

BENEFITS APPLICATION PORTAL

by Comprehensive Community Action Program

Region 1 • Cranston, RI
comcap.org



Technology • COVID Response

INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

The Benefits Application Portal was created to allow individuals and families in our community a way to apply for services such as food, utility, and housing assistance without an increased risk of COVID-19 exposure and spread.

Via email, Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP) links customers to a self-service portal which allows them to apply for programs. On the landing page, there is a welcome message explaining the process and expected timeline.

On the Register tab, the customer enters their name, email, DOB, household size, annual income, gender, and zip code. They will also be asked to create a password. Once the information is entered, the individual will hit the register button. An email with an ID number is sent to the customer.

Next, the customer chooses what they are applying for and will be asked a few prescreening questions. Once the prescreen questions have been answered and they are found to be eligible, the intake process begins. Before starting the intake, they will be asked to electronically sign.

Intake begins with an assessment page, where the customer is asked a series of yes or no questions addressing housing, nutrition, utilities, food, mental health. The next screen is the family composition page, where the customer enters all household members and uploads supporting identification documents. The next step of the application process includes entering household income for each family member.



The customer is then prompted to upload documents verifying the reported income. Should the customer have no income or child support to report, program forms are available on this page to download and sign. Lastly, the customer is prompted to upload their utility bills for LIHEAP or a lease/Five-Day Demand for rental.

Once submitted, the agency is notified that an application has been completed. A staff member retrieves the application and supporting documents to check for completion. If the applicant is missing documents or skipped a screen, the staff member contacts them by phone to let them know what is missing. The client can then return to the Benefits Application Portal and enter or upload the missing information.

LOCAL NEED ADDRESSED BY INITIATIVE

The Benefits Application Portal gives families greater access to services and helps them identify resources. The Portal also addresses the circumstances of

COVID-19 and increases access to services by allowing customers to digitally complete applications and determine eligibility for programs and services.

ROLE OF CSBG FUNDS

Funding utilized for the startup of this project was derived from CSBG CARES Act. CARES Act funding has financed administrative fees, implementation, data support, and further training necessary to sustain the Benefits Application Portal.

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

The initiative's primary focus was to increase agency capacity in order to meet the rising needs of individuals and families within our community. The economic downfall of COVID-19 created more challenges for families experiencing financial hardship, including outsized barriers to adjusting to the demands of the pandemic: stay home orders, working from home, and virtual learning for children.

Comprehensive Community Action Program saw an opportunity to change the way we served our customers by implementing a secure online portal where individuals could apply for services, upload necessary documents, and electronically sign applications from their computer or phone. The Benefits Application Portal allows individuals and families to connect to services without having to leave the safety of home.

EVIDENCE-BASED OUTCOMES

As of 4/22/2021 we have received approximately 300 new applications through the portal. On March 24th, the portal reported 98,361 requests from 4,595 distinct IP addresses and handled 772 distinct client registrations. This portal was launched to continue service delivery during a global pandemic and a time of uncertainty. Qualitative data has informed us that a large portion of these clients may not have applied for these services if it meant having to leave their homes.

EQUITY LENS

The system currently has assessments and applications in both Spanish and English. As the system is being rolled out, it will be easy to navigate and available in multiple languages based on population and area. Tech support is also available. After a tech support request, the agency is then alerted so that staff can further assist with user issues.

CUSTOMER VOICE

We document and follow up on customer issues, working closely with software developers to address and correct them in a timely fashion. During our initial contact with customers, we ask for input regarding their experience with the portal and feedback on improvements. CCAP is in constant contact with our developers, discussing ways in which we can improve the look, feel, and functionality of the portal.

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