

Coordinating SNAP and Nutrition Supports (CSNS) Impact Report:

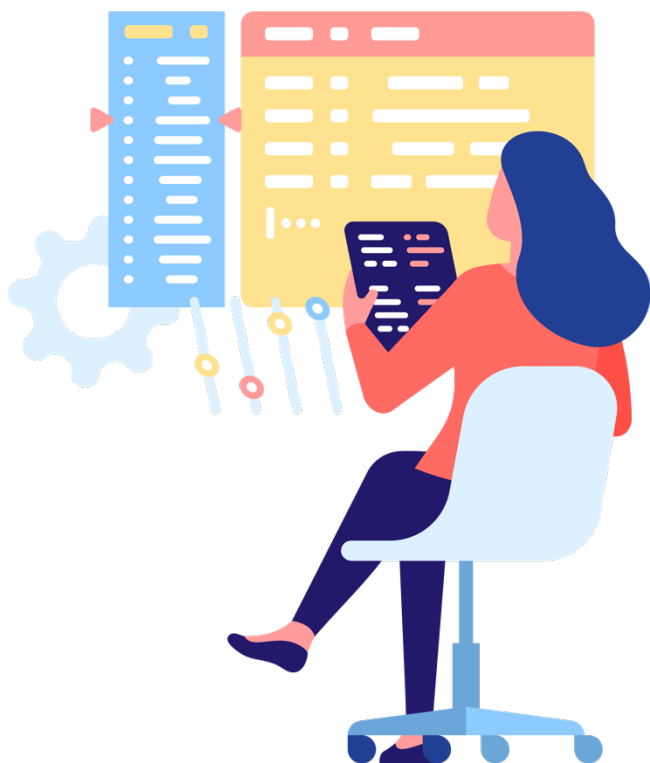
New Mexico

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Background & Context

New Mexico's Coordinating SNAP & Nutrition Supports (CSNS) project built upon an established culture of collaboration to align family supports and services across state agencies. Prior to receiving the CSNS grant in 2021, leaders from the state's various human services agencies participated in Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham's Children's Cabinet, which focused on directing programs to best assist children in New Mexico. This work pushed the leaders of agencies that administer the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – administered by the New Mexico Human Services Department – and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) – administered by the New Mexico Department of Health– to evaluate how they use data to address food insecurity, form new partnerships, and administer new programs like Pandemic EBT to enhance the well-being of children.



Project Description

The New Mexico Human Services Department (HSD) and Department of Health (DOH) co-created a new online interface that exchanges participant data between the SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, and WIC agencies to maximize participation in WIC. The bidirectional exchange of participant data streamlines and maximizes program enrollment thereby increasing caseloads, and has improved the participant experience by enabling more outcome focused interactions and by reducing the administrative burdens for all parties. This online interface works as an automated referral engine that streamlines the referral process for households participating in programs including SNAP, TANF cash assistance, and Medicaid.



When customers interact with connected programs, this new referral engine notifies customers of their likely eligibility for WIC and provides instructions for enrolling in the program.

Now when anyone applies for services through HSD for SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid, they are automatically and securely assessed for potential participation in WIC. People who look to meet WIC eligibility criteria are able to have their information sent directly to WIC clinics as well as Indian Tribal Organizations that administer the program. Sarah Flores-Sievers, the New Mexico WIC Director, describes this as "a first-in-the-nation integration partnership," she explains, "now our system can link referrals to families' records, and even identify potential duplicates to save even more time.

The project aimed to:

- **Increase WIC participation.** Receive more accurate and tailored referral data to help DOH conduct proactive and effective outreach to individuals and families who are currently eligible for, but not enrolled in, WIC.
- **Improve client experience.** Share data between HSD and DOH to reduce duplicate data collection, enable the agencies to prioritize person-centered interactions with WIC participants, and train eligibility staff on other nutrition supports so they can better support their clients.
- **Reduce administrative burden.** Automate exchanges of participant information between SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, and WIC to allow WIC staff to spend less time on data collection during limited WIC appointment time with clients, and instead redirect focus to client outcomes.

