



# Better Service for Those Who Need It Most

ACCESS NYC greatly simplifies health and human services for New Yorkers.



With more than 8 million residents, New York City has an extremely large job to do in providing health and human services (HHS) benefits. Along with the difficulties of serving an immensely diverse population, the city has struggled with the internal roadblocks inherent in government.

The desire to help people has always been there, but the barriers between the city's numerous HHS agencies often prevented citizens from receiving as much aid as they were qualified for. Difficulties in sharing information, lack of coordination among independent HHS programs and perceived privacy issues made it tough for New York City to achieve the outcomes social services recipients need.

Much of that has changed with the creation of ACCESS NYC, the city's central HHS Web portal for citizen-driven self-service. Using ACCESS NYC, city residents can determine potential eligibility for 35 city, state and federal human service benefit programs as well as print



Business Application Suite™, ACCESS NYC uses a "no wrong door" approach that screens applicants for HHS programs for which they may qualify, regardless of why they arrived at the site. Therefore, citizens don't need to know about a specific program in order to apply for it.

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application forms, search for office locations, and create an account to access their information at a later time. ACCESS NYC is also designed to reach New York's diverse population by providing information in seven languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Arabic and Haitian Creole.

From a simple home page, users can get information on child care, food stamps, school meals, Head Start, Medicaid, senior services, housing assistance and other programs. Using the Cúram

ACCESS NYC empowers citizens like never before, allowing them to play an active role in their own health and human services benefits. Citizens get the help they need more quickly — and they interact with HHS programs at their own convenience through the always-available Web interface.

#### Improving Lives

The people who need services most are often those who have the hardest time getting to government offices to fill

out applications. ACCESS NYC drastically changes that process by enabling citizens to apply for and manage social services benefits electronically.

"We can prevent the client from having to run around when they're already in a bad situation," said Kamal Bherwani, CIO for Health and Human Services and executive director of HHS-Connect in New York's Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services.

Bherwani, who oversees technology strategy and architecture for all New York City HHS agencies, said ACCESS NYC lets citizens enter demographic and financial data and quickly determine which programs they can take advantage of.

"In many cases, clients don't know which programs even exist and the details of them — and they shouldn't have to," said Bherwani. "Now they can get online, and the system will say, 'These are the seven programs you might be eligible for.' It's a very client-centric program."

ACCESS NYC is designed to be user-friendly, even for citizens with low computer literacy. The layout is easy to navigate, and each step is clearly labeled and logically ordered. The site even helps users fill out some of the applications.

#### Positive Outcome

Unlike many online HHS offerings, ACCESS NYC was built to provide citizen-driven self-service, allowing benefits recipients to interact electronically with city agencies in meaningful ways. Perhaps a user's marital status or household composition has changed since last updating the system; that will change their status for some benefits. With ACCESS NYC, users can update their own records. In the future, clients will be able to check on the status of their applications online.

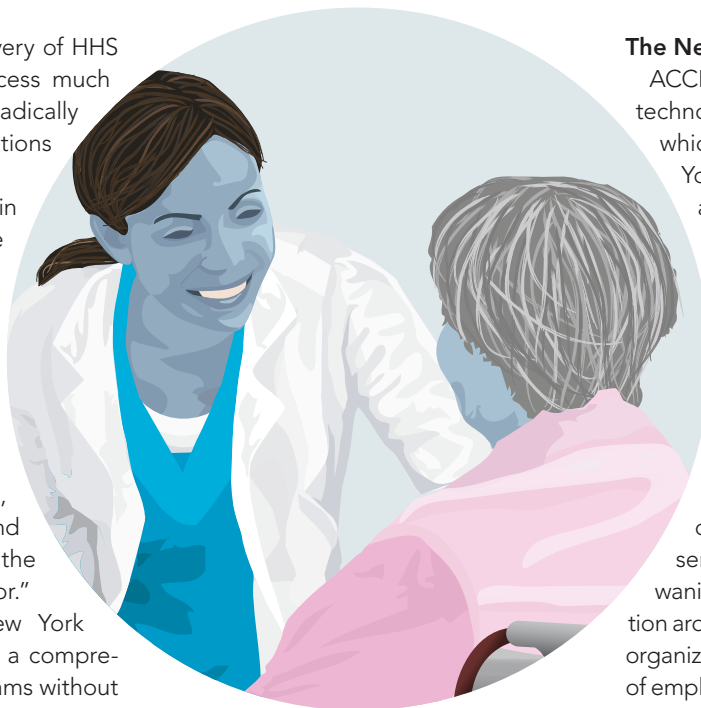
The initial approach for ACCESS NYC was to use an incremental modernization and transformation (IMT) strategy to

completely transform the delivery of HHS programs — making the process much more client-centric — without radically altering the underlying operations and technologies.

“We took an outside-in approach completely, because we wanted to start doing things that make the client’s life better without necessarily impacting or changing the business processes within the city,” Bherwani noted. “Once we did that, that would create demand for the next thing, which is online applications and two-way communications — all the things that technology allows for.”

ACCESS NYC enabled New York City to begin offering citizens a comprehensive portal into HHS programs without wholesale changes to existing systems in multiple agencies. The approach was to maximize existing technologies by tying them together in a new way.

