

Rethinking Human Service Delivery

with a family focus

By Dave McCurley



Joe on Staten Island used it so his son would receive a nutritious lunch every day at school. Jill in the Bronx used it to discover that she qualifies for public health insurance. And the Jones family, after both parents got laid off, used it to help them get back on their feet. But none of them had to set foot in an office to get their benefits rolling.

Since 2006, residents of New York City have been able to research and pre-screen for 35 different social programs through a single portal called ACCESS NYC. Thousands of charities also use the portal to help New Yorkers understand how these programs—including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as “food stamps”), public health insurance and Earned Income Tax Credit—can help them.

The portal is the product of the Integrated Human Services System Task Force, launched by Mayor Michael

Bloomberg in 2005. The goal of the task force: to determine how technology could enhance and streamline service delivery in order to make local government services more efficient and responsive to residents’ needs. Historically, too many city agencies have gotten by with disconnected information systems, thus limiting their ability to coordinate and deliver the kinds of services their citizens require.

ACCESS NYC effectively offers a one-stop shop for a variety of city, state and federal programs. Instead of treating SNAP or Medicaid as disconnected services—when the reality facing the typical family is much more complex—the



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portal helps agencies work together to solve problems more quickly and completely. It is proving invaluable because so few local, state and federal services are able to coordinate their efforts.

In the U.S. health and human services sector in particular, the prevalence of “stovepipe” programs, each with its own bureaucracy, challenges already overworked caseworkers, who cannot access a big-picture view of all the benefits any one of their clients might be receiving. For example, say the Ramirez family is receiving housing assistance—temporary accommodation until the family is back on its feet—but their housing needs are approached in isolation. Hence they receive the first accommodations available, which unfortunately are on the opposite side of the city from their retraining and job site, as well as the physical therapy center where they take their physically impaired child three afternoons per week. As a result of having to travel so much, can they take full advantage of their training or reemployment programs? Might this cause them to take significantly longer to complete the programs, or struggle to complete them at all?

Across the U.S., the fallout from today’s volatile economic situation has left many families scrambling for assistance from human services agencies—many for the first time in their lives. Yet with social program capacity stretching to breaking limits, too many human services in the U.S. remain disconnected, which is costly for governments—not to mention the citizens they serve. If caseworkers can’t access a big-picture view of their clients, they don’t have the best information for allocating available resources. As a consequence, instead of quickly deploying overlapping services in a well-coordinated fashion, agencies are unable to quickly get people back on their feet. Too often, aid recipients see outreach efforts that are piecemeal at best, or they simply fail to understand—and therefore benefit from—the very programs designed to help them become self-sufficient. Purely from a cost perspective, the longer it takes a family to return to self-sufficiency, the more services they consume. From a family’s perspective, the lack of coordination is frustrating—at the very least—and often requires

full-time “bureaucracy navigation,” rather than focusing their energies and attention on the more immediate concern of pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. Finally, the more layers of bureaucracy, the more time and money states spend managing that bureaucracy, rather than delivering services.

A Plan for Integrated Service Delivery

How do you deliver the most effective services in the most efficient ways to the people who need them most? And how do you ensure that families receiving multiple services can quickly get back on their feet and into situations where they no longer require assistance?

Accenture has created a framework to enable organizations to help improve the planning and delivery of human services by answering those kinds of questions. The framework is based on more than 20 years of experience in human service projects and on the successful implementation of hundreds of human service applications—including numerous eligibility-related systems—for government agencies.

Using the framework to understand how services relate to each other and to the public that will use them, agencies can improve service planning and delivery, revise existing processes and remedy technology disconnects, to provide everyone from caseworkers to charities with a more holistic view of each client and the range of human services programs for which they qualify. Building a detailed big-picture view also enables agencies to offer more targeted and effective assistance, to create an integrated case management system, and quickly move people onto the human service “on-ramp” to help reduce the average stay in temporary assistance programs. Finally, better coordination can overcome the complexity that hinders the delivery of different services, enabling caseworkers and charities to help people take advantage of the right assistance programs, at the right time.

