Vermont’s Choices for Care Wins

By Jack Penchoff

Vermont has the second fastest aging population in the nation and, like other states, faces the challenge of funding Medicaid services for its older citizens.

To address that challenge, Vermont has embarked on a bold program that creates more choices for the state and its Medicaid recipients.

Choices for Care is the only Medicaid program in the country that gives a state flexibility in managing Medicaid care.

The program’s innovative approach to serving its elderly population and expanding services earned recognition from an independent panel of judges who awarded Choices for Care The Council of State Governments’ 2006 Silver Society Award.

The program was established after the federal government granted Vermont an 1115 Demonstration Waiver, which allows the state to provide consumers greater choices in where they received care.

“Traditionally, Medicaid only had an open door to nursing homes but not home and community based care,” said Theresa Wood, deputy commissioner for the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living.

“We responded to what consumers’ choices are and that is a preference for home-based care. And the state wants to prepare for the advent of baby boomers and a burgeoning Medicaid population,” said Wood. “It’s a win-win for the state and the consumers.”

While the waiver gives Vermont greater flexibility in managing the care of its Medicaid recipients, it also places greater risk on the state. In exchange for the waiver, the state agreed to cap federal Medicaid funding for the next five years.

Vermont laid the foundation for this new program during the 1997-98 legislative session. That’s when legislators passed a law that directs any savings from lower nursing home costs be redirected to home- and community-based services.

“That’s revolutionary,” said Wood, “to have a state administration and legislature agree to language like that. It was one of the first instances where the money follows the person.”

Early indications are that the program is achieving its goals, saving money on nursing home placements and using the savings to expand services.

In the first year of the program, which ended Sept. 30, 2006, there were 156 fewer consumers in nursing homes, according to Wood.

“The resources from those fewer people in nursing homes served double the number we would have served in home-based and enhanced residential care,” she said.

“Ordinarily we serve 100 new people each year. The savings enabled us to serve 205.”

Developing the program not only required the collaboration of state government officials, it also needed the help of nursing home providers.

Wood and Lorraine Wargo, director of the department’s Individual Support Unit, believe other states can adopt a similar strategy.

“We had a task force that brought everyone to the table,” said Wargo.

The task force spent two years looking at long-term care issues and developing the Choices for Care model.

“There are concerns from nursing home providers,” said Wargo. “It’s important to get those players to the table early. They have to be there with you.”

It was also important to have community-based services in place. “They need to be there. You have to provide an alternative,” said Wargo.

Vermont’s Medicaid Program Stats

- 145,000 Covered Lives—25 percent of Vermont’s Population
- 51,200 Children—34 percent of Vermont’s Children
- $920 Million in FY 2006 Total Medicaid Expenditures
- Largest Insurer in Vermont—9,000 Enrolled Providers
Illinois River Mud Builds Chicago Park

By Mary Branham Dusenberry

It was, perhaps, the world’s biggest mud pie. Illinois state officials approved the mudslinging on Chicago slag fields—all in an effort to return displaced soil to the land on Lake Michigan.

The pilot project—Mud to Parks—is gaining national attention, and garnered Illinois a CSG Innovations Award for the Midwest region.

“We’ve got a real resource at the bottom of the river,” said Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn. “If we use our heads and common sense, we can help the river and at the same time, help other parts of our state and country.”

The slag field that served as a pilot project was the 573-acre U.S. Steel South Works redevelopment site on the south side of Chicago. Quinn has high hopes the program can be used in other areas, and said the state is in talks with Louisiana officials to take some of the fertile Illinois soil to the marshlands there.

Mud to Parks was the brainchild of Dr. John Marlin, a senior scientist with the Waste Management Research Center, a division of the Illinois Division of Natural Resources located at the University of Illinois.

“Like most of the Midwest, Illinois has always had, and probably always will have, a problem with sediment filling in reservoirs and backwaters on rivers,” Marlin said.

Marlin had worked as a student with professors who had modest success with using dredge material as topsoil next to Peoria Lake.

“The big problem,” he said, “is the farmland is so fertile next to the lake the farmers don’t need or want additional material.”

“There’s enough mud in Peoria Lake to fill a football field 10 and a half miles high,” he said. “It’s hard to place it locally.”

But upstream 168 miles, Chicago had an industrial site with very little soil. To recover that land using traditional methods would have meant many truckloads of soil scraped off farmland and construction sites would have to travel through urban areas.

Marlin’s plan was to dredge Peoria Lake and ship the mud by barge. But even that would require new techniques. Dredge material is typically 90 percent water and 10 percent solid, so Marlin said the hydraulic dredging technique wouldn’t work.

