAL SECURITY	11
Social Security Disability Insurance	11
Supplemental Security Income	12
Employment Supports	13
MEDICAL INSURANCE	14
Medicare	14
Medicaid Information for Aged, Blind, or Disabled - Ohio	14
Medicaid Buy-In for Workers with Disabilities	15
EDUCATION	16
Early Childhood	16
School Age	16
Ohio State School for the Blind	17
Assistive Technology and Accessible Education Materials Center	17
Higher Education	17
Student Loan Forgiveness	18
Scholarships	19
EMPLOYMENT	20
Employment Assistance Programs	20
Disability Rights	20
Disability Rights Ohio	20
Job Accommodation Network	20
TRANSPORTATION	22
Discounted Public Transportation	22

Paratransit	22
Disability Parking Placard	22
Ridesharing Services	23
Air Travel	23
Miracle Flights	24
Amtrak	24
TRAVEL & LEISURE	26
State Parks Discount Pass	26
National Parks Access Pass	26
<i>Audiobooks and Periodicals</i>	27
Ohio Library for the Blind and Physically Disabled	27
VoiceCorps Reading Services	27
Braille and Audio Reading Download	27
NFB-Newsline	28
Bookshare	28
Sports	28
Fishing License	29
Theatre Discounts	29
ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY	30
Aira	30
Be My Eyes	30
Seeing AI	30
Assistive Technology of Ohio	31
Apple Pay	31
Computers for the Blind	31
TAX TIPS	33
Deduction for the Legally Blind	33
Medical Deductions for the Blind	33
Impairment-Related Work Expenses	33
Tax Preparation Assistance	34
MISCELLANEOUS	35
Low-Cost Grocery Delivery	35
Pilot Dogs	35
Ohio Ophthalmological Society	35
Avoiding Unnecessary Medical Care	35
General Financial Support	36
<i>Genetic Testing</i>	36
Obligate Carrier/On the Maternal Bloodline	36
First in Family	37

TRAINING & TECHNICAL RESOURCES

American Council of the Blind of Ohio

The American Council of The Blind - Ohio is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to improving the lives of the blind and visually impaired through advocacy efforts focused on education, information, and legislation. ACBO offers annual scholarships for legally blind or visually impaired students attending a post-secondary school. Additionally, funds are available to any blind or visually impaired resident of Ohio or any chapter of ACB-Ohio to pay half the cost of a purchase or chapter project, up to \$1000. Examples include but are not limited to: Screen readers, Braille display CCTV or another magnifiers.

<https://www.acbohio.org>

Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

The Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired provides a variety of services for both adults and children affected by blindness and low vision. CABVI provides access to technology such as large print software, text-to-speech software, Braille displays, and optical character recognition that converts printed text into accessible formats. CABVI provides a variety of services for young children with blindness or low vision, including home visits, functional visual assessments, and emotional and social support for patients and their families. CABVI also provides a variety of rehabilitation and social services including assistance with meal preparation, management of other medical conditions, and access to therapy and support groups. More information can be found on CABVI's website.

<https://cincyblind.org>

Cleveland Sight Center

The Cleveland Sight Center provides free and low-cost services to people with vision impairments. Their services include:

- Clinic offering low vision exams and assessments
- Store offering assistive technology and low vision aids
- Training on assistive technology, low vision aids and daily living techniques

- Case management and peer support groups to help navigate vision loss
- Recreation and socialization activities that foster community
- Employment preparation to build and develop job skills
- Job coaching to support individuals who secure jobs
- Job placement to connect individuals with employment

<https://www.clevelandsightcenter.org>

Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired

The Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired provides a variety of services for those with visual disabilities living in Ohio and the greater Cincinnati area. The Clovernook Center is dedicated to providing services to both adult and pediatric patients, and offers vision clinics for both adults and children. Children with blindness and other visual impairments are also able to participate in summer camps and adaptive sports programs. Adults have access to social enterprises through the Clovernook Center which provides occupational training and other job training services.

<https://clovernook.org>

The Department of Veterans Affairs – Blind Rehabilitation Services

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides blind and visual impairment rehabilitation services (BRS) to eligible veterans and active-duty service members. The Department of Veterans Affairs provides several Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRC) located across the country. The BRC is a residential inpatient program designed to assist in comprehensive adjustment to blindness training and serve as a resource to the blind. Louis Stokes Cleveland Blind Rehabilitation Center is a BRC located in Cleveland, Ohio.

<https://www.rehab.va.gov/blindrehab>

Hadley

Hadley offers free online learning opportunities in assistive technology, daily living, recreation, employment, Braille, and other topics. Additionally, they offer podcasts and online discussion groups covering a wide array of topics.

<https://hadleyhelps.org>

National Federation of the Blind

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) is the oldest and largest nationwide organization of blind Americans. Founded in 1940 and headquartered in Baltimore, the NFB consists of affiliates, chapters, and divisions in all 50 states. Through its network of blind members, it coordinates many programs, services, and resources, providing information and support to children and adults. It offers training and career mentoring, as well as scholarships and awards. Additionally, the NFB sponsors the Free White Cane Program Free White Cane Program | National Federation of the Blind (nfb.org) where any blind individual in the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico can request a cane for their personal use. Requests can be made as often as every six months.

<https://nfbohio.org>

Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD): Bureau of Services for the Blind and Low Vision

Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) is located in communities across the state of Ohio, with a Central Office, the Division of Disability Determination, and several Vocational Rehabilitation offices and appointment centers.