Coordination enables agencies to deliver services in a family-centric fashion. Here’s how: Say that after 20 years of hard work, both John and Mary Smith have been laid off from their jobs and lost their home to fore-

closure. Furthermore, they have a child with special needs—the child could be disabled, have learning problems, or suffer from mental health issues—and lost their health care along with the jobs. Now, the family qualifies for unemployment assistance, job training assistance, immediate cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, food through SNAP, and children’s health coverage. Typically, however, the Smiths would have to cobble together available services on their path to again becoming self-sufficient. But with integrated services delivery, the Smiths could understand and apply for all benefits very simply—via a single portal. Their housing coordinator could easily see what the child’s health worker is doing, understand job retraining plans, coordinate with other agencies, and so on. As a result, the family could more quickly receive all of the benefits they need and rapidly return to self-sufficiency.

Simpler is Better

It’s worth looking more closely at simplification as a benefit of coordinating services—as well as a hallmark of success. For example, here’s what ACCESS NYC users see: An online portal providing anytime access to essential information, including office locations and required documentation, an anonymous pre-screening process, and a streamlined application process that enables people to print blank or partially pre-filled applications. Furthermore, it works in seven different languages: Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Arabic, Haitian-Creole, and English.

Here’s what users don’t see: Everything behind the scenes, including the multitude of policies, technologies and legal or legislative requirements associated with the 15 different city, state and federal agencies behind those 35 different programs. For some programs, for example, eligibility ensures enrollment, while for others, it doesn’t.

As a result, everyone benefits, including the city and its caseworkers. For a start, that’s because ACCESS NYC generates easy-to-read application forms for caseworkers. Furthermore, administrators can begin adding additional services to the portal, such as tying it into the city’s centralized 311 call center.



When it comes to using social services, the typical resident in any global city—from Tokyo, Dublin, and New York to Oslo, Los Angeles and London—defines their ideal relationship with the government like this: “Help me until I’m back on my feet, then get out of my way.”

Framework Coordinates Four Services

What’s needed to improve and ultimately simplify service delivery today is an approach that realigns service delivery so that it is cross-program and family-centric—that is, addressing the complex situation that a family receiving benefits, such as the Smiths, is in, rather than simply providing one disconnected service at a time.

To accomplish this, the Accenture framework begins by grouping human services into one or more of the following categories:

- **Prevention Services** help prevent or limit the need for government services in the future. Examples include childhood immunization programs, to prevent devastating and costly future illnesses, and public education, which helps prevent unemployment by ensuring that employers have access to a skilled workforce.
- **Intervention Services**—aka the “social safety net”—share a common objective: to assist a family during a crisis, for a limited period of time, before returning them to self-sufficiency (or hopefully, better) as quickly as possible. Examples include unemployment assistance and job retraining (for laid-off workers), and housing-, nutrition-, or income-assistance benefits (to help low-income families regain self-sufficiency).
- **Protection Services** protect individuals from a real or perceived threat, perhaps for the rest of their lives. Examples include child protection services, adult abuse and neglect services, and domestic violence shelters.
- **Support Services** aid recipients for the rest of their lives, because their circumstances warrant it (for reasons of mental health or long-term disability), or because they have earned such support (for example, pension, veteran, or Social Security benefits). In either case, support is designed to

deliver not just financial benefits, but also a good quality of life.

However, the exact mix of which services get delivered also depends on the recipient’s stage of life:

tions. This helps agencies reach a consensus on the definition of the shared outcomes and the roles each service will play in meeting them.

In terms of specific outcomes, using

Human Services Planning and Delivery: A Family-Centric Mode			
	Birth/ Childhood	Working-Age Adult	Senior/Elderly
Prevention Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prenatal care • Immunization • Early, elementary & secondary education food programs • Children’s insurance • Child support services • Vocational training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational training • Disease management • Employment services • Cash assistance • Higher-education assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flu shots • Disease management
Intervention Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care management • Food programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment benefits • Re-employment training • Cash assistance • Housing assistance • Workers compensation • Health care management • Food programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food programs • Housing assistance
Protection Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Child welfare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Adult protective services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health • Adult protective services
Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled support • Mental health support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled support • Mental health support • Employment accidents • Veterans benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survivor pension • Disability pension • Long-term care • Nursing home/assisted living • Veterans benefits
Enabling Services	Intake Application, Eligibility, Fraud & Abuse, Case Management, Billing & Collection, Provider Management, Claims Payment & Benefits Administration		

Using the framework helps identify the groups of related programs which should work better together to solve the complex problems facing families in specific situations. Managers can also use it to begin educating field workers on how to interoperate, and design the processes and infrastructure required to implement this new type of service delivery model. Finally, the framework offers an easy-to-understand, high-level discussion tool for use with lawmakers, administrators and stakeholders from related organiza-

the above framework to rethink human services as a cross-program, family-centered endeavor offers numerous opportunities to:

- **Rationalize:** Eliminate redundancies in eligibility verification processes, consolidate back-office processes and functions such as data management and distribution of social services, increase communication, and cross-train health and human services workers to make better use of existing resources.



