



Title: YourTexasBenefits.com Redesign

Category: Digital Government – Government to Citizen

State: Texas

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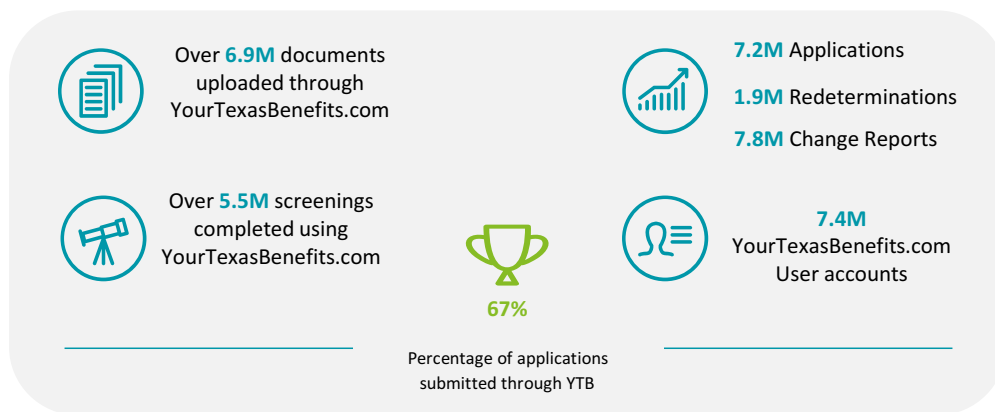


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Government agencies across the country are facing challenges related to reduced budgets and increasing caseloads. Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) is a state agency that oversees the administration of social services programs such as food benefits, cash assistance, and medical coverage for the most vulnerable Texan population. The agency employs over 8,000 individuals working across the state to determine eligibility and make sure that citizens are served in the most efficient manner. **With continuing growth in population and benefit caseloads applications received continue to rise, without a corresponding increase in eligibility determination staffing levels.**

In response to these trends, HHSC developed a strong self-service strategy with the primary goal of increasing self-sufficiency among citizens and improving workload efficiency through automation. HHSC initially developed a self-service application, YourTexasBenefits.com (YTB), to allow Texans to submit their applications online. Over the past five years, YTB was enhanced with additional capabilities to allow citizens to report changes, renew their benefits, and upload documents. As caseloads continued to rise and access methods of the user base continued to evolve, there was an opportunity to further improve eligibility processing efficiency and increase adoption of the citizen portal. The agency embarked on a journey to further improve access and increase self-service adoption through usability enhancements to YourTexasBenefits.

Figure 1: YourTexasBenefits.com by the numbers

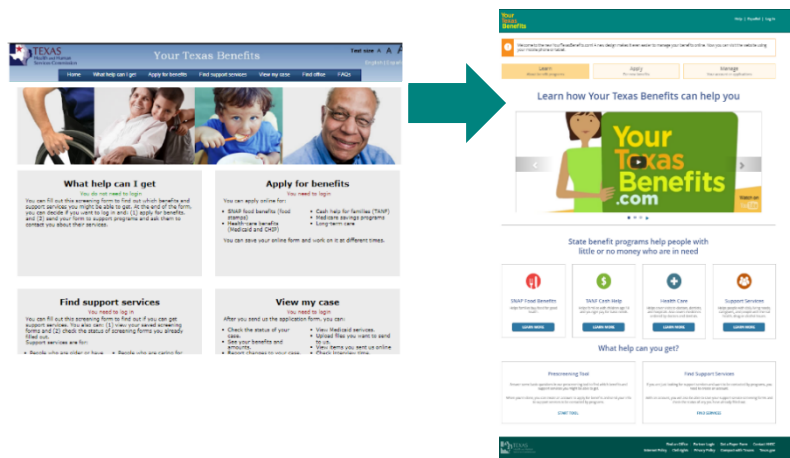


Texas' self-service portal helps over 6 million citizens apply for, report changes to, and renew their benefits. As a number of users were starting to access the application through mobile devices and tablets, the existing platform had a technical limitation that prevented access on such devices. Additionally, the department wanted to make the application compliant with WCAG AA accessibility standards, while improving usability and security of the application.

YourTexasBenefits.com is built on an innovative Lightweight Enterprise Application Platform (LEAP), based on the latest HTML5, CSS3, JavaScript, and REST API frameworks.