“What we’ve been looking at are high solid dredging techniques that bring up mud rather than a soupy mixture,” he said. Using that mechanical dredging technique, Marlin said, workers were able to get “pure mud out of the lake instead of a little bit of mud mixed with water.”

That mud, with a consistency of pudding, was shipped by barge directly to the Chicago slag field, where it was placed in mining trucks and taken to the site. There it went through a process of weathering and movement. After a few months, a bulldozer spread the soil two to four feet deep, and the area was seeded with rye grass.

Today the area is filled with plant life.

“We essentially reclaimed that area by slabbing mud all over it,” Quinn said.

Quinn’s office in 2004 granted $75,000 to WMRC for the project. He got involved after hearing Marlin’s presentation. He said it required a change in how dredge material is considered.

“What are your resources?” he said. “Coal or oil or soybeans or corn. We have all of those, but maybe, right before our very eyes, is a resource we’ve overlooked for decades. We have to deal with the legacy of sedimentation at the bottom of the river. If we can use common sense and ingenuity, we can help a lot of our country build parks, do many positive environmental things with this resource.”

“The Illinois River mud is the best you can find,” he said. “Our mud is your treasure.”

To find out more about Mud to Parks, visit www.wmrc.uiuc.edu/index_sections/about_us/2005_annual_report/mud_to_parks.htm.

Fast Facts

- Mud to Parks was created to address severe sedimentation on the Illinois River and its backwater lakes.
- The program takes a displaced resource—mud in the bottom of the waterways—and moves it to a place where it can be used—such as a Chicago park on Lake Michigan.
- The lieutenant governor’s office granted $75,000 to the Waste Management Research Center for program startup costs.
- The program is funded through grants and general research funds.
Kansas, Counties Collaborate on Drug Purchases

By Mary Branham Dusenberry

In one Kansas county, a 5 mg tablet of Zyprexa cost $5.18. That same tablet would cost $11.14 in another county.

That was before Kansas state and county officials got together to purchase prescription medicines in a collaborative effort.

“Pharmaceutical costs for jail inmates and state prisoners were becoming a budget buster for the state and counties,” said Randall Allen, executive director of the Kansas Association of Counties. “We came together at the table around a common need. … There were data available to describe the devastating financial impact of higher costs.”

In December 2004, the Kansas Department of Corrections negotiated with its contract health care provider, Correct Care Solutions, to offer bulk pharmaceutical pricing to state and local governments through CCS’s pharmaceutical provider, Diamond Pharmaceuticals.

While the state has seen no financial gain, according to Viola Riggin, contract consultant with the Kansas Department of Corrections, the program has saved more than $7 million across the state, with small rural counties saving as much as $6,000 a month and larger metropolitan areas saving more than $200,000 a month. The program—the Kansas Pharmaceutical Collaborative—will be recognized with a CSG Innovations Award for the Midwest region.

Betsy Gillespie, director of the Shawnee County Jail, said there are 95 county jails in Kansas “and there is no centralized system for county jails to talk to each other and have someone who can provide advice.”

Enter TeamTech Inc., a Kansas-based consulting firm.

Kathleen Harnish-Doucet, a TeamTech facilitator, said Gov. Kathleen Sebelius wanted to streamline state government.

“All services really are local and if you were going to truly streamline government, you have to work through the state to the local level,” Harnish-Doucet said.

It was at the first state-county Health and Human Services Summit that officials picked a project to demonstrate collaboration does work. County representatives discussed the ever-rising cost of providing health care to inmates, according to the state’s Innovations program application. The population of prisoners with mental health issues has increased significantly in the past few years due to the closing of a state mental hospital, according to Allen.

Mark Zilner, CEO of Diamond Pharmaceuticals, said some Kansas counties have seen savings up to 60 percent over pricing at local pharmacies.

But that success wouldn’t have happened if the right people hadn’t been at the table for negotiations.

“There’s way too much history on having the county and state in adversarial roles,” Gillespie said. She credits the governor for setting the tone for discussion.

“When this took off was when the state got up from the chairs around the tables and the counties sat down and the state gave assistance,” said Joel Wright, a team facilitator with TeamTech. “A lot of people had to visualize their roles differently,” said John Waltner, special projects director for Harvey County, Kans.

Harnish-Doucet said for a successful collaborative government effort within the state, “you’ve just got to get out and meet people.”

Riggin said a key was getting information out about the success of the program. Zilner said it was not a “high pressure sale” to the counties, but his company did a cost analysis and provided counties with the information. Some county officials, skeptical at first, eventually signed up to participate.

Waltner, who is also mayor of Hesston, Kans., said the Collaborative “seems to point to a way local governments can get good information to make good decisions that have to do with the specific things they’re dealing with.”