OOD provides vocational training for individuals who are blind or are affected with low vision. OOD is focused on providing occupational training so that Ohioans who are blind or visually impaired can find and maintain employment. OOD offers the following services:

- Work adjustment training
- Job training
- Mental and Physical Restoration
- Job Placement Assistance

OOD will provide an individualized plan of employment for those who are seeking work, and will also follow up with job retention services once proper employment has been found. Patients will be paired with a counselor to aid in their job search and training needs. Any Ohioan aged 14 or older affected by from blindness or low vision is welcome to apply for assistance.

<https://ood.ohio.gov>

The Outreach Center for Deafness and Blindness

The Outreach Center for Deafness and Blindness is a part of the Educational Service Center of Central Ohio that provides services for individuals with deafness and blindness as well as those that are hard of hearing or visually impaired. Their services include assistive technology, training for professionals, and accessible materials for learners. They hold frequent meetings and events where they provide information and training, and they host a free, online educational module that teaches about promoting access for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired.

<https://deafandblindoutreach.org>

Philomatheon Society for the Blind

Located in Canton, Ohio the Philomatheon Society for the Blind is an organization of blind and visually impaired individuals along with sighted individuals dedicated to providing the tools and skill needed for visually disabled individuals to live happy, independent, and rewarding lives within the community. The Society provides educational opportunities, activities, and visual aids to individuals with visual challenges at little to no cost. Individuals within the community are also able to become members of the Society for additional benefits. More information can be found at the Society's website.

<https://www.philomatheon.com>

VisionAware

VisionAware is a free, easy-to-use informational service for adults with vision loss. They provide practical tips and resources for adults, their families, friends, caregivers, and related professionals. Information includes: eye diseases and disorders, ways to connect with others including social media channels like Twitter and Facebook, the VisionAware blog, "Visually Impaired, Now What?" Blog by Peer Advisors as well as a searchable, free Directory of Services.

<https://visionaware.org>

DISABILITY INSURANCE

Family Medical Leave

While Ohio does not have state disability, the federally funded, Family Medical Leave Act, requires covered employers to provide family and medical leave for eligible employees. This law requires employers to provide up to 12 weeks off in a 12-month period for the employee's own serious health condition, or for the employee to care for a family member with a serious health condition. This leave need not be taken consecutively.

Upon return from FMLA leave, an employee must be restored to his or her original job or to an equivalent job with equivalent pay, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment. An employee's use of FMLA leave cannot be counted against the employee under a "no-fault" attendance policy.

Employers are also required to continue group health insurance coverage for an employee on FMLA leave under the same terms and conditions as if the employee had not taken leave. The main benefit of FMLA is job protection, especially if your employer has a strict sick policy that could jeopardize your employment.

www.dol.gov

Long-Term Disability Insurance

Long-term disability (LTD) insurance is a private insurance policy that protects an employee from loss of income if he or she is unable to work due to illness, injury, or accident for a long period of time.

LTD insurance ensures that an employee will still receive a percentage of their income if they cannot work for an extended period. It can be provided and paid for by employers or individuals. Your employer may offer an LTD option. If a company doesn't offer LTD insurance or if an employee wants additional coverage, he or she has the option to purchase an individual LTD plan.

Some employers, if they do not provide LTD insurance, will develop a relationship with an LTD insurance company to offer an employee discount for their staff who choose to purchase an LTD policy.

LTD insurance provided by an employer may be inadequate to meet your needs. In this case, you might want to consider purchasing supplemental LTD insurance. Since it's expensive for an individual to purchase, LTD insurance is often available through an employee's professional associations at a discounted rate.

LTD insurance benefits usually begin when short-term disability insurance benefits end. Payments to the employee from their employer's LTD insurance (such as where the employer subsidized the premiums) are taxable income.

Payments from an employee-purchased plan, and/or where the employee paid premiums themselves are on an after-tax basis, are usually not taxable income.

LTD policies sometimes have offset language. For example, a policy may require an employee to secure Social Security Disability Insurance. The insurance company will then reduce the amount of its payment by the amount SSDI is providing. If someone is collecting on an LTD policy and returns to work, the insurance payout may be reduced by some percentage of the amount earned. Since there are so many complexities to the LTD insurance process, consider hiring a lawyer familiar with LTD insurance to help navigate the process.

Each LTD insurance policy has different conditions for payout, diseases, or pre-existing conditions that may be excluded, and various other conditions that make the policy more, or less, useful to an employee. Some policies, for example, will pay disability benefits if the employee is unable to work in his or her current profession. Others expect the employee to take any job they are capable of doing. LTD payments to the employee, in some policies, have a defined period. Others pay an employee until he or she is 65 years old.

Consider your health history, your family's history of LHON, and any other diseases to determine the amount of long-term disability insurance that you need.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security Disability Insurance

SSDI provides benefits to disabled persons (including those who are legally blind) who are “insured” by workers’ contributions to the Social Security trust fund. These contributions are based on your earnings (or those of your spouse or parents) as required by the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA). Your dependents may also be eligible for benefits from your earnings record. Adults who have been disabled since childhood may qualify for SSDI on a parent’s record even if they never have worked.

