
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

COMPASS: Pennsylvania Health & Human Service Portal

2009 NASCIO Recognition Awards
Cross Boundary Collaboration & Partnership

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Nominator

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Summary

Pennsylvania's Public Welfare, Aging, Insurance, and Education Departments worked together to create and continue in partnership to maintain a single Web-based portal for commonwealth citizens to learn about and apply for human services.

Dubbed COMPASS (**COM**mmonwealth of **P**ennsylvania's **A**ccess to **S**ocial **S**ervices), the portal brings together the largest number of health and human service programs anywhere in the nation, including cash, food stamps, Medicaid, home and community services, childcare, fuel assistance, school meals and more.

COMPASS reduces barriers and improves participation in social programs. It allows citizens and providers to screen, apply, renew, check benefits or report changes over the Internet. Citizens and community partners enter applications and screen for social services directly in COMPASS, reducing administrative tasks and common errors.

COMPASS' screening features show citizens the services for which they are likely to be eligible, including myriad local programs which many citizens don't even know exist. Citizens can select and apply for programs using COMPASS' integrated application—eliminating the need to enter redundant demographic and household data on multiple forms. Additionally, the COMPASS application is dynamic; it changes in response to the needs of each applicant. If a person is applying only for health coverage, for example, (s)he will never see irrelevant questions related to food stamps or cash assistance. And COMPASS interfaces with case management systems to provide an integrated delivery system, which also expedites the application process.

Since its launch in 2001, Pennsylvania's COMPASS had successfully processed about 20% of applications received by the participating agencies. On average, approximately 20,000 screening questionnaires are completed each month, helping struggling families understand the breadth of assistance available to them.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania continues to enhance the system's functionality. By responding to changing demands of citizens, community partners, and evolving business models, COMPASS is the benchmark for providing high-quality services and options to families who need help the most.

Description of project, including length of time in operation

For governments, successful delivery of social services is as dependent on accessibility as on the quality of service offerings. When citizens do not to access social service applications due to lack of transportation, busy work schedules, or embarrassment, an unfortunate--and unnecessary--disconnect occurs and families are put at risk. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has taken significant steps to overcome this disconnect with collaboration and technology: COMPASS, which stands for **COM**monwealth of **P**ennsylvania **A**pplication for **S**ocial **S**ervices.

In 2000, Pennsylvania began the COMPASS initiative to extend the accessibility social service applications to public users and business partners. The first release of COMPASS was in October of 2001 and allowed citizens to apply for healthcare for children and pregnant women. As the project progressed, executives at the Department of Public Welfare realized that citizens would be well served by including the Insurance Department's State Children's Health Insurance Program application as well.

Because the Public Welfare and Insurance Departments worked together, a citizen interested in receiving healthcare coverage could simply answer COMPASS' application questions and the system would automatically route the application to the appropriate department based on the information submitted. Moreover, the departments would exchange applications in cases where, if upon review, the applicant may be more likely eligible for the other department's program.

A few short weeks after the first release of COMPASS, the Spanish version was made available online—a significant step for increasing social service accessibility. In every subsequent release, all COMPASS features have been presented in both English and Spanish.

Additional functionality was added to screen for a variety of programs as well as apply for Medicaid (including medical assistance to workers with disabilities), adultBasic, Family Works, food stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and general assistance. This upgrade also provides information about managed care organizations as well as maps and directions county assistance offices.

The most recent iteration of COMPASS allows the Departments of Public Welfare and Insurance to exchange case information, alleviating the burden of manually collecting and sharing mounds of paperwork. Referrals between the agencies have increased by approximately 62%.

COMPASS also allows school districts to collect online applications for the national school breakfast and lunch program and electronically verify a child's enrollment in Food Stamps or TANF, reducing the burdens on families and school districts. School districts can also lookup which of their students are eligible for direct certification, which automatically enrolls children in free or reduced school lunches.

COMPASS incorporates Microsoft web/application server technologies and a data tier consisting of the Oracle 10g database. The Microsoft-centric application architecture model used in COMPASS orchestrates a presentation tier, business tier, and data tier, which provides flexibility for system performance, operating system independence, security, and scalability. Routing of information collected through COMPASS to participating back-end case management systems relies on WebMethods' SOA-compliant middleware technologies.