Logic Model

<p>Objectives</p> <p>Increase WIC participation, improve client experience, and reduce administrative burden by creating an automated data exchange system between SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, and WIC.</p>			
<p>Inputs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HSD / SNAP Project Team • DOH / WIC Project Team • Vendor technical project management • Vendor design team • Cross-agency meetings 	<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Configured changes to agency data systems through iterative design sessions • Developed and delivered end-user trainings • Conducted outreach to WIC families 	<p>Outputs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established business rules in eligibility system required to create a more accurate universe of potentially WIC eligible participants • Referral pipeline data visualizations to enable cross-agency collaboration and accountability 	<p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37,933 referrals were automatically sent to WIC between May 2022 and February 2023 • 5,977 new WIC enrollments between May 2022 and February 2023
<p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlined referral processes across programs • Multi-agency capacity to meet customers where they are and address full scope of needs • Increased WIC enrollment and co-enrollment in programs administered by separate agencies • Modernized business processes surrounding referrals and new enrollments for better service delivery 			

Project Approach

New Mexico's CSNS project followed five phases:

1) Project Definition & Discovery 2) Development 3) Testing 4) Go-Live 5) Program Improvement

Phase 1: **Project Definition & Discovery**

New Mexico began by determining team members, project timeline, key milestones, and regular meeting intervals. The project team defined the design of the initiative through discovery sessions where key collaborators defined business needs and desires to achieve the project's goals. These were then interpreted as user stories to be developed and delivered following the agile methodology. The design was also defined in a design document, providing further support and clarity for the project's goals, and the functional and technical requirements to achieve it.

Phase 2: **Development**

The project then went into a development phase, developing the user stories reflecting the design agreed upon during discovery. Throughout development, the team held regular check-ins with key decision makers, collaborators, and team members to ensure high-quality standards and expectations for project delivery were met. Based on the input and feedback received during the check-ins, user stories were revised and to ensure business needs and quality standards were met.

Phase 3: **Testing**

The project proceeded into the testing phase, ensuring that the product met the requirements defined by the user stories. Testing included quality assurance testing, user acceptance testing, and regression testing.

Phase 4: **Go-Live**

The project went live in May 2022. After going live, New Mexico began capturing near real-time WIC enrollment data from referred individuals.

Phase 5: **Program Improvement**

The WIC team held regular meetings to review the data and determine opportunities for improvement to increase enrollment. Specifically, they performed the following activities:

- **Data Review**
 - NM WIC sends HSD monthly report with outcomes from prior month's referrals
 - Team updates and analyzes referral outcome data in the dashboards
 - NM WIC analyzes the monthly data to see trends across the state and regions to include successful & unsuccessful referrals, regional data comparison, and review caseload impact
- **Focus groups for WIC Program Improvement**
 - NM WIC continuously requests feedback from frontline staff to gauge ease of use and possible improvements through the end of the grant period.

NM WIC performs continuous data analysis from dashboards and focus group feedback to monitor trends across the state and use the data to focus training and outreach efforts.

Results

New Mexico's CSNS project measured results for the performance period from May 2022 through February 2023. During that period, the team measured progress towards increasing the number of WIC referrals, improving insight into customer demographics, and gathering staff feedback on process change from monthly focus groups.

Project Insights

This project generated a lasting change to how New Mexico public agencies operate, resulting in an unprecedented 18% growth (over 10,649 people) in WIC's caseload since May 2022.

During the CSNS project period alone:

- **The automated referral engine sent over 37,933 referrals from SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, HSD or other programs to WIC/DOH.** These referrals come directly from HSD's Automated System Program & Eligibly Network (ASPEN) and were shared with DOH's WIC system, New Mexico Success Opportunity Legendary (NMSOL).
- **Nearly 6,000 new WIC referrals enrolled in four months through the referral engine.** More referrals allow for more opportunity for enrollment. The automated referrals to WIC also allowed WIC staff to focus on enrolling potential customers rather than expending resources on broad WIC outreach.
- **During the performance period, 55% of the referrals received were processed by WIC.** Technical and process improvements in the future could enable many more enrollments. The other 45% could be processed in a shorter timeframe through systems improvements, increased staffing capacity, or both. For example, if the system were capable of more accurately sorting existing customers, WIC staff would spend less time processing referrals for active customers who do not need intervention. It should also be noted that this is expected to improve over time as data on customers that are already enrolled in WIC is reported to HSD and updated accordingly in ASPEN.
- **The overwhelming majority of new WIC referrals were already enrolled in Medicaid (>80%), and many were co-enrolled in both Medicaid and SNAP (>45%) when they received a WIC referral.**
 - 45.87% were enrolled in Medicaid & SNAP
 - 42.3% were enrolled in Medicaid only
 - 6.79% were enrolled in Medicaid & TANF & SNAP
 - 3.84% were enrolled in SNAP only
 - .50% were enrolled in SNAP & TANF
 - .45% were enrolled in Medicaid & TANF
 - .24% were enrolled in TANF only

