

Sector:
State and Local
Government

Solution:
Electronic disbursement of
WIC benefits

Client:
Michigan Department of
Community Health

Challenge:
Rising costs for paper processing
Stigma and inefficiency of
voucher system

Results:
Fast, secure funds delivery to participants
Lower costs and more comprehensive
information for DCH



>> The Bottom Line

Fed up with rising costs for paper-based disbursement of Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program benefits, the Michigan Department of Community Health needed an electronic solution. ACS worked closely with the Department to design the WIC Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program, helping participants obtain funds faster, and replacing the cumbersome paper process with fast, reliable, auditable electronic transactions. The WIC EBT card is easy-to-use and verification is automatic. The program puts benefits in participants' hands, and smiles on their faces.

**MICHIGAN WIC NEEDED LESS PAPER
AND BETTER DATA.**

ACS PUT IT ALL ON OUR CARD.

an ACS
>> BOTTOM LINE
CASE STUDY



130,000

With a successful county-level pilot completed, ACS and the Michigan Department of Community Health are in the process of rolling out the Michigan WIC EBT card to 130,000 families statewide.

THE CHALLENGE

The Michigan WIC program provides nutrition education and nutrition benefits to approximately 230,000 participants each month. Historically, these benefits have been redeemed at participating WIC stores via a paper-based coupon system. But the program was faced with rising costs, resource demands for vendor training and lost/stolen coupon followup, and the need for improved data and information management. Moving to an electronic solution was the answer. In 2005, ACS won a competitive bid to replace Michigan WIC's paper-based coupon benefits with an EBT card.

THE SOLUTION

The Michigan WIC EBT project is the first of its kind and is serving as a national model for other state WIC programs. After extensive design sessions with the state WIC staff, ACS designed and implemented a pilot WIC EBT program that operated in Jackson County for approximately 12 months. Through this pilot program, more than 3,000 WIC participants replaced their paper vouchers with the WIC EBT card.

With the successful pilot complete, the Michigan WIC EBT project is now being rolled out statewide. By February of 2009, all 230,000 participants in 130,000 families will use the WIC EBT card to access and redeem WIC benefits. Participants statewide will benefit from the ability to integrate their WIC shopping into a regular shopping trip, increasing convenience and eliminating the stigma commonly associated with using special coupons at the checkout.

WIC EBT also has benefits for the state of Michigan and authorized WIC vendors. Vendors are paid on a more timely basis, clerk training is reduced, and because the system automatically validates WIC-approved items, errors are caught at the check out lane instead of weeks later in an audit. Benefits for the state include cost reductions for eliminating paper coupon processing, reduced Treasury Department fees, and streamlined program administration. Also, ACS' online real-time system enhances data collection and analysis, making it easier for state administrators to more effectively manage budget dollars.



THE RESULTS

For participants, the card means easier shopping and faster access to funds. Benefits of the WIC EBT card program include:

- Simpler shopping for participants using WIC
- Improved data, increased accountability
- More timely payments to vendors
- Reduced effort for vendor staff as coupon bundling and mailing is eliminated
- Reduced time spent in the clinic by participants

"ACS has been user friendly, willing to work with us if there are any issues, and right on top of things."

Stephanie Horning, RD, WIC Coordinator,
Jackson County Health Department

"Pilot and ongoing rollout has been one of the smoothest new implementations we have done."

Gail VanNoller, Senior Systems Coordinator,
Meijer grocery stores

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