Significance to the improvement of the operation of government

COMPASS allows citizens to screen and apply for myriad social services, administered by different state departments, from any place with Internet access. In no small measure, COMPASS has made Pennsylvania state government more citizen-friendly. It eliminates the need for citizens and business partners to understand the bureaucracy behind the administration of social service programs by automatically routing information to the appropriate program for processing.

An online application also decreases common processing errors and the cost associated with them. COMPASS incorporates built-in validations, drop down menus, and mandatory fields that do not permit citizens to proceed until information is captured, thus reducing the number of incomplete forms submitted. And there's no messy handwriting to decipher! The electronic application also reduces paperwork involved in application processing. These features allow state employees to spend less time dealing with faulty applications and more time serving the public.

COMPASS bolsters the government's aim to ensure citizens' security, privacy, and confidentiality. Information collected through COMPASS is protected through 128-bit encryption and unique user identifications/passwords. Encryption protects the information during its electronic transmission and the user identification/password ensures its confidentiality once the application is received.

Benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agency, or state

Providing a common point of entry to human service programs, COMPASS' enables a "no wrong door" approach to screening and application. There is a help option on every page which provides expanded information on the questions specific to that page, as well as a help desk phone number and a link to e-mail questions.

User-friendly modules in COMPASS guide citizens through a completely automated process of collecting data and determining potential eligibility. Because of its compliance with ADA web accessibility guidelines, COMPASS is easier for people with disabilities to use than paper application forms. COMPASS also offers screening and application processes in Spanish.

Citizens who already participate in human service programs--food stamps, Medicaid, TANF and SelectPlan, for example--can use their MyCOMPASS accounts, to view

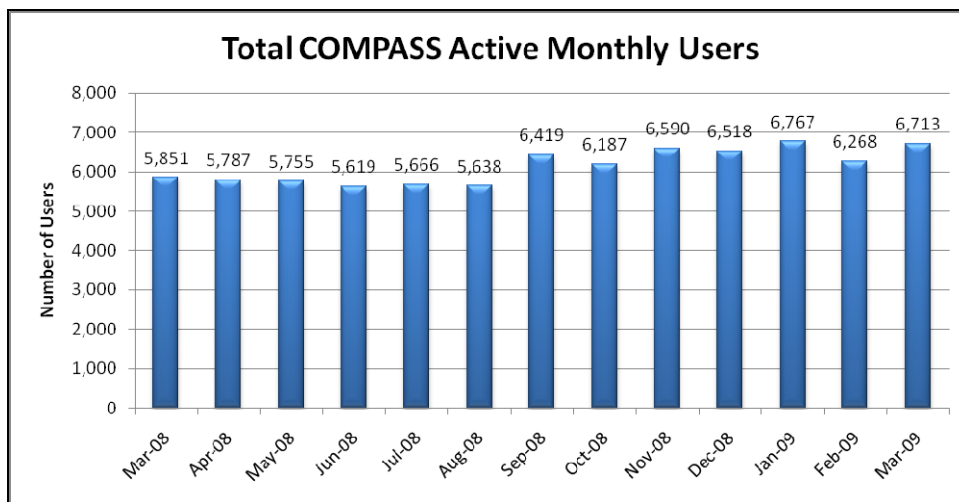
details of their current enrollment status and benefits. They can also initiate changes at any convenient time of day or night without having to pick up the phone.

COMPASS connects citizens to government services and businesses and non-profit organizations as well. A community partner dashboard offers management tools to community partners who regularly submit applications on behalf of citizens they serve. Such organizations include medical providers, food banks, community advocates, Family Works organizations, family planning councils, etc. Community partners need Department of Public Welfare-issued user IDs/passwords to use the dashboard to access submitted and/or suspended applications they have personally entered as well as applications entered by colleagues in their organization. The dashboard features “quick reports” which display details of applications processed for each program and county.

COMPASS continues to expand as more programs and new features are added. It has successfully integrated the high technology capabilities of private industry with the mission of social service agencies and distinguishes Pennsylvania as a leader among states in its commitment to using technology to expand citizen services.

