Automating Medicaid Eligibility Reviews with RPA Technology

Emerging & Innovative Technologies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Social & Health Services (DSHS) implemented Robotic Process Automation (RPA) to automate the redetermination of medical program eligibility, a crucial step to manage the increased workload following the end of the Public Health Emergency (PHE) and to comply with federal requirements. During the pandemic, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) mandated continuous Medicaid enrollment, linked to enhanced federal funds. As the pandemic wound down, states faced stricter requirements to ensure continued coverage without procedural lapses. DSHS, anticipating the workload impact, especially for non-MAGI Medicaid, initiated the PHE Unwind Project to automate parts of this process using RPA. The project initially targeted simpler Medicaid renewal processes, allowing skilled staff to focus on more complex cases. By integrating RPA bots, DSHS automated the review and renewal of eligible cases, reducing the workload on caseworkers and improving client experience.

Partnering with Washington Technology Services (WaTech) and leveraging the RPA service provider UiPath, with Roboyo as the service integrator, DSHS became one of the first to pilot this innovative solution. The RPA bots efficiently handled between 6,000 and 9,000 cases per month, completing an average of 35% of their assigned cases over nine months. This automation not only ensured compliance with CMS requirements but also mitigated potential financial penalties, safeguarding over $135 million in federal funding.

Following the success of the PHE Unwind Project, DSHS launched additional RPA initiatives. One project automated manual processes within the Children's Health and Education Tracking (CHET) system, while another combined RPA with Intelligent Optical Character Recognition to pre-screen documents, further reducing the burden on skilled caseworkers. These efforts collectively enhanced service delivery, ensuring uninterrupted support for the most vulnerable individuals in Washington state.

IDEA

The COVID pandemic adjusted a lot of normal processes for Washingtonians receiving services through the Department of Social & Health Services (DSHS). There were 86,296 total unique head of household who received waivers and extensions for financial eligibility for healthcare during the pandemic. This ensured that they continued to remain eligible for services. Once the pandemic ended, DSHS had to review the eligibility of all 86,296 individuals. DSHS was required to renew eligibility based on information already available to DSHS resulting in new work. An automated process was needed to meet the required timelines.

What is Robotic Process Automation (RPA)?

RPS is a form of business process automation based on software robotics utilizing the user interface of a system to simulate user actions.

One significant value of RPA technology is to enable process automation WITHOUT requiring costly and time-consuming change to program code within large and complex legacy systems.

During the pandemic, as part of the public health emergency, states were required to maintain continuous enrollment of nearly all Medicaid

enrollees. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) allowed this continuous enrollment and linked it to enhanced federal funds. As the pandemic wound down, states had 12 months to return to normal operations, but with stricter federal requirements to ensure people didn't lose coverage due to procedural issues like loss of contact.

Before these new rules, DSHS had already been concerned about the workload this would create for staff in different divisions. The paperwork and regulation changes significantly impacted those on non-MAGI Medicaid (classic Medicaid), who didn't benefit from automated renewals like those under MAGI methodologies. CMS required states to perform ex-parte reviews before terminating any client's coverage. This manual process was very labor-intensive, requiring staff to review each case individually. Given the volume of cases and the hours needed, DSHS risked falling behind on eligibility reviews. Failure to comply could have resulted in a loss of over $135 million in federal funding for the second quarter of 2023.

The PHE Unwind Project was initiated to meet CMS requirements, avoid losing federal funding, and help staff manage the workload of ex-parte determinations. The project focused on creating RPA bots to automate some of these medical program renewals. These bots searched IT systems for information that met specific criteria and handled cases managed by different administrations within DSHS.

Initially, the project targeted simpler Classic Medicaid renewal processes, leaving complex cases to skilled staff. The RPA bots determined if a case could be renewed or needed more information, acting only when the outcome was positive for the client. This automation helped reduce the workload on DSHS caseworkers and improved the client experience by addressing staff shortages.

This project addresses several state and national mandates including:

- **NASCIO State CIO Top Ten Priorities** – Data & Information Management
- **Washington State Enterprise IT Strategic Plan:**
    - **Goal #1: Create a Government Experience that Leaves No Community Behind** – Through a connected government that emphasizes service delivery and the experience of those we serve, we can achieve equitable outcomes across our communities.
    - **Goal #2** – Better Data, Better Decisions, Better Government, Better Washington – Use data and insights to improve the experience of those we serve, prioritize service improvements, drive strategic decisions, and improve transparencey.
    - **Goal #3: Innovative Technology Solutions Create a Better Washington** – Prioritize solutions emphasizing access, technology, and innovation to address systemic societal challenges and align our decision-making for those we serve.