SSDI is different from the Supplemental Security Income Program (SSI). SSDI is funded through FICA and Social Security taxes; SSI is financed through general tax revenues. Also, the qualifications for SSDI and SSI differ. SSDI will help if you are severely disabled and can’t be employed in your field of work, have a history of work, have paid into Social Security in prior work years, and have a medical issue that meets the Social Security disability guidelines (such as legal blindness). Blindness is defined as central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with best correction, or a limitation in the field of vision in the better eye so that the widest diameter of the visual field subtends an angle of 20 degrees or less. Under SSDI, this condition has to have lasted or be expected to last at least 12 months.

SSDI is an earned benefit, based on your work record. In order to qualify, you need to have worked for a minimum amount of time, depending on your age when you become disabled. Your benefit amount can be higher or lower depending on your income history and work duration.

Qualification for SSDI is primarily based on two things: documenting a disability, and an evaluation of your work history. The Social Security Administration (SSA) looks at your recent work history, and how long you’ve worked. There is also an earnings test, if you’re still working. Basically, if you’re still able to work, and you earn over a certain amount, you aren’t considered disabled.

Benefit amounts vary dramatically based on each individual’s work record. The SSA uses a weighted formula to calculate disability benefits. To get an estimate, view your Social Security statement by creating an account on www.ssa.gov.

SSDI can be applied for online at <https://www.ssa.gov/apply>. The SSA will review your application and supporting documents and make a decision as to whether or not you qualify as disabled, and if you do, whether or not you're eligible for benefits.

You can speak with an SSDI representative by calling your local Social Security office or the national number (1-800-772-1213). Local office phone numbers can be found online with the Social Security Office Locator Field Office Locator: <https://www.ssa.gov/locator>.

Note: If you receive SSDI benefits and work, it is important to pay close attention to the amount of income you earn in relation to the monthly maximum allowed for a blind individual to earn and to continue to receive SSDI benefits. If your monthly income exceeds the monthly allowed amount, SSDI does not automatically stop sending your monthly benefit amount. They will review your case from time to time, and if they determine that you have received benefits to which you were not entitled, they will send a letter demanding repayment. This can be for a significant amount, and can be an extremely unpleasant situation to be in.

Supplemental Security Income

Unlike Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), which is based on work experience, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a program based on need. Eligibility for SSI does not depend on whether or not you worked and paid into the Social Security system. In order to qualify for SSI benefits, your income and resources must be below a certain amount.

SSI qualification is based on your resources and is available to people who are disabled (including legally blind), or over 65. The SSI program makes cash assistance payments to aged, blind, and disabled persons (including children) who have limited income and resources. The Federal Government funds SSI from general tax revenues. Many states pay a supplemental benefit to eligible persons in addition to their federal benefits.

To apply for SSI, you can begin the process and complete a large part of your application by visiting their website at <https://www.ssa.gov/apply>. You can also call them toll-free at 1-800-772-1213 to set up an in-person or telephone appointment with a representative from your local Social Security office. Do not wait to apply. If you believe you're eligible for SSI, contact SSA right away. The

earliest they will pay SSI is the month after the filing date of your application, or the month after you first meet all the eligibility requirements, whichever is later.

<https://www.ssa.gov/apply>

Note: As with SSDI, if you receive SSI benefits, it is important to pay close attention to the amount of income you earn and your assets in relation to the maximum allowed. If your monthly income exceeds the monthly allowed amount, or if in any month your assets exceed the maximum allowed amount, SSI does not automatically stop sending your monthly benefit amount. If you ever request to stop receiving SSI benefits, they will review your case. If they determine that you have received benefits to which you were not entitled, they will send a letter demanding repayment. This can be for a significant amount, and can be an extremely unpleasant situation to be in.

Employment Supports

There are many provisions designed to assist you in becoming self-sufficient through work. The Social Security Red Book discusses each of these provisions, including Blind Work Expenses (BWE), Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWE), Trial Work Period (TWP) and many others.

www.ssa.gov/redbook/Advice

MEDICAL INSURANCE

Medicare

Medicare is a national health insurance program administered by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). If you are age 18 to 64, your eligibility for Medicare is tied to your eligibility for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits. You must qualify for and receive SSDI monthly income benefits to be eligible for Medicare.

Once you are approved for SSDI, you must wait 5 months for your income benefits to begin, and an additional 24 months before Medicare benefits begin.

Medicare covers only some of the healthcare expenses of those enrolled and does not cover the cost of low vision devices. It is divided into four Parts. Medicare Part A covers hospital, skilled nursing, and hospice services, and has no cost. Part B has a cost, and covers outpatient services, outpatient hospital charges, most provider office visits, and most professionally administered prescription drugs. Your Part B cost can be deducted from your monthly SSDI and/or SSI benefit payment.

Enrollees can cover most of the remaining costs by taking additional private insurance and/or by joining a Part C Medicare health plan. Part C is an alternative to the combination of Parts A and B, called Managed Medicare or Medicare Advantage, which allows patients to choose health plans with at least the same service coverage as Parts A and B. A beneficiary must enroll in Parts A and B first before signing up for Part C. Part D covers most self-administered prescription drugs.

www.medicare.gov

Medicaid Information for Aged, Blind, or Disabled - Ohio

Ohio Medicaid offers affordable healthcare insurance for qualifying individuals. To qualify for ABD Medicaid coverage in Ohio, one must be over the age of 65, be considered legally blind, or have a disability as approved by the State Social Security Administration and must meet the basic requirements for coverage.