Return on investment, short-term/long-term payback (include summary calculations). Projects must exhibit measurable operational benefit

Because COMPASS’s primary objective is to increase accessibility to social services for the general public, it is difficult to put a dollar value on the convenience and increased quality of life experienced by COMPASS users. It is expected that COMPASS may one day automate the application process throughout the state. This will have many cost-saving implications, particularly in the area of training and education. In the next few years, normal turnover of clerical workers will bring in a group of workers who are already web-savvy. For them, little to no training will be necessary on a completely web-based system, as opposed to the training currently necessary on the archaic mainframe system.



On average, over 6,000 registered users visit their MyCOMPASS account, significantly reducing the calls to customer service centers and county office staff.

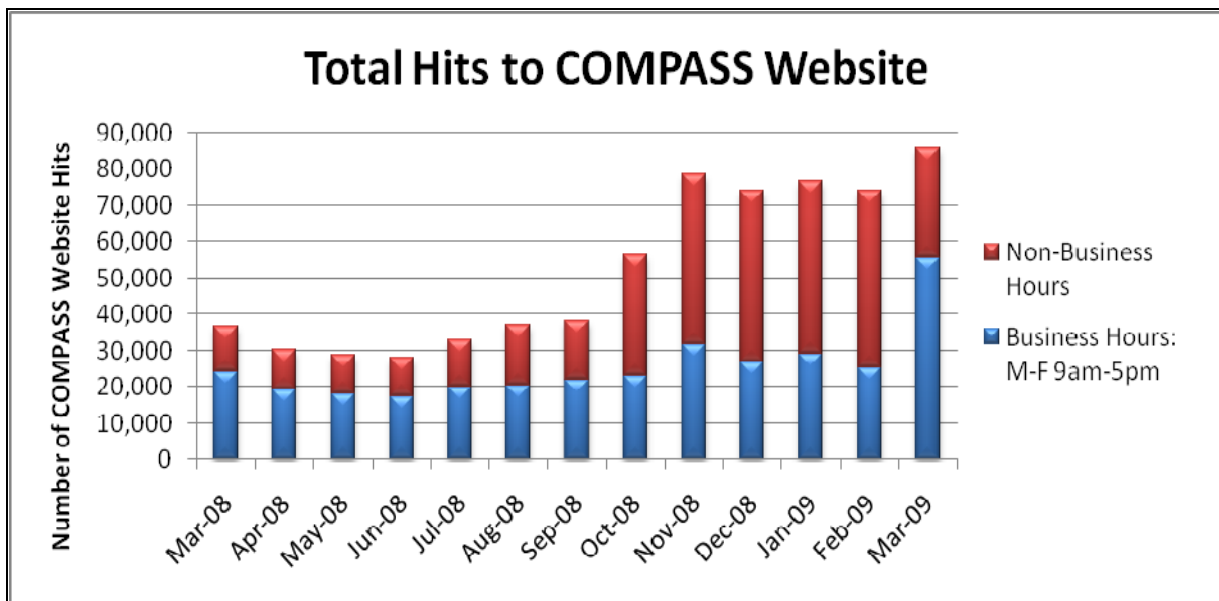
A measurable indicator that COMPASS has increased efficiency and saved money for the Commonwealth is the fact that COMPASS applications are less likely to be entered into the system and later rejected than paper applications.

County assistance offices receive many applications that have missing information. These applications are still entered into the system but are later “rejected” if the applicant fails to provide the missing information within an allotted time period. This wastes county intake workers time and the commonwealth’s money. Because COMPASS requires users to submit complete applications, there are few entered then rejected.

Information collected through COMPASS is automatically populated into the case management system, removing the need to re-enter data from a form. COMPASS saves time and money by reducing errors, since clerical workers do not have to retype information.

Citizens who use COMPASS save time by screening themselves for services and determining their likelihood eligibility. They also save time in not having to travel many times to a county assistance office to apply for services.

Community partners save time with COMPASS because they do not have to call daily to check the status of their clients’ applications, nor do they have to keep track of multiple paper copies.



COMPASS represents a critical and valuable resource to citizens and community partners looking for assistance at a time in their life when they need it the most.