Lessons Learned

- ✓ **Key collaborators need to be identified as early as possible, need to have buy-in, and agree to engage regularly for this shared goal.**
 - The group should represent all areas that the project may impact and should be varied in skill, perspective, and experience. These members all need to be involved in the design phase of the project to ensure their perspectives are considered and addressed in the design of the program. This applies to functional teams, technology teams, and end users.
 - Include third party experts who are not directly involved in the project but can contribute ideas to share external insight and mitigate tunnel vision.

- ✓ **Improving cross-agency work requires investing in cross-agency partnership.**
 - This requires early commitment from all stakeholders to meet regularly, communicate frequently, and continuously improve the partnership and transfer knowledge of different processes, procedures, and systems of the different parties involved in the project. This collaboration enables more accurate project planning and a better understanding of the needs and desires of the different parties involved.

- ✓ **Technology interaction needs to be thoroughly investigated early to understand technical limitations and allow for creative problem solving.**
 - If a shared repository across all parties is not possible, the team will need to prioritize regular communication to share key decisions, inputs, and progress.
 - Automated referral tools should have built-in mechanisms to filter out referrals that are already enrolled in the service to avoid duplicate processing.

Project Team Reflections

During the development phase, the project team developed user stories reflecting the design agreed upon during discovery. Through development, the team held regular check-ins with key decision makers, collaborators, and team members to ensure high-quality standards and expectations for project delivery were being met. Based on the input and feedback received during the check-ins, user stories were revised and further developed to ensure business needs and quality were met.

Sustainability & Improvement

In the future, New Mexico plans to use more complex dashboards to refine data on customer demographics and reduce the time needed to convert a referral into an enrollment. The WIC team hopes to start tracking WIC referrals affiliated with Indigenous tribes and continues to meet regularly to identify data that merits tracking in the future as they become more knowledgeable and experienced of the evolving needs of the state of New Mexico. The team also plans to work toward a process where individuals are directly referred to WIC centers from HSD, as opposed to WIC sending customers a referral after they have received it from HSD.



A key challenge in this project was that a sizable portion of referrals were for customers that were already enrolled in WIC. This challenge has limited New Mexico's ability to process new WIC referrals and convert them into new enrolled participants in WIC. In the future, the team will build a mechanism into the referral tool that will filter out individuals who are already enrolled in WIC.

Additionally, since the referral program is implemented through New Mexico's integrated eligibility computer system ASPEN, future decisions and possible enhancements to the ASPEN system need to consider possible downstream impacts on the WIC referral program.

DOH and HSD continue to connect monthly to share referral data and ensure proper maintenance and operations of the referral program. DOH reviews this data to make informed outreach decisions and improve service delivery. Achieving the goals set out at the onset of this project will require years of commitment, closely monitoring enrollment data, refining targeted outreach and service delivery, and eventually improving the referral program and dashboards altogether as the team better realizes evolving needs. This requires sustaining a close partnership between involved parties and improved knowledge about the different parties' needs and strengths.

Key Takeaways

- Automated referral across human services can significantly increase service participation rates for children and families and has potential to reduce administrative burden
- Automated referral systems need built-in mechanisms to filter out referrals who are already enrolled in the respective service
- Successful cross-agency work requires inclusion of key collaborators and time investment to continuously transfer knowledge across the partnership
- Iterative user testing and adaptation identifies opportunities for improvement early, thereby improving the end user experience

Project Library

- [New Mexico Case Study: Improving Online Infrastructure to Expand WIC's Reach](#)

For more information about this project, please reach out to **Morgan McKinney** at mmckinney@aphsa.org and **Jess Maneely** at jmaneely@aphsa.org.