

Building a Foundation for Innovation and Success in Health and Human Services:

How a Cloud Platform Can
Help Drive Transformation
and Improve Outcomes



HHS at an Inflection Point

In 2012, there were nearly 800,000 people on Medicaid in Colorado, but only 10 agents in the state's contact center to answer their questions. It was frustrating for citizens, who would call the number on their Medicaid card and either get a busy signal or wait on hold for so long that over half of them hung up. Even if they got through, the agent often had to put them on hold again to get forms or find information in other databases. Worse yet, some individuals were transferred back and forth between the state and county offices because of unclearly defined roles. The ever-present concern was that those in need would stop trying to get help altogether due to administrative hurdles, which could lead to access to care issues or even preventable death.

This is the situation Christine Comer confronted in 2012 when she took on the role of client services division director of the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, the state agency that administers Medicaid. Comer knew the contact center would only get busier due to Medicaid expansion, which would increase the number of Colorado residents eligible for benefits. (As of late 2017, it was up to 1.5 million.) Because of this, improving the citizen contact center experience had to be a priority — and Comer was confident a proven cloud-based platform could be the solution.

Before Comer implemented Salesforce's cloud platform in 2013, she had no way to measure the service levels in a contact center in real time because the legacy system didn't enable such reporting. The cloud immediately allowed the department to collect and analyze data, but those initial numbers were "pretty ugly," Comer says.

The numbers were so bad that the legislature approved funding for the contact center to hire additional agents and tackle business processes head-on. That was an easy task to accomplish with Salesforce. The reengineered business processes — combined with the efficiencies of the Salesforce-based cloud platform — significantly improved the contact center's performance. Call abandonment rates dropped to 12.5 percent from more than 50 percent, and call handling time decreased from 12.5 minutes to 6 minutes. In addition, the agency now automates manual processes that previously consumed agents' time and generated unnecessary stress.

"Now, agents can complete a process in seven seconds that used to take seven minutes," Comer says. "We can measure every transaction, define how long it takes and then use the technology to maximize efficiency."

All these changes also benefit contact center employees who now rely on modern and intuitive technology to do their jobs and make their members happy.

Similar to the situation in Colorado, HHS agencies across the nation face increasing pressure to deliver services to citizens more efficiently and effectively than ever. But they struggle with outdated technology that is difficult to use and expensive to maintain, much less upgrade. In the



Governing Institute's 2017 HHS survey, 65 percent of the 191 respondents said their agency's HHS systems needed to be upgraded — but few expect to get the funds needed for full-scale modernization.

That's just one of the reasons why state and local governments are adopting cloud-based platforms. The cloud can be quickly implemented at scale — agencies can start small, with a low-cost, proof-of-concept project, and then rapidly expand. Colorado began this way in 2015 and now has more than 90 applications built on the Salesforce Platform — and is still growing.

In addition, a cloud platform approach to modernization builds a foundation for the future through agile methodology and aligns with federal funding mandates that support modular system development and deployment, which favors configuration over customization. It enables reusable components to be built and shared across government agencies. These components are designed to achieve rapid time to value measured in weeks — not months or years.

CLOUD: A MORE MODERN APPROACH

In stark contrast to how systems were built in the past, cloud enables the public sector to provide services quickly and respond to issues with agility. Comer was more than ready to use cloud after her frustrating experience managing other call center legacy systems.

“Even if all I wanted was a change in a drop-down menu, it was ‘submit your request and we’ll do it in maybe three to six months,’” she says.

The contact center could not respond quickly to the needs of customers and employees, much less make plans for new technology in anticipation of policy changes. And the department needed a quick fix to the problem as its employees were already overworked and fatigued.

The cloud helped the contact center overcome these issues. Three months after Comer signed the contract, the new platform went live — a dramatically shorter timeline than the five years it took another state to build its custom solution from scratch.

In addition to being quicker to implement, a cloud platform is easier to scale and more cost effective to maintain and support. Perhaps more importantly, cloud helps break down silos — or at least better connect them — to integrate data and provide a complete 360-degree view of client history and records. Such integration enables faster service and produces better outcomes. It also creates opportunities to analyze data and measure progress in new ways to make better use of tax dollars.

BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION

Innovative state and local agencies are taking advantage of the cloud to connect with their citizens in a whole new way.



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State of Colorado

In addition to using the cloud for its contact center, the state of Colorado also implemented the cloud in its Department of Human Services (DHS). DHS built a self-service portal called PEAK (Program Eligibility and Application Kit) that helps citizens quickly apply for and determine their eligibility for social services and health benefits.

“In less than a minute, you know your eligibility and when you will start receiving benefits,” says Herb Wilson, business technology director of the department. The portal enables the state to process twice as many applications per month — it went from 30,000 to 60,000 — without a corresponding increase in its budget.¹

Colorado has a unique structure for HHS. There are two agencies at the state level. The Department of Human Services oversees food and nutrition services as well as cash assistance. The Department of Health Care Policy and Financing manages Medicaid. Programs from both state

agencies are then deployed through 64 different counties. It makes collecting and analyzing data challenging, says Comer.

“We could have one individual who’s receiving services from one county, but through three different agencies,” she says.

The cloud has simplified the integration of the contact center with PEAK to address some of these challenges, while also improving visibility into performance. For example, PEAK incorporates a chat feature from the contact center.

“If citizens are enrolled and have set up a PEAK account, they can chat directly with an agent, which helps them get answers faster,” she says. “Chat is far more efficient than calling because agents can handle five chats at a time.”

Boulder County, Colorado

Boulder County’s Housing and Human Services department built a data warehouse that extracts and integrates basic beneficiary information, such as demographics and service utilization, from the state’s systems, says Jason McRoy, division director, business operations and systems support for Housing and Human Services. The county then used that data to populate a Salesforce-based platform for case assessment and case management.

The county also launched Boulder County Connect, a self-service portal where citizens can check their eligibility for services and then apply for benefits all in one place, as well as track and manage the support they receive at any time and from any device. The county uses the system to avoid duplication of effort. For example, if a citizen applies for Colorado Works (the state’s TANF program), the county must ensure the applicant is compliant with any child support orders. In the past, that meant sending the citizen to a separate department (and system) that handled child support. That child support team would have the citizen provide much of the same information he or she already provided to Colorado Works, and would then ensure the citizen was in compliance by manually filling out a form and sending it back to Colorado Works.

“Now that all happens seamlessly,” says McRoy. “The child support worker looks up the data from the Colorado Works application, checks all the boxes and then signs off on the application.”

The county chose Salesforce because of the robustness of its out-of-the-box functionality and ease of use, says McRoy. “A lot of commercial off-the-shelf solutions (COTS) we looked at were cumbersome to use and difficult to tailor

Using the Cloud to Accelerate Transformation

Agencies that use the Salesforce Platform can accelerate transformation since they no longer have to reinvent the wheel. For example, Boulder is replicating its system in other interested counties, says McRoy.

“It will enable us to work across county boundaries more seamlessly, share data and evaluate programs more effectively,” he says.

Likewise, although Comer was the first to use a cloud platform for a customer contact center in the state, she says at least one other state agency — Colorado’s Department of Labor and Employment — has used it as a model for its Unemployment Insurance contact center.

“In government, we’re risk averse, so if there’s someone in your state who has already successfully deployed a cloud platform, you can use that in your favor,” she says.

In addition, Salesforce’s ongoing investment in new innovations such as artificial intelligence (AI) is providing state agencies with capabilities unthinkable a few years ago. For example, machine learning and natural language processing can boost call center agents’ productivity. Similarly, automation and AI can free up a caseworker to spend more time with their clients and less on manual tasks. In programs such as child welfare, this is critical — 38 percent of a caseworker’s time is typically spent on documentation and administration, versus the 9 percent spent on actual client contact.²

to our needs. Other solutions had functions that sounded great but were not really necessary,” he says. “We wanted to focus on only what was necessary, and have the ability to incorporate user-centric design and feedback from customers and stakeholders.”