Harnish-Doucet said the state will look at other areas where state and local governments can work in a collaborative manner.

To learn more about the Kansas Pharmaceutical Collaborative, visit www.accesskansas.org.

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Fast Facts

- The Kansas Pharmaceutical Cooperative has saved the state’s local jails more than $7 million since it was implemented in December 2004.
- The Cooperative uses the state’s bargaining power with a private contractor to negotiate savings to smaller agencies (state and local governments).
- The program requires no additional funding at the state or local level.
- Colorado has adopted the method and utilized the Kansas Department of Corrections bid structure to offer the same discounts to its local governments.
Minnesota Uses Design Build-Best Value for Road Project

Minnesota hit the trifecta with its ROC 52 road project. “Usually in the triangle of safety, quality and cost, you can pick two of the three, but you can’t have all three,” said Terry Ward, ROC 52 project manager with the Minnesota Department of Transportation. “We were able to deliver all three with overwhelming public support.”

The state used a design build-best value delivery method in its 11 Miles in 1,000 Days reconstruction project of 11 miles of highway near Rochester and the world-renowned Mayo Clinic. Highway 52, nicknamed ROC 52 because it runs through Rochester, is the principle route between Rochester and the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

“It cuts right through the heart of the Rochester community,” Ward said. “It’s really the economic engine of southeastern Minnesota.”

The project was needed to reduce congestion, improve safety, replace deficient bridges and pavement and eliminate the confusing mixed frontage road system, according to the state’s application for the CSG Innovations Award.

Ward said the project was originally set up for completion in 11 years through 15 stages. But, he said, based on funding and the new delivery method, the project was completed within three and a half years.

The Design-Build method speeds the project by allowing construction to start soon after the design is begun, instead of waiting for full design completion. It also saves money, according to Minnesota’s Innovations application, when future inflationary costs are factored in the analysis.

The total project cost $239 million. It marked the first time Minnesota used the Design Build-Best Value approach.

Ward said some one concern some states have is that nonlocal or nontraditional contractors will take business from the local contracting community.

“Our contractor used local materials, local contractors and local labor to complete ROC 52,” he said. “It looked very similar to a traditional design build project as far as companies work on the project.”

To learn more about 11 Miles in 1,000 Days, visit www.roc52.com/.

—Mary Branham Dusenberry

Photo Credits:
Photos of the planning groups for the Kansas Pharmaceutical Collaborative on pages 17 and 18 were provided by Kathleen Harnish-Doucet, a TeamTech facilitator for the state.
Photos of Illinois Mud to Parks Program, pictured at different stages in the process on the magazine cover and pages 17 and 18, were provided by Dr. John Marlin, a senior scientist with the Waste Management Research Center.
Kentucky Program Cuts Suicide Rate in Jails

By Laura Coleman

When a person is arrested in Kentucky, it is likely that the arresting officer will ask him three critical questions to assess the need for treatment for mental illness.

That’s just the first step in Kentucky’s Jail Mental Health Crisis Network, administered by the state’s Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services. The program boasts an 80 percent reduction in suicides in Kentucky jails during fiscal year 2006.

It is one of eight national winners of CSG’s Innovations Awards.

The program, which began in July 2004, involves a four-step process to clearly define protocols for integrating mental health services into state detention centers, said Connie Milligan, regional director of the program and director of intake and emergency services for Bluegrass Regional Mental Health-Mental Retardation Board. Milligan and Ray Sabbatine, a consultant to the mental health-mental retardation board and a former jailer in Lexington, helped develop the program.

First, an arresting officer administers a questionnaire related to behavioral indicators of suicide, mental illness or negative reactions to the arrestee’s charge. The answers to these questions can warrant an immediate call to the Telephonic Triage Line, described below. The booking/screening officer then administers a second questionnaire.

The availability of a toll-free Telephonic Triage Line that offers 24-hour response by licensed mental health care professionals at Bluegrass Regional Mental Health-Mental Retardation Board is the second component. A mental health care professional uses a mental health and suicide risk assessment instrument to identify a level of risk related to current and potential red flags for suicidal thoughts or mental illness.

“The triage does a risk assessment, then determines a risk rate for the inmate,” said Rita Ruggles, the program’s administrator at Kentucky’s Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services.

That risk rate is tied to jail housing and management protocols. Triage professionals then contact a community healthcare provider who must respond within a certain amount of time. For example:

- **Low risk level**: The individual can be housed in the general population.
- **Moderate risk level**: An individual needs further assessment.
- **Critical risk level**: An individual is actively trying to take his life. Four-point restraints are no longer acceptable because of safety risks. A local mental health care provider must respond within three hours to evaluate the person face-to-face.
- **High risk level**: A local mental health care provider must respond within 12 hours. Safe or single-cell housing is used along with frequent supervision.