HHSC worked with their partner, Deloitte, to embark on this transformation journey with an aggressive timeline. Around the same time, the IT and business team was also transforming its software development approach from Waterfall to Agile. Leveraging the best practices of Agile, business and IT stakeholders collaborated and worked together to review usability, develop new style guides and pattern library to streamline end user experience. The close collaboration resulted in shorter feedback loops, increased transparency, and a quality product that was developed and deployed in a little over six months.

The redesigned YourTexasBenefits.com went live in September 2016. With the help of user experience specialists, HHSC developed a new style guide that updated everything on the existing application including; typography, use of imagery, header and footer, presentation of tables and form elements, and page layouts with the goal of promoting self-sufficiency



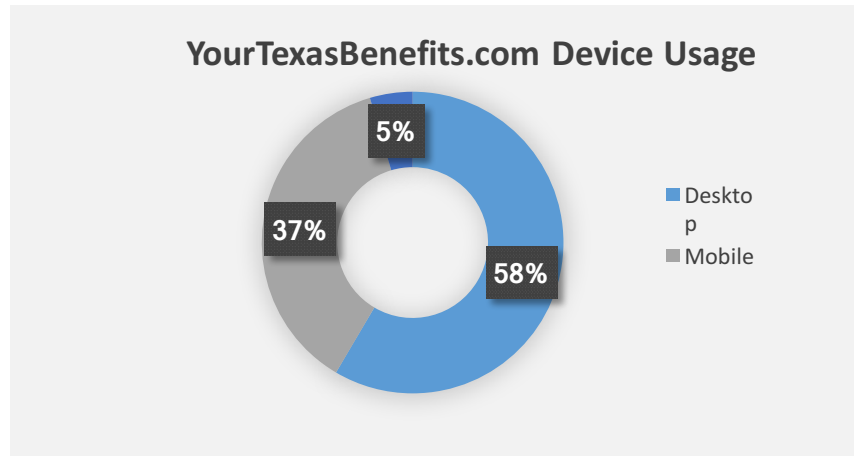
By the end of the project, HHSC achieved the following:

- Adopted a persona-driven design approach and implemented industry-leading best practices to create **intuitive workflows** that **streamline user experience**
- Achieved responsive **multi-device, multi-platform support** for YTB, enabling users to use the application through tablets and smartphones
- Developed a **WCAG AA compliant** portal exceeding the state’s accessibility standards and becoming **one of the first State agency sites compliant with this standard!**
- Developed a modern application platform that leverages light-weight application components developed on HTML5, CSS3, JavaScript and Rest API frameworks resulting in **better maintainability** and **lowering total cost of ownership**
- Proved that **Agile at scale** works
- Established an enterprise standard that would serve as a **model for future HHSC applications**

CONCEPT

Prior to HHSC's implementation of the first online application, the most common way to apply for benefits involved a citizen travelling to the nearest benefits office (sometimes dozens of miles away) and working with a caseworker to fill out the relevant application forms. If they forgot to bring their paystubs or other verification documents, a determination of their eligibility would be delayed until they provided the additional information. HHSC recognized the need for a technology solution that could accommodate the growing population and the rise of digital transformation to improve efficiency and accessibility to apply for benefits. As part of this vision, HHSC implemented the self-service portal, YourTexasBenefits.com, and added multiple functions to enable users to apply for benefits, renew and

submit case changes online. HHSC's goal is continuous improvement and doing more with less. Seeing the recent shift in demographics and the rise of and adoption of digital technology, HHSC embarked on a redesign initiative. According to the 2014 Nielsen Digital Consumer report, the number of individuals with access to a PC or smartphone with internet has increased by more than 50% since 2009. **To meet the growing digital demand, YTB had to expand to allow access to iOS, Safari, and Android users.** There were also some challenges with meeting the accessibility standards on the legacy platform.



As part of the redesign effort, **the team reviewed all 200 pages of the website and identified additional ways to improve usability for end users of the application.** For each page, the workflow, questions, and layout was evaluated to create the optimal user experience for a citizen while improving the quality of data gathered.

Led by the IT applications team and an internal business partner, the department was in the midst of a large-scale transition of the software development methodology from Waterfall to Agile. This redesign effort also acted as an additional pilot and catalyst for exploring how to scale Agile across multiple teams, applications, and technologies. **The team operated seven sprint teams in parallel for a total of 37 sprints to successfully implement project in 10 months from concept to launch.**

The first 10 weeks were spent in customer experience and usability review discussions to streamline usability. A style guide and pattern library was developed as part of the initial phase. Given that the architecture and the User Interface was completely overhauled, the next 10 weeks were spent in vetting the architecture and developing a pilot. Finally, development, implementation and training for community partners were completed in 5 months after. It was an example of unique collaboration across a number of teams including business stakeholders, community partners, training groups, technology teams and vendor partners to deliver this initiative. This project was broken into 260+ user stories to overhaul over 200 pages while simultaneously implementing new and complex functional changes. The Agile development approach also allowed HHSC to gain and maintain stakeholder buy-in throughout the development process, from initiation to go-live through the iterative approach and frequent product demos in each sprint.