He also liked Salesforce’s configurability, compliance features and security. And since the state was embracing the Salesforce-First strategy, “we knew they had researched it enough that we could have confidence in the platform,” he says.

Another advantage of the Salesforce Platform is the availability of industry-specific, pre-built applications and accelerators from a variety of Salesforce partners, including those that specialize in the public sector. The next phase of the Boulder County project will extend the service to community partners like food banks and homeless shelters.

“It should further cut down on unnecessary duplication of effort, enabling faster access to more services,” McRoy says.

To complete this extension, the county used Vlocity, a Salesforce partner that provides specialized apps for the public sector. Vlocity’s pre-built library of business processes and data model for HHS make it easy to import and export data, thus avoiding the need for custom coding. The Vlocity tools streamlined the process and shortened the development time substantially, says McRoy. As a result, the county could quickly build a dashboard that pulls information from different sources and summarizes citizen data for the community partners in one consolidated screen. The tools have also enabled them to configure forms to guide community partners through the data collection needed for client assessments.

Boulder started rolling the dashboard out in August 2017. By the end of October there will be seven providers using the system, with more planned for 2018.

Michigan Health Information Network

Some states use cloud platforms to unify increasingly complex health care systems, data and relationships. The Michigan Health Information Network (MiHIN) is a privately managed nonprofit, established by the state of Michigan. The organization provides a collaborative, shared-services model dedicated to unifying data statewide to increase quality of health care services, decrease costs and improve the overall patient experience.

However, MiHIN goes beyond just tracking data, says Executive Director Tim Pletcher. “Most people say if we only had all the data in one place, then the mistakes and problems would go away. But data is not the issue,” says Pletcher. “It’s the failure to coordinate all the relationships among different groups in health care.”

MiHIN turned to Salesforce to develop an application that captures the relationships between a patient and all members of his or her care team. This allows applications to simultaneously share information with everyone responsible

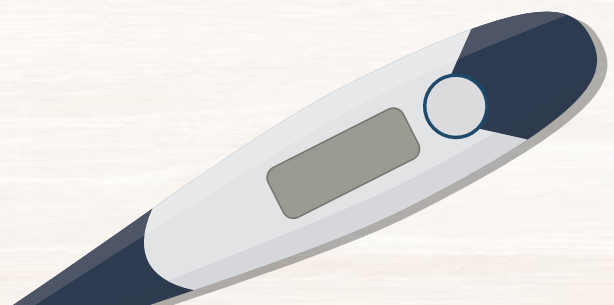
for a patient’s care. Approved health care entities can access the application and make changes based on comprehensive information and insight that is centered around the patient.

The application notifies all relevant parties when, for example, a patient ends up in an emergency room. If that patient is diabetic, his endocrinologist would be notified. If it’s a cancer patient undergoing chemotherapy, her oncologist needs to know. It enables a new level of care coordination, and it’s automatic, seamless and real time.

These relationships can get complicated, notes Jeff Livesay, MiHIN’s associate director. A psychologist might be affiliated with several hospitals, operate his own clinic and consult for several other clinics. “We needed something with powerful modeling that could extract data at high levels and be flexible enough for all these different relationships,” he says.

“Managing those relationships and their complexities is very important as we look at value-based payment models where you have complicated revenue sharing,” Pletcher adds. The inherent flexibility, speed, regular upgrades, and development and application also help to future-proof MiHIN’s work.

The Salesforce Platform helps state agencies operationalize and achieve the highly desired Triple Aim goal set by the federal government: improving the patient experience of care (including quality and satisfaction); improving the health of populations; and reducing the per capita cost of health care.



STEPS TO BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION AND SUCCESS

The public sector executives interviewed for this paper offered their insights and advice for agencies looking to transform their organizations and improve outcomes by implementing cloud platform solutions.



CREATE A MISSION AND GOALS BASED ON CITIZEN-CENTRIC OUTCOMES.

Rather than thinking in terms of just technology or data, consider the experience of a citizen across multiple programs and how improving that experience can help you deliver measurable outcomes that change lives. How many agencies does a citizen have to interact with to enroll in programs? How many times does the family in need have to provide duplicative information? How does timely service and access to benefits reduce the risk of developing chronic conditions and/or prevent a costly hospital readmission? Be adamant about linking and measuring the services provided to the outcomes achieved for your target population.