Ruggles said that in fiscal year 2006, there were 8,989 calls to the triage line and 45 percent of calls indicated a need for face-to-face evaluation. In 75 percent of calls, the person experienced at least one symptom of mental illness.

Milligan said 45 percent of people who received a phone assessment also receive face-to-face assessment.

“If they need follow-up services, they are encouraged to go for them,” she said. Milligan said the program will eventually evolve so clinicians will develop a release plan for those individuals.

Approximately 80 percent of jails in the state participate in the network.

The Jail Mental Health Crisis Network is easily transferable to other states, Ruggles said.

“We could actually set up this 1-800 line to be a national line so the cost to replicate the program in another state would be to pay for their service on the line,” she said. “Then the state would have to have the availability of mental health professionals to provide ground response at the local level.”

For more information on the Jail Mental Health Crisis Network, visit http://mhmr.ky.gov/kdmhmr/default.asp.

Fast Facts:

- Implemented by legislative action in 2004 to cut down on suicides in Kentucky’s jails and provide better services for arrestees with mental illnesses.
- Program costs: $2.2 million annually.
- Funded by a $5 increase in court costs in both district and circuit courts.
- As part of the program, mental health professionals go into jails to provide services to arrestees.
Since Texas’ Money Follows the Person program came into effect four and a half years ago, the state’s residents housed in Medicaid-certified nursing facilities have more options. “Money Follows the Person is an opportunity for nursing facility residents to access Medicaid-based community-based programming without having to go on a waiting list,” said Marc S. Gold, manager of the Promoting Independence Initiative. “People can go home and the state will pay for services to be brought to their home or into assisted living or adult foster care.”

Gold said the reason there are waiting lists is because by definition, nursing facility services are an entitlement under Medicaid. Community-based care, however, is not an entitlement. The program garnered Texas one of eight CSG Innovations Awards. “States can limit the number of community placements if they choose. Then people go on waiting lists to get those types of services,” said Gold. “This program allows money allocated for nursing facilities to go with them when they leave the institutional setting.”

In 2001, Texas’ legislature attached a rider to the Department of Human Services’ appropriation. Then, in the following three years, state officials developed rules and policies for the program and received a grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to develop transition teams to identify obstacles to transition and develop solutions. In 2005, the 79th legislative session codified the bill and the concepts were reinforced by executive order.

From Sept. 1, 2001, through Dec. 31, 2005, 10,156 individuals have transferred from nursing facilities into the community. Of that number, 5,597 individuals remain in the community. “This has had a tremendous impact on the aging population, with approximately two-thirds of the transferred population over age 65,” Gold wrote in his application for the Innovations Award. “There are significant numbers of persons in their 80s and 90s and even 12 residents over 100 who have transferred. Of major import is the concept of system change. Texas is a leader in the rebalancing of its long-term care.” This program is cost-neutral for Texas, said Gold. Money Follows the Person is funded through current Medicaid appropriations and took just three months to implement. Providing supplemental services, such as relocation specialists to help identify nursing facility residents who want to transfer, costs $1.3 million annually.

“I think we won the award because as I pointed out during our presentation, this was a new idea. It generated widespread support among advocates, consumers and government officials,” said Gold. “It has had an immediate impact in quality of life for aging individuals or those with physical disabilities. It also helped promote other public policy supported innovation and is one of the bases for the federal law of the same nature.”

According to Gold, states seeking to implement policies like Money Follows the Person, must consider:

- The occupancy rate of Medicaid-certified nursing facilities.
- Having the appropriate 1915(c) waiver or other Medicaid community-based programs in place.
- The state’s home health provider network.
- Identifying and collaborating with appropriate stakeholders.
- Financing concerns.
- Resistance by nursing facility providers.
- The development of supportive services, such as relocation specialists and community coordinating groups.

“We are very proud of the program. It’s definitely kicking off strong,” said Gold. “It’s become part of our public consciousness in Texas; it’s become old hat because we assume it. It helps get people back into the community because that is the future of long-term care.”

For more information on the Money Follows the Person program, visit www.dads.state.tx.us/business/pi/index.html.
North Carolina Program Brings Immigrants in Compliance

When a state experiences a 400 percent increase in immigration in a 15 year period—and a large portion of the percentage are illegal immigrants—chances are, that state is losing revenue through unpaid taxes.

Enter North Carolina’s Guest Worker Compliance Program, administered by the state Department of Revenue. It was selected as an alternate in the South region for CSG’s Innovations Awards.