Medicaid Buy-In for Workers with Disabilities

The Ohio Medicaid Buy-in for workers with disabilities enables blind or visually impaired individuals to receive Medicaid coverage while maintaining employment. Requirements for the Medicaid Buy-In include being between the ages of 16 and 64, being considered legally blind or having a disability as defined by the State Social Security Administration, and meeting certain financial thresholds as determined by the United States government.

<https://medicaid.ohio.gov/home>

EDUCATION

Early Childhood

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services are designed for young children (aged 3-5) with disabilities who need specially designed instruction or related services and whose disability causes the children to be unable to participate in developmentally appropriate typical preschool activities.

School districts are required by law to ensure that a developmentally appropriate ESCE program and services are available. ECSE programs and services ensure that all children with disabilities have a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) that is designed to meet their unique needs and enable them to make progress in acquiring knowledge and skills, improving social relationships, and learning to take action to meet their needs within the general education program.

School Age

If someone becomes affected by LHON while in elementary, middle, or high school, it is important to contact their school district immediately. A discussion with the school principal, or Section 504 coordinator at the school district, is often the best first step to address concerns.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, commonly called “Section 504,” is a federal law that protects students from discrimination based on disability. This law applies to all programs and activities that receive funding from the federal government, including Ohio public schools.

Under Section 504, students with disabilities are entitled to accommodations, aids, and services to access and benefit from education. Section 504 requires that public schools provide a “free appropriate public education” to every student with a disability, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability. A counselor or coordinator works with the student and their family, teacher(s), and the school to develop an Individualized Education Program to support and accommodate the student’s needs.

For detailed information on Section 504, please see the Parent and Educator Resource Guide to Section 504 in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools.

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/504-resource-guide-201612.pdf>

Ohio State School for the Blind

The Ohio State School for the Blind was founded as the first public school for the blind in the United States. Today, OSSB educates over 100 blind and visually impaired students per year. OSSB offers early childhood education, elementary education, and high school education for students with blindness and visual impairments. OSSB's Library Media Center contains many volumes in Braille, large print, regular print, and recordings for students to use. OSSB offers many blindness training services, especially lessons in Braille and communication without vision. OSSB offers physical education, musical instruction, and social and emotional learning services for their students. OSSB also offers a variety of statewide services for students attending different institutions, including technical support, individualized education programming, and school psychologist support.

<https://ossb.ohio.gov/home/resources/ossb-main-banner>

Assistive Technology and Accessible Education Materials Center

ATAEM assists local educational institutions in providing accessible instructional materials for students with blindness and visual impairments. Materials include Braille and large print textbooks, audiobooks, text-to-speech technologies, screen readers, and speech recognition technologies. On behalf of the Ohio Department of Education, ATAEM also conducts the Federal Quota Registration of Blind Students, which registers blind students to be eligible to qualify for federal funds to receive accessible instructional materials. Requests for materials may be placed at ATAEM's website.

<https://ataem.org/who-needs-aem>

Higher Education

If someone becomes affected at college-age or beyond and seeks to continue higher education, it's important to establish a relationship with the disability/accessibility center on campus. Most colleges and universities offer low-vision assistance and resources such as notetakers and priority registration, as well as other support services.

Student Loan Forgiveness

A Total and Permanent Discharge (TPD) relieves you from having to repay a William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan (Direct Loan) Program loan, Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program loan, and/or Federal Perkins Loan (Perkins Loan) Program loan, or complete a TEACH Grant service obligation, on the basis of your total and permanent disability.

Before your federal student loans or TEACH Grant service obligation can be discharged, you must provide information to the Department of Education, Federal Student Aid Department, to show that you are totally and permanently disabled. The Department will evaluate the information and determine if you qualify for a TPD discharge.

If you think you might qualify and want to apply for a TPD discharge, you must complete a TPD discharge application and gather supporting documentation on your disability. Contact the Department to apply, either by phone: 888.303.7818 or by email: DisabilityInformation@Nelnet.net. If you want to start your application online, go to: www.secure.disabilitydischarge.com/registration

If the Department approves your TPD discharge request, they will notify you and the holders of your loans and/or TEACH Grant service obligation of the approval. They will also instruct the loan holders to return any loan payments received after your disability date to the person who made the payments. Your “disability date” is the date they received the documentation of your SSA notice of award for SSDI or SSI benefits, or the date the physician signed your discharge application, depending on the type of documentation you provided to show that you are totally and permanently disabled.

After being notified that the Department has approved your discharge request, your loan holders will transfer your loans and/or TEACH Grant service obligation to the Department for discharge. You will then be subject to a 3-year post-discharge monitoring period that begins on the date the discharge is approved. There are requirements that you must meet during the post-discharge monitoring period.

Note: The Department will reinstate your obligation to repay your discharged loans or complete your discharged TEACH Grant service obligation if at any time during the 3-year monitoring period you do not meet the requirements of the post-discharge monitoring period.

Scholarships

For more information about educational resources and scholarships, visit the LHON website.

www.lhon.org/living-with-lhon

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Assistance Programs

Many employers offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that will include several visits to a mental health professional at no cost. Onset of LHON vision loss can have a significant impact on the mental health of the individual affected and their loved ones. An EAP is an opportunity to try working with a mental health professional at no charge. Additional access to a therapist or counselor may be available through your health insurance, or at your local non-profit agency serving the blind and visually impaired.