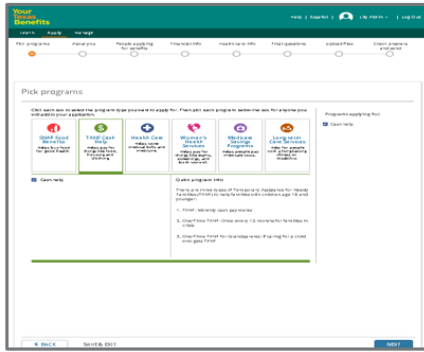
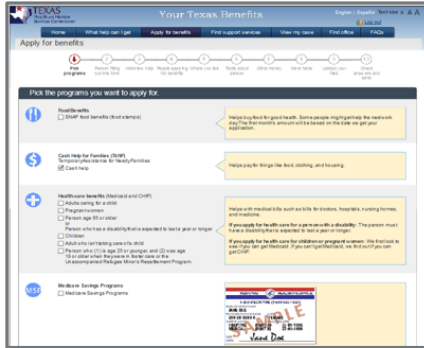


"This site makes me tear up in a good way. So much hard work and such a huge accomplishment that only came to be because we worked as ONE team that trusted each other and believed in the vision."

Product Owner
Self-Service Portal redesign project

SIGNIFICANCE

Texas HHSC used the YourTexasBenefits.com redesign project to make progress towards numerous strategic priorities.



Legacy Modernization

YourTexasBenefits.com platform was initially developed using Adobe Flex technology and was replaced by a custom-built modern server platform – Lightweight Enterprise Application Platform (LEAP). Modernizing the application reduced the risk of obsolescence and allowed for a range of usability enhancements that were not possible earlier. **First**, the team opened up a whole new world of style choices by removing dependencies on restrictive legacy technologies. The new style gives the website a **modern look and feel** as well as facilitates an **intuitive user experience**. With a more enjoyable, intuitive experience, HHSC hoped citizens would enter more necessary data than previously captured, resulting in reduced need for manual follow-up interactions by eligibility staff that result in a delay in the eligibility determination. **Second**, the team was able to take accessibility to the next level. Not only is the new YourTexasBenefits.com 508-compliant, it is also **WCAG AA compliant**. **Third**, the new **responsive web platform** allows users to access YourTexasBenefits.com from a wider range of browsers,

operating systems, and devices than ever before.

Consolidation and Optimization

Over the past few years, enhancements were made to YourTexasBenefits.com that reduced the need for redundant manual data entry by eligibility workers. Citizens could enter their own required information online and have it pre-populated in the worker portal, removing the need for redundant data entry by workers. Clearly, the efficiency of this process depended on the amount and quality of information that the applicants provided upfront. The HHSC team kept this issue in mind when redesigning the site. By **streamlining the workflows** and **restyling the page designs**, they were able to create a more **intuitive submission** process. In addition, they added reminders that nudge users to input more information. In doing so, the team hoped to further reduce the manual intervention required from workers, providing an efficiency that would enable the state to better manage increasing workloads.

Budget and Cost Control

Promoting self-service is one of Texas HHSC’s key strategies for reducing cost. With a more effective, user-friendly self-service portal solution, HHSC expects more citizens will opt for the convenience of the web-based experience to address their benefits needs. By doing so, lobby traffic and visits to local

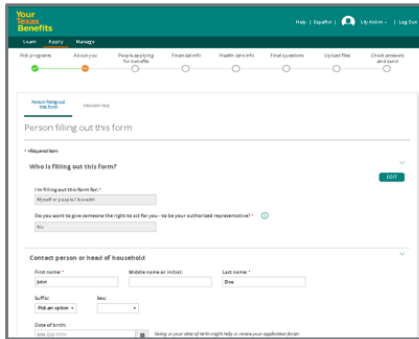
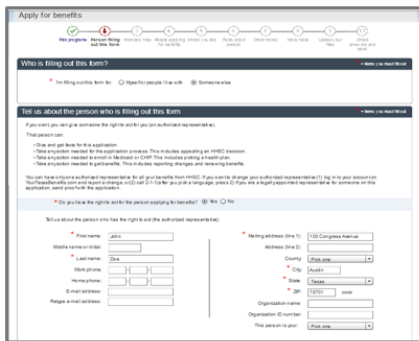
Enhanced Accessibility

