

# Navigating Employment



## First steps

### Contact your state agency that provides assistance

Contact your state's agency that provides assistance to the blind and visually impaired. Open a case with this agency to receive guidance and training needed to learn skills for independent living and career or occupational transitions.

### Get paperwork from your doctor

Have your doctor provide the paperwork declaring you legally blind. The designation of legally blind occurs once your vision is 20/200 or worse in both eyes. Make sure the paperwork uses the phrase "legally blind."

### Learn about assistive technology

Learn what [assistive technologies](#) are available, such as [CCTVs](#), digital magnifiers for computers, screen readers, etc. If you have a smartphone, learn the accessibility and assistive technology available on that device. Your state agency may provide devices and/or training. There are many videos online that showcase these devices and how to use them.

### Assess your disability insurance options

Assess your disability insurance options, including private disability insurance, short and long-term disability, and SSDI.

### Learn about transportation and mobility options

Learn the options you have for transportation. Discounted or free of charge transit passes may be available from your local government, which may also offer paratransit services. Consider ride-sharing services, such as Uber and Lyft. Learn to navigate as a passenger or pedestrian.

### Establish a support network

Identify and utilize a support network. Family, friends, professional counselors, therapists, and psychologists can all play a role. LHON can be emotionally challenging, and having someone personal and private to talk to can help. Your state agency or local blind support organization may be able to refer you to a counselor specialized in working with people with vision loss. Finding a mentor you can relate to can be helpful in moving forward.

### If you are currently employed...

Many people's initial response to LHON vision loss is to conclude that they can no longer do their current job, so they quit. Before taking this action, consider that it may be better to find a way to continue with an employer who knows and will support you as you work through the transition, than to leave and seek employment with a different employer. Don't let this decision happen before you've pursued all internal options.

## Actions to take

- Inform your manager or HR that you have a disability to ensure that the situation is not perceived as a performance issue.
- State that you are requesting accommodations.
- Request a workplace assessment to determine your needs and potential solutions.
- Work with your employer and/or state agency to identify and obtain the accommodations required to perform your job.

## Other things to consider

- Every person's situation will be different, and adapting will take time.
- What types of training do you need?
- Can or should you take some time off? If taking time off, what are the impacts? Explore the [Family and Medical Leave Act \(FMLA\)](#).
- Understand your rights under the ADA and anti-discrimination laws. The [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) of 1990 guarantees reasonable accommodations.

Navigating and obtaining employment has been discussed at past LHON Conferences, and these (YouTube) presentations share some of the most recent information and experiences.

- [Navigating Employment Panel](#)
- [Living with LHON from the Perspective of Employment](#)
- [Maintaining Employment with LHON](#)
- [Obtaining Employment with LHON](#)

## If you are seeking employment

### Actions to take

- Think about your career aspirations.
- Assess if and how LHON can affect these career aspirations. Use this information to guide your accommodation needs. Articulate why LHON will not be a barrier to your success.
- Stay productive and constructive.
- Seek training that supports your career goals. Some organizations offer training and educational services free of charge.

### Other things to consider

- Explore resources targeted for the blind/visually impaired.
- Consider the company culture in terms of inclusiveness and diversity.
- Are there job-specific training programs you can attend?
- When or how to disclose your vision impairment during the hiring process?

### For more information

To assist you in navigating your employment journey, please visit the following:

- [LHON.org](#) website
- [LHON Global Facebook Group](#)
- Facebook Group: [Navigating Employment/Careers with LHON](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network](#): Info and free consultations about workplace accommodations or the ADA.

## **Organizations of and for those who are blind or vision impaired**

- [National Federation of the Blind](#)
- [American Council of the Blind](#)
- [American Foundation for the Blind—Career Connect](#)

## **Learn about assistive technology on your devices**

- [Apple Accessibility](#) or call 877-204-3930
- [Microsoft Accessibility](#) or call 800-936-5900
- [Google Accessibility](#) (Android)

## **Other services or organizations for the visually impaired**

- [Hadley free instructional videos](#) on Assistive Technology.
- [Career Advantage for V.I.P.'s employment primer for visually impaired](#) people through Mississippi State University.
- [National Library Services](#) for the blind and print disabled.
- [State-by-State list of organizations for the blind](#)