Disability Rights

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (“ADA”) is federal legislation designed to counteract bias and protect the rights of the disabled in the workplace. The ADA prohibits employers from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities. A disability is defined broadly as any mental or physical impairment that limits at least one major life function.

Workers are deemed to be qualified to perform a job under the ADA, if they meet the educational and other requirements for the job and they can perform the job duties with or without reasonable accommodations.

Disability Rights Ohio

A non-profit organization, Disability Rights Ohio seeks to advocate for people with disabilities. They provide legal advocacy and rights protection for people living with a wide range of disabilities. Their services include assisting in access to assistive technology, aiding in problems such as abuse or discrimination, special education, housing, employment, community integration, and voting rights protection.

<https://www.disabilityrightsohio.org/#who>

Job Accommodation Network

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a leading source of free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues.

JAN's consultants offer one-on-one guidance on workplace accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and related legislation, and self-employment and entrepreneurship options for people with disabilities.

Assistance is available both over the phone and online. JAN provides individualized consultation to assist:

- Individuals with medical conditions and disabilities seeking information about job accommodation solutions, employment rights under the ADA, and self-employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.
- Family members and rehabilitation, medical, educational, and other professionals in their effort to support successful employment outcomes for individuals with medical conditions and disabilities.
- Employers and their representatives seeking guidance on practical ways to engage in the interactive process, provide job accommodation solutions, and comply with Title I of the ADA.

www.askjan.org

TRANSPORTATION

Discounted Public Transportation

In many municipalities, a rider with a qualifying disability, such as legal blindness, can apply for a discounted regional transportation fare card for buses, subways, streetcars or ferries, depending on local rules. In most cases, you can load a cash value on the card, which will be deducted automatically upon usage. To apply for a discounted transit card, contact your local transit authority. You will usually need to fill out a form and have your doctor sign it.

Paratransit

Paratransit is a transportation service for individuals with disabilities who are unable to use public transportation services. A transit agency must provide paratransit service within 3/4 of a mile of a bus route or rail station. This service must be available on the same days and at the same hours as regular transit services. You may have to pay a higher fare for paratransit services, but this fare cannot be more than double the regular fare. You're eligible for paratransit service if you're unable to use public transit because of your disability.

Demonstrating legal blindness is usually adequate to establish eligibility. Contact your local transit agency to request access to your local paratransit service. The transit agency may ask you to support your request for paratransit services with a letter from your doctor. Once approved, you can schedule trips by following your transit agency's scheduling process. Transit agencies are required to offer next-day service, and they must agree to pick you up within an hour of the time that you requested.

Disability Parking Placard

A qualified permanently disabled person may obtain a Disability Parking Placard. Placards can be moved from one vehicle to another, making them a good option for someone affected by LHON who rides in various cars. It allows parking in any space reserved for disabled parking in Ohio.

To obtain a placard, you will need to fill out the "Application for Removable Windshield Placards (form BMV 4826)." Additionally, the application must be accompanied by a prescription from a health care provider. The prescription must contain:

- Date
- Name of the person with the disability
- Statement that the prescription is for a removable windshield placard
- Expected duration of the disabling condition
- Health care provider's signature

You may submit your handicap parking application in person at any local Deputy Registrar office or mail your documents to:

Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles
Registration Support Services
PO Box 16521
Columbus, Ohio 43216

<https://ohio.gov/residents/resources/disability-placards>

Ridesharing Services

The two largest ridesharing services are Uber (<https://www.uber.com>) and Lyft (<https://www.lyft.com>). Both utilize software and smartphone technology to assist visually impaired riders to get from place to place. Both services offer: cashless options to simplify the payment process, reducing the need for riders to worry about counting out cash or exchanging bills with a driver; on-demand transportation so riders no longer have to pre-arrange trips through dispatchers or paratransit options; upfront pricing so riders know the cost of their trip before requesting the ride; the ability to share the rider's ETA and location with friends or family members; and service animal policies which require drivers to comply with all applicable laws regarding the transportation of service animals.

Additionally, rideshare companies have been partnering with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and Lighthouse for the Blind to increase awareness of blind passengers' rights, advocate for effective public policies, and expand transportation options for passengers who are blind or have low vision. They are working to make their apps more accessible and inclusive.

Air Travel

People with visual impairments are protected via rules that all airlines are required to follow, however, specific methods can differ from airline to airline. While airport personnel should always accommodate requests for assistance at

the airport itself, making arrangements in advance can help save time, travel headaches and delays.

When making your reservation, contact the airline's disability support desk; they often have a dedicated phone number. Your reservation can be marked to let the ground staff and onboard personnel have all the information they need to facilitate any special arrangements you may require such as transportation to your gate and upon arrival at your destination, as well as assistance regarding your baggage and ground transportation. This information can also be entered into a reservation online.

Additionally, some airlines' disability support desks can waive seat assignment fees, and/or provide a lower cost fare for a companion who may be traveling with you to provide assistance. Check with your airline to see what specific services they provide.

Miracle Flights

Some people affected by LHON want to travel to a distant location to see a LHON specialist, but find the travel cost prohibitive. One option to consider is Miracle Flights, the nation's leading medical flight charity and one of the only national non-profits. They arrange more than 600 flights every month to medical facilities across the country.

www.miracleflights.org

Amtrak

Amtrak offers a 10% rail fare discount to adult passengers with a disability. Child passengers with a disability are eligible for the everyday 50% child discount plus an additional 10% off the discounted child's fare, regardless of the service on which they travel. Amtrak also offers a 10% discount for persons traveling with a passenger with a disability as a companion. Those designated as a companion must be capable of providing the necessary assistance to the passenger with a disability. Just select 'Passenger with Disability' or 'Companion' for each passenger as appropriate in Fare Finder at the beginning of your search to receive the applicable discounts.