- **Automate:** Increase service accessibility, decentralize data input requirements, introduce online self-service portals, and eliminate data entry requirements.
- **Simplify:** Unify the collective mission of related human services agencies, and in doing so consolidate existing databases containing recipient information, integrate eligible systems, eliminate rework and increase data accuracy.
- **Source:** Use the lowest total-cost provider of products and services, and use centralized procurement to lower operating expenditures.
- **Grow:** Become more efficient and flexible—and increase capacity to better weather future downturns.

By pursuing integrated human services delivery, agencies can control costs, increase efficiency, and improve processes. By doing so, Accenture estimates a government agency can reduce costs by 10 percent to 20 percent in less than a year. Furthermore, increased coordination also enables agencies to cut overpayments by up to 20 percent and reduce total costs by about one percent as fraud, waste and abuse are reined in.

In the longer term, service integration enables agencies to create service centers that handle multiple services, to consolidate call centers, and to create online self-service portals. Each of these can reduce related administrative and operating costs by 10–25 percent.

What Taxpayers Want

When it comes to using social services, the typical resident in any global city—from Tokyo, Dublin, and New York to Oslo, Los Angeles and London—defines their ideal relationship with the government like this: “Help me until I’m back on my feet, then get out of my way.” We heard such themes constantly during Accenture’s recent Global Cities Forums—a regular series of citizen panels in different cities around the

world—in which groups of up to 75 randomly selected local residents provided qualitative insights into what people expect from their governments, and how they define “public value.”

Another interesting finding is that taxpayers expect government to use their money efficiently, as well as to improve service delivery through better coordination. They also believe that everyone involved in providing public services—governments, businesses, nonprofits, and nongovernmental organizations—needs to collaborate effectively to share information and deliver more integrated and streamlined services. Today, however, the popular opinion is that too many public service organizations that deliver services are overly large and unnecessarily bureaucratic.

Governments are listening. For example, Accenture is working with Norway’s Social Security Agency to integrate software applications and related claims processes for three types of pensions: the old-age pension offered to every citizen, the pension available to public-sector workers, and the 45 different related social programs offered throughout the country.

When the project is completed, the agency will have a view into exactly which services are being used by any given family and can begin designing unique, situation-specific service plans across its entire suite of services. In addition, the agency can better prevent fraud, abuse and overpayments.

The Psychology Of The Safety Net

The potential for more rapidly and efficiently delivering services in a family-centric fashion must not be lost on administrators facing unprecedented

budget shortfalls. Imagine if improved service coordination overall could reduce each family’s “average stay” by just one week in the four largest human service programs based on spending—Medicaid, TANF, SNAP and unemployment insurance. The United States would save \$45.4 billion per year, not including administrative cost savings.

Speed counts, and integrating services helps agencies get the right services to the right families at the right time. Circus trapeze artists offer a relevant metaphor. They appreciate that there’s a safety net, but hope they never need it. But when they do, you marvel at how they fall, prepare themselves, land flat, then bounce up and catch the lowest available bar. The recovery can be almost as thrilling as the act. But they know that the circus doesn’t happen in the safety net. It happens above it—and that’s where they return as fast as possible.

Likewise, human service programs must bounce people back as fast as possible, because the longer it takes, the more difficult it becomes for people to recover, and the more they become entangled in the very net intended to support them. Conversely, the sooner a family achieves self-sufficiency and no longer requires government assistance, the more everyone benefits.

For human service agencies, the solution is to eliminate the stovepipe delivery of health and human services. Of course, agencies and caseworkers have wanted to do this for years, but didn’t know where to start. Now, however, we finally have a starting point: our framework, which provides a roadmap for the future integration of service delivery across all human services programs. It works by aligning a network of human service programs with the major results those programs are designed to help families achieve.

Today, reaching that level of understanding and coordination is more important than ever. Because for America’s families, life doesn’t happen in the safety net either. 