The program works to educate the public about tax policies and compliance with revenue laws. The program’s main components include recruiting bilingual employees, translating key information, public outreach and education, and enforcement of revenue laws.

“We work very closely with community-based organizations. What we’re trying to do here is enforce the laws, and when you’re dealing with taxes people are focused on money and what’s being lost and gained,” said Alan Felton, North Carolina assistant secretary of revenue and tax compliance.

“But we look at it as an effort to bring immigrants in compliance with U.S. and North Carolina law. We try to target areas like the Catholic church, state fair and seminars to get our message out,” he said. “We don’t get involved with the immigration status but what we’re saying is, if you live in North Carolina and work in North Carolina, you have a tax obligation and we are going to enforce that.”

The program has recently gone live with a mini data warehouse.

“We’ve already uncovered lots of data that will show lots of compliance problems,” said Felton.

He offered this example: Under federal laws contract workers get paid by 1099 forms. However, many immigrants are paid by 1099s, but do not have Social Security numbers. With information like this, the mini data warehouse has uncovered more than $300 million in lost state revenue through untaxed income.

“We found one person who was paid a million and half dollars with no taxes paid,” said Felton. “And we never would have known it without the data warehouse.”

The program, which began in 2004, costs the state $500,000 annually, and is funded through a budget allocation from the General Assembly.

For more information on the Guest Worker Compliance Program, visit www.dornnc.com.

—Laura Coleman
In most states, when families apply for government services, they fill out numerous applications, answer duplicated questions and spend more time than necessary. The Utah Clicks/Universal Application System (UAS) has made this process more customer-friendly.

The program, which was launched statewide in May 2005 as a partnership between Utah State University and the state department of health, provides access to a Web-based intra-agency application process designed to help families apply for multiple programs.

By filling out an online application, families can apply for programs such as Medicaid, WIC, CHIP and Head Start. Because UAS allows families to complete and submit paperwork online for multiple programs, the need to visit multiple offices is minimized. The application is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is available in English and Spanish.

For Lois Bloebaum, the manager of the Reproductive Health Program at the Utah Department of Health, a program like this was a dream come true.

“Ninety percent of the credit goes to USU. We had been dreaming that wouldn’t it be great if women could access an application from their home or business computers or public libraries where they could do this quick screening process online and facilitate earlier entry to prenatal care,” she said. “The screening process asks families questions that are shared by numerous programs so they don’t have to fill out four applications.”

Adrienne Akers, senior researcher for Utah State University, said families indicated that they didn’t know where to get the services they needed, and this provided the impetus for change.

“Families said that they call programs different things in different states, they couldn’t get out of work when the offices were open,” she said.

Akers said the federal government recognized families’ struggles with these issues, and offered grants so states could work from within for a remedy. The initial grant provided $150,000 a year for four years. Approximately half the funds went into the development of the Utah Clicks technology.

Akers said the prototype for the program is sound for several reasons.

“Ours was done at a reasonably low price and ours was successful,” she said. She said that the creators of the software exercised good principles of software development. “They automated those parts of the process that made sense as opposed to automating all the parts,” she said. “They didn’t try to remove the human element all together.

“We found out that 55 percent of people applying said they are applying from home,” said Akers. “If you look at national statistics, the number of people who have Internet access is growing. Everybody knows how to use the Internet.”

On the application for the Innovations Award, Akers said 97 percent of users indicated they would recommend Utah Clicks to other families, contributing to the success of promoting the program only through word-of-mouth and newspaper articles.

Bloebaum said while there were challenges in implementation, she thinks the program would be easily transferable to other states. Texas and Pennsylvania also offer online application processes.

“I think that we have sort of been the trailblazers and worked out a lot of the process, so I can definitely see it,” she said.

To learn more about Utah Clicks, visit https://utahclicks.org/index.cfm.

**Utah Clicks to Make Applications Simpler**

By Laura Coleman

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**Fast Facts**

- Utah Clicks allows citizens to use an online application to apply for government services.
- Services like Medicaid, WIC and Head Start participate in the program.
- Start-up costs for the program were funded through a federal grant that allocated $150,000 annually for four years.
‘Brokers’ Save Washington Interpreter Services

By Mary Branham Dusenberry

Better quality, less cost.
That’s what Washington experienced after it implemented the Spoken Language Brokered Interpreter Services in January 2003. The program earned Washington one of eight national CSG Innovations awards.

Thomas R. Gray, manager of the Office of Transportation and Interpreter Services, said the program—which provides interpreter services for Washington’s estimated 160,000 Limited English Proficient Medicaid clients—has saved the state $1 million a month.

The move to implement a “brokered” service also saved the program. Gray said the legislature had cut the program from its proposed budget, but reinstated it after the new model was proposed.