You must provide written documentation of your disability at the ticket counter and when boarding the train. Acceptable documentation includes a transit system ID card for persons with a disability, membership card from a disability organization, letter from a physician, Medicare card (if under 65), or a Disabled/Accessible parking placard issued by a state Department of Motor Vehicles (photocopy is acceptable).

www.amtrak.com/passengers-with-disabilities-discounts

TRAVEL & LEISURE

State Parks Discount Pass

Ohio State parks offer a Golden Buckeye pass to people with disabilities to be used at Ohio State Parks. The pass provides a 50% discount off camping fees Sunday through Thursday, 10% off camping fees Friday through Saturday, and a 10% discount off total rate for all other Overnight Rentals and Day Use Rentals, such as shelter houses.

<https://ohiodnr.gov/discover-and-learn/safety-conservation/about-odnr/division-parks-watercraft/stay-overnight/state-parks-camping-discounts>

National Parks Access Pass

The National Parks Access Pass is a free, lifetime pass available to U.S. citizens or permanent residents, regardless of age, that have a permanent disability. It can be used at over 2,000 Federal recreation sites across the nation, including National Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, and many National Forest lands. Discounts offered by the Pass vary widely across the many different types of recreation sites. Pass owners are encouraged to check with sites they plan to visit before obtaining a Pass to verify that their Pass will be accepted. Any time a Pass is used, photo identification will be requested to verify Pass ownership.

The Pass may be obtained at certain federal recreation sites, through the mail, or online. To obtain a Pass you must have identification to verify that you are a U.S. citizen or permanent resident as well as documentation that you have a permanent disability. Showing a state motor vehicle department disability sticker, license plate or placard is not acceptable documentation.

If you apply for an Access Pass at a Federal recreation site you do NOT need to fill out an application. Upon arrival, the officer will verify your documentation of disability and that you are a U.S. citizen or permanent resident by checking your ID. You will then be issued the Pass. The Pass is free if obtained in person, and there is no processing fee. Before making a trip to obtain a Pass, be sure to contact the site to ensure that they have Passes available. To obtain an Access Pass through the mail or online, you must complete an application, provide a photocopy of proof of citizenship or residency, documentation of disability, and

pay the processing fee. The cost of obtaining an Access Pass through the mail or online is \$10 for application processing (the Pass is free).

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/accessibility/interagency-access-pass.htm>

Audiobooks and Periodicals

Ohio Library for the Blind and Physically Disabled

The Ohio Library for the Blind and Physically Disabled is a part of the Cleveland Public Library system. The library provides resources in conjunction with the State Library of Ohio Talking Book Program, which provides free recorded books and magazines as well as playback equipment to blind, visually impaired, print disabled, and reading disabled Ohioans. The library also acts as the regional arm for the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, which is a part of the Library of Congress. This service sends both braille and audio materials to Ohioans through postage-free mail. The library also provides reference sources and information about blindness and disabilities.

<https://cpl.org/aboutthelibrary/ohio-library-for-the-blind-print-disabled>

VoiceCorps Reading Services

Founded in 1975, VoiceCorps broadcasts present programming designed to make print news and information accessible to people who have a disability or vision impairment that prevents them from using print. With the aim of providing a tool for independent access to information, VoiceCorps volunteers read aloud from current local and national newspapers alongside 200 other print publications. The free readings, which include the Columbus Dispatch, portions of the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, and other community newspapers are transmitted over radio, the web, and on select local cable systems.

<https://voicecorps.org/programming>

Braille and Audio Reading Download

Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) is a free online service run by The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) that allows you to download books and magazines instantly. To use BARD, you must be an NLS

patron and fill out an application. Once approved, you can download the BARD mobile app for either IOS or Android at no cost.

www.loc.gov/nls

NFB-Newsline

Anyone who cannot read printed publications due to vision loss is eligible to receive NFB-NEWSLINE; a free audio news service offering access to more than 500 publications, emergency weather alerts, job listings, and more.

www.nfb.org/programs-services/nfb-newsline

Libby by OverDrive

The Libby app is a free downloadable audio book borrowing service that works with any public library using OverDrive. Over 90% of public libraries in North America have OverDrive. To utilize Libby, you need a library card from your local OverDrive-enabled library. Once downloaded, the Libby app works with Windows 10, IOS, or Android. The app can be downloaded from your preferred app store.

www.overdrive.com

Bookshare

Bookshare is an ebook library where members can access a collection of over 1,109,245 titles. It includes books for school, career, and reading pleasure, as well as titles in over 34 languages. Thanks to funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Bookshare is free for all qualified U.S. students and schools. Qualified individuals who are not students pay a nominal annual fee for their membership. To qualify, you will need to provide a proof of disability form signed by a qualified expert such as an ophthalmologist.

www.bookshare.org/cms/get-started/sign

Sports

There are many ways to save money while participating in sports with LHON vision. For instance, many ski areas provide a free pass to a guide for a visually impaired skier. Check with your local ski area for more information.

