

Case Study

Virginia Department of Community Health

“In November 2013, the Virginia WIC Program became the first state in the country to begin the simultaneous rollout of a state agency model [Crossroads] along with issuing food benefits via EBT. This historic event could not have happened without the teamwork, partnership and commitment of Conduent. I highly recommend Conduent as a WIC EBT processor.”

– Michael Welch, Division Director, Virginia Department of Community Health



The Challenge

The Virginia Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program provides nutrition and education benefits for women, infants, and children under 5 years of age. The Virginia WIC program is one of the largest in the country, serving 145,000 participants each month from 200 local agencies and supporting more than 850 vendors.

To collect benefits, participants previously went to an office to pick up paper checks and then to a WIC-authorized vendor that stocked program approved items. Checks were issued for specific items in specific quantities, and any benefits not redeemed in a single transaction were lost. WIC and non-WIC items had to be separated in the checkout line, taking several times longer than non-WIC transactions – inconvenient for the cashier and stigmatizing to the participant.

Virginia WIC turned to an online WIC solution to alleviate these problems, increase conveniences to those supporting the WIC program, improve back office operations, and reduce or eliminate the stigma for participants. They also needed to comply with the Healthy Hunger Free Kids act of 2010 mandating all WIC programs implement Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) by 2020. Because EBT requires updates to the program management information system (MIS), Virginia WIC wanted to implement MIS changes concurrently with EBT. Conduent was chosen as the partner to meet their implementation goals.

The Solution

Through extraordinary collaboration and teamwork, Virginia WIC was the first state to implement a new state agency model (SAM) system and start issuing WIC benefits via EBT at the same time. The new SAM system, Crossroads, has a USDA FNS compliant universal interface that is transferrable to other states and supports all facets of state and local agency WIC operations, including food benefit issuance in states not yet using EBT, caseload management, clinic scheduling, and federal reporting to name a few. Crossroads also tracks basic biometric health data such as hemoglobin, weight and height to monitor participants' health.

Coordinating the implementation of Crossroads simultaneously with an EBT rollout required weekly calls between Conduent, VA WIC representatives and the MIS project contractor to ensure consistency, prompt resolution of any issues, and clarity of goals and deliverables.

Training was also needed to get retail employees familiar with the new EBT WIC system. Conduent conducted nine “town-hall” like training sessions across the state that were outside the contractual scope of work but helped to meet implementation standards and timelines. In retail locations that didn't have the proper technology, stand-beside devices were placed next to cash registers to ensure their participation and compliance with the new WIC EBT program.



The Results

The Virginia WIC program processes more than 67 million redemptions annually. By moving to an online system, participants automatically receive benefit updates and changes electronically. Now if a child has an allergic reaction to formula or some other food, the benefits on the card can be changed electronically without the participant having to visit the clinic to pick up new vouchers. WIC participants can also spread out redemptions throughout the month instead of having to redeem the entire check at one time.

The new WIC EBT program reduces the stigma associated with WIC participation by making WIC transactions seamless. Participants no longer have to pull out the WIC folder they were required to bring with them to the store that identified them as a WIC participant. With an EBT card, at most stores no one knows that a WIC transaction is occurring since WIC items and non-WIC items don't need to be separated. Participants can tender WIC items and use an alternate tender to pay the remaining balance in the same transaction.

The online system increases conveniences for the State too, enabling faster settlement, accurate reporting, approved product compliance, effective cost containment, and more efficient special formula ordering and distribution. The simultaneous rollout allowed for real-time benefit redemption tracking as well.

Not only was this the first simultaneous implementation of the new SAM system and EBT but the statewide rollout was also accelerated and completed over the course of three months rather than the originally scheduled six months.

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