“We saved more than double what we were required to save under the legislation,” Gray said. “In the first six months, we were supposed to save $2.6 million, and we saved over $5 million. In the following biennium, we were supposed to save $12 million and we saved over $24 million.”

The interpreter service was moved within state government, which implemented a brokerage model similar to the state’s medical transportation service. That means the interpreter services are scheduled through a broker, which serves as a “gatekeeper,” Gray said. The broker reviews requests for a medical interpreter, as well as the services rendered to ensure the state’s Medicaid program is billed correctly for services.

Before this program began in 2003, medical providers would contact an agency, which would send an interpreter to the provider at the time of the Medicaid client’s appointment. The bill would be submitted to the agency, which would then submit the bill to the state for payment.

“An interpreter could generate a lot of bills and it could go through the system without appropriate oversight,” Gray said. “There really was no gatekeeper function in paying the bills. We were doing prepayment review. You can only call medical providers to verify so many appointments (before it becomes a burden for them).

“Basically, there were a lot of extra billings being generated that we didn’t believe were appropriate,” Gray said. “The amount of charges seemed to be exaggerated.”

The brokers now ensure that the clients served through the program are Medicaid clients, and that the billing is submitted correctly, according to Gray. The same call center infrastructure brokers used covers both the medical transportation and interpreter services, cutting costs for both programs, he said.

Gray said the new system allows for sanctions of interpreters “if they do anything we don’t believe is appropriate. We have a built-in mechanism to monitor the quality of the services to make sure they’re appropriate.”

The broker also can increase resources by recruiting more medical interpreters. That’s important, Gray said, because Washington has long been a top relocation spot for new immigrants to the U.S.

“We really believe in this model because it’s really worked for us,” Gray said.

He said other states have contacted Washington to gather information about the program. Gray recommends other states considering interpreter services for Medicaid clients should make sure there is a gatekeeper function. “Make sure the services are high quality and are provided appropriately,” he said.

Washington requires medical and social service interpreters to be certified, through a state testing service.

“The federal law says you have to ensure effective communications,” Gray said. “To do it just because of that limits the program. The real issue is when people understand what they’re being told medically, we believe we get better medical outcomes.

“We also believe we will save more money,” he said. “If people have better medical outcomes, they’re not going to the emergency room as much. We’re not paying out unnecessary money for medical care. It really is the best of all worlds.”

To learn more about the Spoken Language Brokered Interpreter Services, visit https://fortress.wa.gov/dshs/maa/InterpreterServices/.

Fast Facts

- The Spoken Language Brokered Interpreter Services established strict controls over the scheduling process for medical interpreter services.

- Washington is the only state to use a “brokerage model” for providing interpreter services for Medicaid clients.

- The Spoken Language Brokered Interpreter Services has increased quality, lowered costs, decreased complaints and is considered a model for the delivery of other services.
Oregon Schools Strive for Energy Efficiency

Oregon didn’t have a stick, so it used a carrot.

“In Oregon, each school district passes a bond measure to build a school,” said Betty Merrill, manager of Building Technologies with the Oregon Department of Energy. “There is no central approval.”

Since the state couldn’t require use of better energy efficient systems (the stick), it offered a carrot: the **High Performance Schools Program**—which provides education, grants and free technical assistance to K–12 school districts for the design and construction of high performance schools.

Not only do these schools save 20 percent more energy than a standard building, “because of the integrated design process, the school district ends up with a school that has more daylighting, better acoustics and improved indoor air quality so it enhances the learning environment,” Merrill said.

The state Department of Energy provides $50,000 grants to school districts, as well as technical staff who work with districts on everything from orientation of the building on site, determining uses of different spaces in the building and the use of techniques and materials to enhance the sustainability features in the building.

Merrill said states interested in a similar program should adopt a goal of developing high performance schools statewide.

In Oregon, 12 schools designed and constructed HPS, and Merrill said 14 more schools will be built in Oregon, provided that districts approve the bonds.

Sustainable buildings, Merrill said, are important for school districts. “If your utility rates are ratcheting up 10 percent a year, it can make a huge difference,” she said.

The average efficiency above code for the HPS in Oregon is above 30 percent, with one school reporting its efficiency as 53 percent above code, according to the program’s Innovations application.

“It’s a fiscal issue,” Merrill said. “You can put the money into electric bills or you can put that money into classrooms.”

For more information on the High Performance Schools Program, visit [www.oregon.gov/ENERGY/](http://www.oregon.gov/ENERGY/).

