

IMAGING AND WORKFLOW SOLUTION DRAMATICALLY IMPROVES COMPLAINT PROCESSING TIME WHILE MANAGING COSTS

FAST FACTS

CUSTOMER NAME	Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services – Consumer Rights and Services
INDUSTRY	Health and Human Services
LOCATION	Austin, TX
SOLUTION HIGHLIGHTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Converted DADS-CRS from paper to electronic filing system and created custom file structure • Freed up resources allowing re-purposing of staff to provide more support and to increase overall output • Reduced incoming requests for file transfers from hundreds of requests per week to zero
BENEFITS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to data by multiple users at once • Faster processing of complaints and incident intakes regarding the service delivery system are addressed in a timely manner • Increased staff productivity • Simple, cost-effective implementation

BUSINESS PROFILE

The Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) was established to administer long-term services and supports for people who are aging as well as for people with intellectual and physical disabilities. DADS licenses and regulates providers of these services, and administers the state’s Guardianship program. DADS began formal operations on Sept. 1, 2004.

The DADS mission is to provide a comprehensive array of aging and disability services, supports, and opportunities that are easily accessed in local communities.

The office of Consumer Rights and Services (CRS) was identified by DADS as its centralized source for the receipt of complaints by people who receive services from DADS, their family members, and the public.

The CRS section of DADS is responsible for Consumer Rights/Surrogate Decision Making programs, Complaint Intake, and Professional Review.

The mission of CRS is to provide efficient and effective services to all individuals and their family members by ensuring that their service options and complaints regarding the service delivery system are addressed in a timely manner.



CRS staff specializes in processing complaint and incident intake and providing program information assistance for the following:

- Home and Community-based Services program
- Texas Home Living Waiver program
- Consumer rights and program issues for individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities
- Nursing facilities
- Assisted living facilities
- Adult day care facilities
- Intermediate care facilities for persons with intellectual disabilities or related conditions, including public and private group homes and state supported living centers
- Home health agencies
- Hospice agencies
- Personal assistance services
- Unlicensed facilities
- All other community-based programs

DADS Regulatory Services (RS) is tasked with investigating complaints and incidents against DADS providers to ensure those entities are in compliance with regulatory requirements and that individuals residing in facilities or receiving DADS services from home health and hospice agencies are free from abuse, neglect and exploitation and that their rights are protected.

SUMMARY

Neubus created a customized electronic filing solution to help CRS process incoming complaints and incidents with a high degree of efficiency while reducing costs. The streamlined, digital process provides easier access to reports by multiple users, and dramatically reduces storage and processing time.

OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

CRS serves the State of Texas as the centralized division in DADS to receive, manage and prioritize complaints regarding DADS providers from individuals and their families, the public, advocates and other state agencies. CRS interacts with these stakeholders and DADS staff to ensure complaints and incidents are addressed in a timely manner.

Triaging and prioritizing complaints and incidents, archiving and sharing data with RS regional staff and other pertinent individuals in a timely manner are critical components to CRS' daily operation.

There are more than 4,200 LTC providers in the state of Texas, housing more than 150,000 individuals. CRS receives thousands of complaints and incidents monthly. Allegations include but are not limited to: neglect, abuse, care and services, environment, administration or other concerns regarding a provider's compliance with federal, state and local laws. Complaints are received primarily by phone but also include mail, email and fax. Complaint or incident intake reports range from three pages to hundreds of pages in length, creating significant challenges and resources for the management of a paper filing system.

CRS strives to facilitate rapid triage for each complaint or incident. The CRS process involves entering each complaint or incident intake into the DADS intake tracking system, followed by prioritizing each intake based on threat to health and safety. For less urgent incident intakes where a violation may have already resulted in corrective action by the facility itself, a Professional Review of a facility investigation report regarding the incident was often necessitated, requiring multiple team members to track and manage a paper report.

Complaints and incident intakes are sent to RS regional offices immediately when a provider's alleged non-compliance has created or allowed a present and on-going situation to protect individuals from serious harm, impairment or death. Intake data must be transferred rapidly and accurately with a traceable process to ensure operational integrity. There are eleven regional offices, and each location may have slightly unique protocols.

A number of additional data management issues existed within CRS. Requests from RS regional staff for attachments associated with a complaint or incident occurred frequently. By 2012, the Department was receiving numerous such requests each week, creating laborious and inefficient search and retrieval procedures characterized by delays and backlogs. In addition, the agency is required to retain all reports for 5 years, and even longer in certain situations.





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BUSINESS NEED

An increased volume of complaints and incidents coupled with staff and budget constraints necessitated a creative solution for CRS to maintain or improve its operational efficiency. Previously, all incoming complaints with attachments and provider self-reported incident investigation reports were captured into paper files that were archived in a central file room. Given the number of people requiring access to original documents and the slow process to retrieve and re-file reports, CRS experienced growing delays and backlogs.