Ski for Light is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization whose mission is to teach visually- and mobility-impaired adults the sport of classic cross-country skiing.

www.sfl.org

Facilities like the National Ability Center provide adaptive sports opportunities, often at low/no cost to the vision impaired.

www.discovernac.org

Organizations like the Challenged Athletes Foundation (CAF) provide grants to athletes with any disability including vision loss to support their athletic activities.

www.challengedathletes.org

A good source of information on sports that may be available in your area is the United States Association of Blind Athletes.

www.usaba.org

Fishing License

Ohio residents who are legally blind are eligible to be issued a free state fishing license.

<https://ohiodnr.gov/buy-and-apply/hunting-fishing-boating/fishing-resources/fishing-licenses>

Theatre Discounts

Many theatres throughout the country offer discounts and often special seating for the blind. Many also offer special performances with a live AudioDescriber. Check with the theatres in your area.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Aira

Aira delivers instant access to visual information. Aira’s trained, professional agents remotely assist people who are blind or low vision with virtually any task, all without a sighted assistant nearby. Through an app on your smartphone, you can connect with a trained Aira agent. Pick the plan that makes the most sense for you, sign up in a couple of minutes, and download the Aira app to your smartphone. Access agents on-demand for almost any task, take advantage of ride-share integration to get you where you need to be, and use one of the ever-growing list of free Aira Access offers to save you money while doing it. To discover all available free Aira Access offers, just tap on the “Search & Apply a Free Offer” button on the home screen of your Aira app.

<http://www.aira.io/free-access>

Be My Eyes

Be My Eyes is a free app that connects blind and low-vision people with sighted volunteers and company representatives for visual assistance through a live video call. It works similarly to Aira. You connect via either an IOS or an Android app on your phone. During the call, you and a volunteer can communicate directly and solve a problem. The volunteer can help guide which direction to point your camera and what to focus on. A blind or a low-vision user may need help with anything from checking expiration dates, distinguishing colors, reading instructions or navigating new surroundings.

Additionally, Be My Eyes has recently introduced Be My AI, a state of the art visual assistance tool that helps vividly describe images via the use of a phone app. Calls can still be escalated to a human, but this is only required in 10% of use cases.

www.bemyeyes.com

Seeing AI

Seeing AI is a free app developed by Microsoft that helps people with vision impairment convert visual info into audio. Optimized for use with the iPhone’s VoiceOver setting, the app enables you to recognize:

- Short Text – Speaks text as soon as it appears in front of the camera

- Documents - Provides audio guidance to capture a printed page, and recognizes the text, along with its original formatting
- Products - Scans barcodes, using audio beeps to guide you, allowing you to hear the name, and package information when available
- People - Saves people's faces so you can recognize them, and get an estimate of their age, gender, and emotions
- Currency - Recognizes currency
- Color - Identifies color
- Handwriting - Reads handwritten text like in greeting cards
- Photo browsing experience - Describes photos on your phone

<http://SeeingAI.com>

Assistive Technology of Ohio

Assistive Technology of Ohio is a nonprofit that is a part of the College of Engineering at The Ohio State University. They provide education on and access to assistive technology for individuals with disabilities and educate lawmakers on current legislative activity that affects individuals with disabilities. Their services include a computer refurbishment program that provides individuals with disabilities their own computer for a low cost, a lending library for assistive technology devices that can be tried out for free, and several toy libraries that offer adaptive toys for children with disabilities. The center also provides many resources that connect individuals with disabilities to other services in Ohio.

<https://atohio.org>

Apple Pay

Once set up, Apple Pay is easy and works with your Apple devices. You can make contactless, secure purchases in stores, apps, and on the web. You can also send and receive money from friends and family. Apple Pay is safe, helping you avoid touching buttons or exchanging cash. For many people with low vision, it is often simpler and more secure than using a physical card. Apple Pay can be used at any store that accepts tap-to-pay, and at restaurants, vending machines, trains, and taxis.

Computers for the Blind

CFTB is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization located in Richardson, Texas, devoted to providing refurbished computers with assistive technology to persons who are blind or visually impaired, at very low cost. There are no income or age

requirements. There is a processing fee for a desktop or laptop with JAWS or ZoomText installed. Shipping is free in the US. Certain upgrades are available, and details are on this fact sheet:

<https://www.computersfortheblind.org/src/documents/CFTBPriceSheet.pdf>

www.computersfortheblind.org

TAX TIPS

Several aspects of federal tax law apply specifically to individuals considered to be legally blind (vision is 20/200 or less in the best eye). Some of those deductions are described below, but check with the IRS or your local tax preparer for comprehensive information.

Deduction for the Legally Blind

Legally blind federal tax filers can claim unique deductions. This translates into a larger tax break, allowing you to subtract a bigger standard tax deduction from your adjusted gross income. Married filers also benefit from this deduction when their spouse is visually impaired. If you're blind and over age 65, your savings increase.

Medical Deductions for the Blind

If you itemize your deductions, the law allows you to deduct what you spend to prevent, diagnose, or treat illness, as well as any costs related to your blindness or visual impairment. Transportation to and from a doctor's office, prescriptions, insurance premiums and tests are examples of accepted medical deduction expenses as are disability-associated items such as Braille magazines and books (costs that exceed regular print versions), Braille printer, eyeglasses, eye exams, eye surgery, Guide dogs and all related costs, and home modifications. Additionally, you can include in medical expenses the amounts paid for admission and transportation to a medical conference if the medical conference concerns the chronic illness of yourself, your spouse, or your dependent such as the annual LHON Conference.