—Mary Branham Dusenberry

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Photo Credits:
Photos of Washington’s Office of Transportation and Interpreter Services and the call center for the state’s Spoken Language Brokering Services, on pages 22 and 23, are courtesy of Tom Gray, chief of the office.
When troubled families walk into the **New Haven Regional Children’s Probate Court**, they are entering a system dedicated to dealing with their unique problems.

The court is a model of interbranch cooperation among the executive, judicial and legislative branches of Connecticut state government. That collaboration earned the court recognition as one of eight national winners of CSG’s 2006 Innovations Awards.

The probate court system in Connecticut operated with the same structure for 300 years. Nearly every town has an elected probate court judge to handle general estate proceedings and an increasing case load of guardianship and custody matters. That’s 123 separate courts.

Things began to change in 2003 when Casey Family Services, a program of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, conducted a study of the state’s probate court system.

The study concluded that there were few support and mental health services for families involved in the probate system; there was a lack of timely or clear communication from social workers to the probate court; and there was no monitoring of families after guardianship decisions were made.

“We had information, but not the in-depth information we have now,” said Judge Frank J. Forgione of the North Branford Probate Court and administrative judge of the New Haven Regional Children’s Probate Court.

Researchers, academics and judicial experts developed a plan for the first regional probate court to address the concerns raised by the report. In 2004, the Connecticut General Assembly authorized the pilot program in the New Haven region. In 2005, legislators authorized six more regional children’s probate courts.

The New Haven court was designed to cover all children’s probate matters in 10 towns and cities. The region mirrors the Department of Children and Family Services region. The DCF investigates and provides information for the courts.

The regional court also hired four masters’ level social workers to monitor and follow up with families.

The regional court also allows caseloads to be more evenly among judges, said Forgione. Before the regional court was established, judges in the small towns surrounding New Haven might handle a dozen cases in a year. Meanwhile, the New Haven probate judge was dealing with 50 or 60 in a month. Now, all cases in the region are evenly divided.

The reorganization into regions allows the court system to be more effective in placing children with family members.

“We take the teamwork approach,” said Forgione. “We look at a family network and try to find someone in the family for an appropriate placement.”

In one case, for example, a woman petitioned the court for guardianship of her 16-year-old sister. The sisters shared the same mother but different fathers. When the 16-year-old’s mother died, she lived with her father in New York. The father was subsequently in an auto accident and while hospitalized was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease.

The older sister wanted guardianship so she could enroll her younger sibling in a Connecticut school.

The girl was 16 and only in the ninth grade. The probate court helped the teenager with her placement needs and provided the sisters with a list of Alzheimer’s support groups for teens.

The court is also working with the family to find counseling for the girl to deal with the grief from losing her parents and the adjustments she has had to undergo in her new home environment.

An evaluation of the 1,855 cases handled during the court’s first year concluded:

- Children were safer, with no reported cases of abuse or neglect;
- Placements were stable with all children still with their court-assigned guardians, even though two-thirds of those children had previously been through multiple placements;
- Children’s well-being had improved with an increase in grades, better behavior in school and involvement in community activities.

Forgione credits the interbranch cooperation with helping make the courts a success.

“We fostered interagency relationships,” he said. “We nurtured that. It was no small deal.”

To find out more about New Haven Regional Children’s Probate Court, visit [www.jud.state.ct.us/probate](http://www.jud.state.ct.us/probate).
Affordable housing for low-income New Jersey residents is in short supply. And for those who are disabled, the supply is even shorter.

High housing costs in the Garden State, verified by the most recent U.S. Census figures which show New Jersey has the highest housing costs in the nation, intensify the problem.

To help overcome those barriers for state residents, officials designed the New Jersey Housing Resource Center to match an individual’s housing needs with available units. While other states have online housing clearinghouses to help residents find affordable housing, New Jersey expanded the concept to give low-income residents greater choices. The service also provides disabled residents as many as 21 disability related search criteria.

The program is a cooperative effort of the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Authority; the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Disability Services; and the New Jersey Housing the Mortgage Finance Agency. In addition, those agencies reached out to United Way of New Jersey. Residents without computer access can use United Way’s information call center to access the Resource Center.

Because of expanded search capabilities on the Web site and the collaboration among agencies to get the project online in June 2005, the program was selected as one of eight national winners of 2006 CSG’s Innovations Awards.

“Finding affordable housing is tough,” said Susan Bass Levin, commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. “The Housing Resource Center makes it easier with the click of a button.”

The resource center depends on technology and interactive features to provide low-income and disabled residents the help they need. But it’s customer service and creative ideas that make the program work.

Landlords and property owners list their available units for free. Then, consumers can search for all units in a chosen community and narrow choices down to categories such as “doorways that are 32 inches or wider” and have “kitchen counters with a minimum knee clearance of 27 inches.”