“We were burdened with a slow, laborious file retrieval process,” described the Professional Review Unit (PRU) Manager for CRS. “The paper system and manual process introduced filing and tracking errors and was impossible to search quickly.”

Data retrieval delays were encountered which prolonged the time that documents were unavailable to other users. Previous and current month files were kept in temporary locations to ensure easier access, but these well-intended solutions created additional problems. Offices were crowded with file boxes and staff members had concerns about misplacements, tracking and inaccurate filing within the temporary system.

While CRS was receiving a growing number of incoming electronic reports, they did not have a formal file structure addressing both paper and electronic files. This created inconsistencies and a lack of confidence that files were complete and accurate. Even with electronic PDFs, file sizes were often too big to email to outside requestors; therefore, despite the efficiencies of electronic files, printed copies were faxed or mailed.

What was needed was an easy, cost-effective transition to an electronic file system. Such a conversion had not been successfully implemented before due to concerns about difficulties in scanning the large volume of incoming files, new costs associated with equipment and staffing, and complexity of training for the new digital process.

SOLUTION

In June 2012, CRS selected Neubus to develop and deploy a much-needed electronic filing system. Neubus team leaders first determined specific requirements of the Department's daily process. While dozens of incoming reports each day ranged in format and page length, a number of data fields were common to each report and could be consolidated into a simple user interface. Other inputs such as the typical document type, size, color or resolution were considered in order to optimize document scanner settings.

Based on these process requirements, Neubus developed a custom software 'dashboard' for its Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) system. When a new report is received, it is scanned (if paper) using a desktop scanner or uploaded (if electronic) to the ESD system and automatically assigned a unique file number. Basic contact information, date of complaint or incident and name of the facility in question are easily added into fields within the new file. Other input fields helpful to downstream processing include license number of the facility, intake type, and the region to which the facility belongs.

Since each new file is added directly to a central server, information is processed "real time," enabling immediate access and use of the documents across the State. With visibility by multiple users at once, the

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progress of each report is easily updated and communicated between multiple offices. Security within this digital system is of the highest stringency, including multiple levels of data protection on local computers and remote servers.

Implementation of the electronic filing system took shape through a 3-month pilot study where both paper and electronic files were supported. The new system only took minutes to learn, and efficiencies were immediately noticed at the start of the pilot period. The Neubus team worked closely with CRS staff during this trial to ensure that the process was efficient and continued to meet their objectives.

By the end of August 2012, the Department took the final step toward a completely electronic filing system. Support includes a help field within the ESD software that allows users to email a question to the Neubus team, auto-generating a support ticket for quick resolution. While Neubus remains part of an ongoing support structure, the new digital process is a turnkey imaging and document management solution that is easy to maintain and easy to learn for new staff.

"I knew we had reached a milestone of success when our internet service went down briefly and my team immediately complained about not having access to our Neubus data," the PRU Manager explained. "A 5-minute delay had become a nuisance, whereas before we could barely complete a file request in that time. With Neubus, our productivity increased dramatically, and so did our expectations."

Before the Neubus electronic filing system, CRS was sending more than 20,000 pages of paper files to a centralized file room each month. After implementing this powerful program, the CRS contribution to the file room was eliminated significantly.



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BENEFITS

Dramatically Increase Data Access

Electronic data allows immediate online access for multiple users at once. Searching for documents is simple and logical, and stakeholders outside the Department can directly access files. The PRU Manager noted that a significant amount of time and resources was previously spent managing provider incident investigation reports and responding to incoming requests from regional offices. With the Neubus system, incoming file requests have been completely eliminated and RS regional staff has immediate access to pertinent complaint attachments and provider investigation reports. For intakes requiring immediate triage and processing, there is no faster solution available on the market.

Improve Compliance and Patient Care

Having electronic files at your fingertips through computer access makes it is easy to visibly determine which files are present or absent within a particular report and allows CRS staff to see when a provider is out of compliance based on an absence of files. Access to critical records enables RS to take proactive efforts to bring providers into compliance, reducing the present or on-going threat of continued abuse or neglect of individuals.

Free Up Resources

Management of an entirely paper file system meant that a significant portion of each day was spent on file retrieval, tracking or re-filing. This labor-intensive process takes away from potentially more important work. Switching to a digital system enabled CRS to re-purpose its full-time employees to provide more support and to increase overall output.

Boost Productivity

“I enjoy watching my team tell new employees how great our Neubus electronic system is,” says the PRU Manager. “Our enthusiasm for this newly found efficiency is contagious, and sets the bar high for Department productivity.” The PRU Manager added that she and her team could easily track each worker’s productivity at a glance, a great productivity tool for employees and managers.