IMPLEMENTATION

RPA offered ability to quickly automate without taxing legacy system resources and leverage automated integration with the new Asset Verification System. This combination allowed DSHS to design, develop and implement within a 3-month window. And for the first time automate eligibility determination for exparte renewal.

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DSHS partnered with Washington Technology Services (WaTech) to utilize their new RPA service provider, UiPath, and the service integrator, Roboyo, making DSHS one of the first pilots of this service.

The project benefited from a wide range of expertise from WaTech with multiple groups prioritizing and collaborating daily, including Security, Network Services, Computing Services, Agency Technology Services, Contracts & Procurement, and Finance. WaTech delivered critical components such as Terms of Service, Statement of Work, Security Design Review, invoicing, inter-agency chargeback, infrastructure setup, and licensing. The infrastructure setup and security design review were jointly conducted by DSHS and WaTech technical teams, working closely together. When technical roadblocks arose, various teams collaborated to find solutions promptly, demonstrating strong communication and focus throughout the project. To meet tight deadlines for automating the unwind process, both agencies trusted each other to resolve funding models as the work progressed. Finally, WaTech communications and billing were integrated to finalize the service offering, making it available statewide.

Subject matter experts from DSHS, the Health Care Authority, WATECH, and Roboyo met twice per week for just under four weeks to document and finalize rules, processes and outcomes.

- Business process
- Program policy
- Technical environment and systems
- Quality assurance
- Project Management
- Leadership

An aggressive timeline was developed and approximately eight weeks later, the RPA was put into practice.

Deliverables/Milestones	Target Date
Project Charter	5/15/2023
DSHS / Roboyo Deep Dive Work Sessions	4/07/2023
Pilot / UAT	5/31/2023
Development Complete	6/15/2023
Processes for Future Engagement w / WaTech & Roboyo	6/30/2023
Parking Lot List	6/30/2023

Lessons Learned	7/15/2023
Project Closeout	7/31/2023

Scope Summary

Project Management

- Charter
- Communications Matrix
- Project Schedule

RPA bots to automate a small subset of ex-parte medical program renewals for CSD, DDA, and HCS

- Deep Dive Work Sessions
- Development
- Pilot / UAT
- Hypercare

Processes in place to work with WaTech / Roboyo to engage in future RPA work

- Security Design Review
- Inter-Agency Agreement
- Determine Funding for Ongoing Work and Maintenance

Parking lot of future DSHS RPA bots work

- Project Closeout
- Lessons Learned
- Closure Document

Budget

Staff Resources	$ 83,978
Procurements (Equipment, Software, Services)	$ 250,000
(3) additional bots	$ 29,400
Total budget	**$363,378.00**

This effort has enabled the service integrator to program a robotic process that investigates cases through the user interface of DSHS systems, evaluate the case circumstances to determine if the robotic process can execute a case renewal resulting in continued or improved program coverage for the client and if so, take appropriate action to renew medical coverage for the client.

The RPA bots work through the process to determine if a case can be renewed or if additional information is needed. By leveraging bot technology, DSHS was able to increase efficiency in the renewal process by cutting out repetitive tasks, yielding greater efficiency in getting clients renewed on services. This allowed DSHS to continue providing services to the most vulnerable individuals in Washington state without interruption, improving service delivery in the process. On average, of all cases the RPAs worked through, 22% of them were completed, mitigating the need for a case worker to deal with them.

IMPACT

Initially, it was estimated that RPAs could automatically renew approximately 25% of the assigned cases, saving skilled caseworkers time on over 2,000 cases. The PHE Unwind RPAs handle between 6,000 and 9,000 cases per month, with about two weeks to complete their workload before transferring remaining cases to skilled workers. Initially, the three RPAs could not complete their caseload in the allotted time, but adding two more RPAs resolved this issue. Over the past nine months, RPAs have renewed an average of 35% of their assigned cases.

The implementation of this technology has reduced the workload for skilled staff by 35%, enabling them to focus more on providing human services to the most vulnerable individuals instead of spending time on tasks that have been automated. This proves the point that automation doesn’t take jobs, it frees up workers from burdensome tasks.

Following the PHE Unwind project, DSHS implemented three additional RPA initiatives. One addressed a manual process in the Children’s Health and Education Tracking (CHET) system by automating the search and consolidation of information from several systems, freeing skilled staff from these tasks. The other combines Robotic Process Automation with Intelligent Optical Character Recognition to pre-screen documents, reducing the workload on skilled caseworkers.