Homebuyers also have the option of refining searches with more than 90 criteria, including the Median Family Income calculator to help search for housing by income. Each unit is profiled on the Web site with a photo, map and accessibility.

“We update it every day,” said Levin. “It only works if it’s updated.”

In the first year of the program, potential homebuyers performed more than 2 million searches. Thirty-three percent of the 8,000 units advertised on the Web site featured at least one accessibility feature.

“I think it is important that having agencies on the same page is real and not a cliche,” said Levin. “It’s difficult enough to find affordable housing without government making it harder.”

A grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—the Real Choice Systems Change Grant—funded the program in its first year. This fiscal year, the program’s $227,000 annual budget is funded by contributions from the three cooperating agencies.

Levin said her department has had positive feedback from those looking for housing, property owners and public housing administrators.

“When a project like this works,” she said, “it makes you feel good about government.”

To learn more about the New Jersey Housing Resource Center, visit www.state.nj.us/dca/hmfa.
New York Battles Fraud Against Immigrants

Immigrants are easy prey for scam artists. New immigrants are often unfamiliar with the laws, culture and sometimes the language. In New York State, the Consumer Protection Board and the Governor’s Citizenship have joined forces to deliver information to immigrants about potential fraud.

New York has nearly 4 million immigrants, with more than 20,000 immigrants each from 27 countries.

In response to complaints about dishonest immigration consultants who make false promises that end up costing immigrants thousands of dollars and cause harm to their immigration status, the Consumer Protection Board and the Governor’s Citizenship Unit developed New York Immigration Fraud Awareness and Prevention, a program to reach immigrants through community-based organizations.

The program was selected as an alternate in the East for CSG’s 2006 Innovations Awards.

The program is designed to help immigrants identify common scams and provide helpful tips to immigrants when they are searching for information and guidance. This information is provided in more than 18 languages through a toll-free hotline funded by the Bureau of Refugee and Immigration Affairs, and directly to immigrants through community-based organizations, in collaboration with citizenship services providers under contract with BRIA. This creative approach has proven to be particularly effective in providing important information directly to the most vulnerable consumers.

Several firms claiming to assist immigrants were shut down as a result of the program. In one instance, a company called New Vision was closed when the state determined it was selling phony IDs to immigrants from an office in the Empire State Building.

In another case working with immigrant organizations, the state helped federal officials investigate a Florida-based organization, Haitian American Community Organization. That company filed more than 10,000 applications for work permits and driver’s licenses, many of which were fraudulent, according to a federal indictment handed up this year. The organization charged individuals $450 apiece and netted more than $3 million, according to federal authorities. Most of the work-permit applications were fraudulent and denied.

To learn more about Immigration Fraud Awareness and Prevention, visit www.nysconsumer.gov.

—Jack Penchoff
Innovations Awards Finalists by Region

**eastern**
- Connecticut’s New Haven Regional Children’s Probate Court
- Delaware’s Foster Care Reform in Delaware
- Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles Evidence of Insurance Online Submittal
- New Jersey’s Career Ladders
- New Jersey Helps
- New Jersey Housing Resource Center HRC
- New York’s Home Performance with ENERGY STAR
- New York’s Immigration Fraud Awareness and Prevention
- New York’s The Leadership Academy
- Rhode Island’s Governor’s Fiscal Fitness Program

**midwestern**
- Illinois’ Mud to Parks
- Iowa’s CRM Billing Project
- Kansas Pharmaceutical Collaborative
- Kansas’ Shawnee County Re-Entry Program
- Michigan Timely Application and Permit Service
- Minnesota’s 11 Miles in 1000 Days
- Ohio’s Multi Agency Radio Communications System

**southern**
- Georgia’s Commission for a New Georgia
- Kentucky’s Jail Mental Health Crisis Network
- Kentucky’s Promise Not to Tell
- Mississippi’s Supervision Fee Agent Collection Program
- North Carolina’s Guest Worker Compliance Program
- North Carolina’s Sharing Our Stories – Cultural Connections
- Texas’s Money Follows the Person
- Virginia’s Council on Virginia’s Future
- West Virginia’s Medicaid Health Improvement Demonstration Project

**western**
- Arizona Hiring Gateway
- Colorado’s Greening State Government
- Hawaii’s Supporting Employment Empowerment (SEE) Program: SEE Hawaii Work
- New Mexico’s Tempo (DD/MI Collaborative Project)
- Oregon’s High Performance Schools Program
- Utah’s Utah Clicks/Universal Application System
- Washington’s Spoken Language Brokered Interpreter Services
- Washington’s Statewide Integrated Intelligence System and the Washington Joint Analytical Center (WAJAC)