“It works well because it gets your foot in the door without having to deal with all the hard stuff in government, which was internal change,” Bherwani noted. “The sweet spot was doing the external work that makes the client’s life easier.”



### The Next Steps

ACCESS NYC is now a key part of a larger technology initiative called HHS-Connect, which represents the next step in New York City’s effort to transform health and human services. HHS-Connect focuses on integrating programs offered by numerous city HHS agencies, eliminating internal barriers and enabling agencies to share information about clients and collaborate in ways that weren’t possible before.

“HHS-Connect is about breaking silos within HHS in order to deliver more effective and efficient services to New Yorkers,” said Bherwani. “We have this extreme fragmentation around nine health and human services organizations that have tens of thousands of employees and a \$15 billion to \$20 billion operational budget. There’s a maximum

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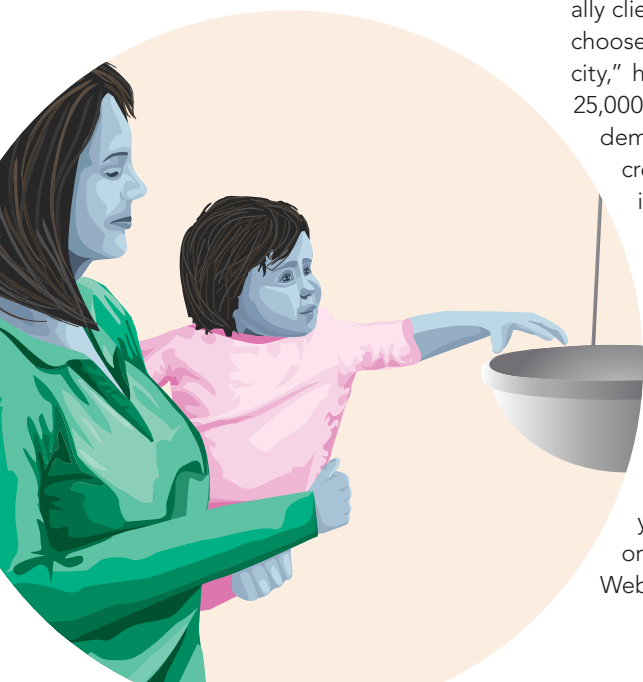
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Bherwani sees a natural progression to more activity in the future. “Eventually clients will have a variety of options to choose from in their interactions with the city,” he said. “Right now we have about 25,000 hits per month, and that creates demand for online applications. That creates demand for multichannel integration.”

Multichannel integration means the ability for clients to interact with government in their preferred manner. No matter what “door” they enter through, they can get the service they need. “Right now we’re saying ‘no wrong door,’ meaning you walk into an office for food stamps, or you can call 311 and get information, or you can mail, or you can use the Web,” Bherwani said.

amount of complexity in the way the systems have grown. All of the agencies’ standards are around technology or data. So trying to connect the data together has been a huge technological challenge. These changes are necessary to achieve better client outcomes and improve the efficiency of city HHS programs.

“We realized that in order to make significant changes in the way we deliver services to New Yorkers, we had to change some internal government as well,” Bherwani said. “When we thought about changing the internal business processes of government, it needed to be a larger umbrella that dealt with the third-party providers — the not-for-profits we deal with in terms of moving data back and forth, moving business processes back and forth — to deal with the way workers within an agency handle case management. We’re trying to



deal with the client, the worker, the agency and the third-party provider."

### Bright Future

ACCESS NYC went live in fall 2006 and has proven popular with New Yorkers. The innovative Web portal also has drawn wide interest from government officials both domestic and abroad.

"Several places have contacted us. We built the largest and most in-depth pre-screening eligibility tool on the planet," Bherwani said. "There's a lot of interest because we're regarded as one of the few that are really out there on the leading edge with what we've already done, and because of our vision for the future, which integrates data that has never been integrated before."

One project involves deploying new case-management systems. "That also happens to be Cúram Software," said Bherwani. "We're linking case-management systems to something called a Com-



mon Client Index. That links data together between different organizations for the benefit of clients, workers and — one day — providers. In the future, clients will log in to ACCESS NYC and be able to get a

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complete picture of the services and benefits they receive from the city."

Sharing data among agencies also will improve the quality of interactions between those agencies and the public. Caseworkers can be more effective when they have more complete client information, and that leads to better outcomes for recipients of social services.

"It's really transforming the culture of how we interact with clients," Bherwani said. "And once we link the data together, we'll be able to analyze the data to improve service delivery and target resources where the need is greatest."

HHS officials expect use of ACCESS NYC to continue growing as the portal's availability becomes more widely known. The city publicizes the portal in public libraries, subway platforms and trains, community centers and schools. Community-based organizations have also played an important role in spreading the word about ACCESS NYC. Bherwani is confident that even more citizens will benefit from future enhancements of ACCESS NYC and will be able to use those features to improve their lives.

To learn how Cúram Software can help your agency transform your service delivery and achieve positive outcomes, contact a Cúram Software Representative at **1-866-41-CÚRAM** or [info@curamsoftware.com](mailto:info@curamsoftware.com)

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