Impairment-Related Work Expenses

You may require special equipment or accommodations as an employee or self-employed individual. The tax code allows you to subtract expenses for things you must have in order to work. Called impairment-related work expenses, they appear as unreimbursed employee expenses on the Schedule A form used for itemizing.

Minimum requirements for the dollar amount do not apply to blind filers. Impairment-related work expenses you might have, provided you don't count them under medical expenses, include the following: computer attachments for Braille display and typing, electronic visual aids, high-speed Internet connection,

modifications to your home, software that provides synthetic voice description, and reader services.

Tax Preparation Assistance

Blind or low vision people are eligible for tax preparation assistance from their local IRS office, or through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) sponsored by the IRS. Taxpayers can find a nearby IRS office location by calling 1-800-906-9887.

MISCELLANEOUS

Low-Cost Grocery Delivery

Amazon offers an unlimited grocery delivery service in conjunction with Amazon Fresh and Whole Foods. The service costs \$10 a month for Prime members and \$5 a month for those with a registered SNAP/EBT card. The program includes free unlimited grocery deliveries on orders over \$35 from Amazon Fresh, Whole Foods and a select number of specialty retailers including Cardenas Markets, Rite Aid, Pet Food Express and Mission Wine & Spirits.

<https://www.amazon.com>

Pilot Dogs

Pilot dogs is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing guidance dogs to those with low vision. Located in Columbus, Pilot Dogs provides expertly-trained guide dogs, orientation and mobility training, and other services to those who are affected by blindness or low vision. Pilot dogs are provided at no cost to those who are considered legally blind, and it is possible to apply for a Pilot dog at their website. If interested in raising a Pilot Dog, more information is available on the website as well.

<https://www.pilotdogs.org>

Ohio Ophthalmological Society

The Ohio Ophthalmological Society is a non-profit organization and alliance of ophthalmologists dedicated to providing total care and treatment to the eyes and the visual system. The OOS offers many education opportunities and events for both patients and providers seeking information about caring for those with ophthalmological disorders.

https://www.ohioeye.org/aws/OSMA/pt/sp/OOS_home_page

Avoiding Unnecessary Medical Care

The diagnostic odyssey for LHON can be extremely expensive, including many tests to rule out other, more common causes of sudden vision loss. Many individuals have spent thousands of dollars on tests and treatments for diseases

they did not have (Brain Tumor, Optic Neuritis, MS, NMO, etc.). They and their loved ones have lost time from work for these appointments and have spent money traveling to a range of specialists trying to get the correct diagnosis. If LHON vision loss begins when an individual knows they carry a LHON mutation, they can avoid all these costs, and go directly to a LHON specialist for care. This is one of many reasons why people in the LHON community tell their maternal relatives about LHON. While it can be difficult information to share, there can be great value. There are several videos and links in the Genealogy section of the LHON.org website that can help in identifying maternal relatives and preparing to share the information.

www.LHON.org/living-with-LHON

Since there are no approved treatments for LHON, patients and their families can be vulnerable to unproven, experimental, and expensive “treatments”. It’s important to avoid clinics that claim to offer “clinical trials” that require payment by the patient to participate. Legitimate trials will not require patient payment.

General Financial Support

Many in the LHON community have been creative in finding financial support. Local service organizations are often willing to assist those in need, in particular Lions Clubs which have a specific mission to serve those with vision loss. College fraternities and sororities often do fundraising and are willing to provide support, especially the Delta Gamma (DG) sorority whose philanthropy is Service for Sight. GoFundMe.com is a fundraising platform on which individuals can describe their financial hardship or need, then share the link with family and friends to crowd source donations.

Genetic Testing

There are several ways to make LHON genetic testing cost-effective:

Obligate Carrier/On the Maternal Bloodline

It’s first helpful to understand the genetic transmission of a LHON mutation. LHON is maternally inherited, and a woman who carries a LHON mutation usually passes that mutation to all her children. If someone on your maternal bloodline has had genetic testing done and has a confirmed diagnosis of their LHON mutation, you can reasonably assume that you’re an “obligate carrier.” This means that based on genetics, you carry the same LHON mutation. You can

presume you carry that LHON mutation without doing any genetic testing, which is the least expensive option. Also, there are no test results in your medical records that could impact your future insurance choices.

If you're an obligate carrier and would prefer to have your own genetic testing done to confirm your genetic status, you can save money by testing for just the specific mutation in your family. Most LHON genetic testing is a panel that tests for multiple LHON mutations at one time. However, if you have a copy of your maternal relative's LHON genetic test results, you can get testing done for that single, targeted mutation. The cost is far less than the broader panel test.

First in Family

If you're the first in your extended maternal family to become affected by LHON and/or to get genetic testing done, there are ways to limit the cost, including the following:

- Athena Diagnostics offers the Athena Alliance Program. This is a financial assistance program for those with low income. www.AthenaDiagnostics.com
- GeneDx offers a Financial Assistance Program. <https://www.genedx.com/tests/billing>
- Probably Genetic offers free at home testing through the United Mitochondrial Disease Foundation. <https://www.probablygenetic.com>

This document is intended as a general guide only. It was developed by LHON volunteers and is subject to change. It does not purport to provide legal, financial or tax guidance. You should check with each listed provider and your own advisors for your specific situation.