FIND A TRUSTED TECHNOLOGY PARTNER WITH EXPERIENCE AND A PROVEN TRACK-RECORD IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR.

Make sure the vendor meets the appropriate standards — including security and compliance — for your applications so you can have complete confidence in the new processes. For example, multiple Gartner reports on enterprise cloud platforms highlight key criteria for success. These criteria include selecting cloud platforms that are innovative, open, fast, easy and trusted. Do your homework and base your decisions on these criteria.

“The biggest question for government is the security of the system,” says Comer. “Make sure your vendor can meet all security requirements.”



DEVOTE TIME AND ATTENTION UPFRONT TO CHANGE MANAGEMENT.

“People are pretty guarded about their programs,” McRoy says. “We had to dispel the myths that the data they had was somehow unique to their programs.”

In Boulder County, McRoy organized practice groups, built user groups and ran plenty of training programs. “If you just implement the technology, you’re likely to get a bad result,” he says.

Although the change management is time consuming, it is well worth it. “At times we’ve tried to rush things because we thought we should be able to deploy and deliver functionality faster, and that’s usually when the wheels started to fall off,” McRoy explains.



DEMONSTRATE WHY A NEW APPROACH IS NEEDED AND GAIN THE BACKING OF TOP LEADERSHIP AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS FROM THE BEGINNING.

In Michigan, the director of the state’s HHS department made the business case for a better system when he displayed a 32-page application for one of the state’s Medicaid programs.

“There is no substitute for strong, consistent leadership,” says Pletcher.

Leaders are often taking a risk in switching to new ways of doing things, and they must keep their resolve in the face of criticism.

“State leadership has to be willing to look at the whole puzzle, not individual programs. Other groups and vendors may challenge the decision,” says Pletcher. “They’ll test your resolve to break down the silos.”



WHEN WRITING RFPs, DON'T BE TOO PRESCRIPTIVE — THIS WILL STIFLE INNOVATION AND DRIVE AGENCIES TOWARD A CUSTOM SOLUTION.

Such systems are often costly to deploy and maintain, and difficult to upgrade. Agencies must also rely on vendor support, which limits their options for expansion. Instead, try to rethink how you do business and serve your clients. Ask your vendors to demonstrate how their technology helps caseworkers become more productive to deliver better outcomes, and how their cloud platform can be configured to your desired functionality. Let the vendor describe how it would respond to the challenges your agency faces. Talk to your technology vendors to educate yourself about their unique solutions and approaches to modernization such as open cloud platforms and how they can enable innovation before you commit or engage any particular system integrator.



ESTABLISH A CLOUD PLATFORM FIRST MENTALITY ACROSS THE ENTERPRISE.

Make sure your staff understands the advantages of the cloud. Start with small projects and quick wins that demonstrate the benefits, then scale from there. Encourage departments to consider using a cloud platform for every new project.

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A PLATFORM FOR THE FUTURE

As more agencies in government use cloud platforms — at the local, state and federal levels — HHS services will become more efficient, faster and more effective. As a result, agencies — and most importantly, citizens — will benefit.

But many health and human services agencies are just beginning their cloud journeys and platform adoption, and are looking to gather evidence and use their peers’ early successes to justify their own investment decisions.

“We didn’t have a baseline before because there was no way to measure things,” says McRoy. As Boulder County’s platform expands, the agency is looking to document how citizens navigate the system and use that data not only to improve service but also to evaluate whether clients are making progress to self-sufficiency.

Comer has plans for further integration with the state and with counties. “The goal is to have this golden record for the member, showing exactly what benefits the client is receiving from which programs,” she says.

She’s hopeful that goal is within reach. The cloud has already helped the state identify and maximize efficiencies and dramatically improve service to citizens, she says. “There’s real power in using these tools.”

Endnotes:

1. www.salesforce.com/form/industries/improving-service-delivery-webinar.jsp
2. ICF, Colorado Child Welfare County Workload Study August 2014

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