- Latest HTML5, CSS3, and JavaScript libraries
- Breaking Flash dependence allows access to numerous default accessibility features present in leading browsers
- Custom UI-elements
- ARIA attributes further improve accessibility of custom features
- Aimed at elevating the true accessibility for disabled citizens, more so than meeting minimum 508 standards

offices could be reduced and free up eligibility workers to focus on their core function of making eligibility determinations and spending less time answering application status questions or following up with applicants about their verification documents. From HHSC’s budget perspective, the team hoped to save on resource costs by reducing workloads and the resulting overtime, as well as document imaging and mail costs.

Agile Software Delivery

To tackle the large, complex redesign effort, HHSC elected to use an Agile approach to project management. Agile’s incremental nature freed the team from the need to conduct all planning up-front. Additionally, Agile provided a unique opportunity for business stakeholders to work directly with the application development team and provided greater transparency and shorter feedback loops. The team used rapid prototyping and wireframes and developed the product in short increments. The team’s success with Agile on the YourTexasBenefits.com redesign effort paved the way to fully transform Texas HHSC into an Agile organization and serve as an example to the rest of the State of Texas.



Cohesive Enterprise Vision

The new LEAP architecture and its usability improvements have been so well received that Texas HHSC and other State of Texas organizations are looking to push the adoption of LEAP across the statewide enterprise. If more organizations grow to adopt LEAP and the Agile method that helped make it possible, citizens and stakeholders across the entire state will stand to benefit.

Security and Risk Management

In addition to the project-based risk mitigation achieved by adopting an Agile development methodology, the LEAP architecture further reduced risk by improving YourTexasBenefits.com information security. With the renewed architecture, HHSC to take advantage of recent security advancements. The new YourTexasBenefits.com site actively mitigates risk of DDoS attacks, malware infections, and phishing attempts. When citizens feel secure online, they feel more comfortable sharing the sensitive information necessary for benefit determination.

IMPACT



Texas had used and benefited from YourTexasBenefits.com site for several years. However, the redesign of the portal provides the agency the opportunity to further expand the goal of increasing self-sufficiency for the citizens while reducing workload for staff. It hasn't been very long since the redesigned YourTexasBenefits.com launched in September 2016, but the team is already seeing some very promising results. ***Impact to the Citizens***

The legacy application posed some limitations related to accessibility. The new LEAP architecture removed those constraints and enables access to a wider range of devices, operating systems, and browsers than ever before. In doing so, the team has achieved the highest accessibility standard of any State of Texas application – WCAG 2.0 AA. Additionally, mobile devices are playing an even bigger role than ever before. Given the growing importance of mobile technology, especially among millennials and lower income families, YourTexasBenefits.com improves access and self-sufficiency for Texans. LEAP allowed the Texas HHSC team to streamline the site's workflows and improve usability. Streamlining usability makes self-service application and benefit management less intimidating to citizens. Citizens are entering more complete information on their own, without as much need for eligibility worker or call center assistance thereby expediting eligibility determination rather than pend those cases for additional information.



Impact to the State Agency

Texas HHSC team overhauled the entire look and feel of YTB, down to the most basic patterns that govern user interface interactions. Not only has this helped citizens feel more comfortable using self-service options, it has changed the types of interactions that are most commonly performed by eligibility workers and call center staff. More citizens are taking benefit management into their own hands by accessing YourTexasBenefits.com on their phone, tablet, or computer, corresponding to an **8% increase in unassisted application submissions**. Additionally, citizens are submitting higher quality applications with improved data inclusion and document submissions. Compared to the legacy site, **citizens are uploading 9% more documents per application** submitted and the **incidence of missing demographic information has dropped by half**. This means that workers will spend less time inquiring into missing information and manually entering data themselves. It increases processing efficiency for workers and lowers eligibility determination costs for HHSC.



Vision for Texas

Self-sufficiency is at the heart of Texas HHSC's strategy. YourTexasBenefits.com, born from Agile and supported by LEAP, is already affecting significant improvements in how Texas delivers government benefits to its citizens. However, these improvements are minimal compared to the future course set forth by these efforts. As the exemplar of Agile development, accessibility and usability excellence, and behavioral design, Texas HHSC has taken a massive step forward and blazed a trail for other government organizations – both inside and outside of Texas – to follow into the future.