



State of Florida  
Department of Children and Families

Charlie Crist  
Governor

George H. Sheldon  
Interim Secretary

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**DATE:** September 26, 2008

**TO:** George H. Sheldon  
Interim Secretary

**FROM:** Sheryl G. Steckler ✓  
Inspector General

**SUBJECT:** Six-Month Status Report for OPPAGA Report No. 08-13

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In accordance with Section 20.055(5)(g), Florida Statutes, enclosed is our six-month status report on OPPAGA Report No. 08-13, *"ACCESS Improved Productivity; Additional Refinements Would Better Manage Workload."* The report shows OPPAGA's original recommendations and the Department's status and comments, taken from representations made by management.

If I may be of further assistance, please let me know.

Enclosures

cc: Terry Shoffstall, Staff Director, Joint Legislative Auditing Committee ✓

JLAC  
Rec'd 9/30/08

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1317 Winewood Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700

Mission: Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

**SIX-MONTH STATUS REPORT:  
OFFICE OF PROGRAM POLICY ANALYSIS &  
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY  
REPORT #08-13**

*"ACCESS Improved Productivity;  
Additional Refinements  
Would Better Manage Workload"*



Sheryl G. Steckler, Inspector General  
Jerry Chesnutt, Director of Auditing

*Enhancing Public Trust in Government*

Report #E-24-0607-273

September 25, 2008

**PURPOSE**

This report provides a written response to the Secretary on the status of corrective actions taken six months after the Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability published Report #08-13, "ACCESS Improved Productivity; Additional Refinements Would Better Manage Workload."

**REPORT FINDINGS, COMMENTS & STATUS**

Presented below are the up-to-date corrective action comments and status for audit findings 1 through 10, as reported by the ACCESS (Automated Community Connection to Economic Self-Sufficiency) staff.

**RECOMMENDATION #1:** *To reduce call center volume and better support clients, the department should revise the online application to add pictures of required documents, list the most frequently required documents for each benefit, and provide a more complete description of the application process to help clients understand how their eligibility will be determined and the length of time this could take.*

**Status per ACCESS staff:** (Completed)

This spring, we released an updated version of the web application with many improvements. Our welcome page has a general list for clients to read but we will add specific information by program in Phase II of our updates. Thus far, we have not included graphics in our plans, as it slows response time for the client.

Our confirmation page contains information on processing times. Also, in March 2008, we added dynamic text, which displays if clients are potentially eligible for expedited services, and the time frames.

**RECOMMENDATION #2:** *The department should encourage clients to complete an online screening tool before submitting an application by making this link more prominent on its website and highlighting the benefits of prescreening in its description of the application process.*

**Status per ACCESS staff:** (Ongoing)

The Department moved the screening link to be the first link on the website. Community Partners and service center staff do encourage clients to complete the screening process prior to submitting a web application if the client is not sure that they meet eligibility requirements.

**RECOMMENDATION #3:** *The screening tool should provide immediate electronic feedback to clients on the likelihood they will be eligible for each benefit applied.*

**Status per ACCESS staff:** (Completed)

The screening tool provides information of what type of benefits the client may qualify to receive.

**RECOMMENDATION #4:** *The department also should revise the screening tool to solicit more specific information and develop software to populate the application with this screening information, so that clients do not need to reenter information.*

**Status per ACCESS staff:** (Do not Concur, at this time)

We could explore this recommendation further but it would require many programming hours, and we have been advised that we are facing over a \$2 million reduction for programmers in Information Systems (IS). Additionally, the more detail we try to capture from a client reduces the ease of the screening tool. The current screening tool is designed at a high level. As it stands, without asking many more detailed questions, we cannot pull data into detailed fields on the web application.

**RECOMMENDATION #5:** *To ensure pregnant women receive early prenatal care, the department should move its link for the simplified application to the program's main web page to better inform pregnant women of their application options and ensure that pregnant clients can easily download, print, and complete this application.*

**Status per ACCESS staff:** (Completed)

The SEPW (Simplified Eligibility for Pregnant Women) application will be incorporated into the regular web application process during Phase II of the Web Application Rewrite. We have begun work on the project's requirements, but due to limited resources, we have not set a target date for completion.

**RECOMMENDATION #6:** *To ensure that staff properly sort documentation into the correct electronic folders, the department should establish a deadline for creating more detailed electronic folders for organizing faxed documents.*

**Status (per ACCESS staff):** Pending

The Department has several phases of updates planned for our Document Imaging system. We are waiting for funding to complete these updates.

**RECOMMENDATION #7:** *The department should also create more specific instructions for using these folders and train and monitor staff regarding correct document filing.*

**Status (per ACCESS staff):** Pending

Currently, functionality to create more detailed and clearer labeled electronic folders is priority #3 in our Document Imaging plan. Prior to that, we are working on the display of documents in the workgroup folders and enhancements to the courtesy notification functionality. We have been notified that programming will be mainly limited to maintenance-only functions on existing systems, due to declining IS resources.

**RECOMMENDATION #8:** *We recommend that the department reassign staff responsibilities and amend certain components of its current organizational structure. For initial eligibility determination, the department should assign processing staff specific cases and designate these persons as the single point of contact for clients during eligibility determination.*

**Status per ACCESS staff: (Do not Concur, Recommend Alternatives)**

When clients call to check on the status of their case, it interrupts the processors' ability to concentrate on the case they are processing at that time. Repeated interruptions have a negative impact on the quality of casework processing. We have taken other measures to increase communication with clients. One example is our notice simplification project. The first phase moved into production in July and August. The following notices were printed using the new format:

- Food Stamps Notice of Expiration
- Interim Contact Letter for Family-Related cases
- Interim Contact Letter for ICP-Related cases
- Notice of Expiration of Benefits
- Voter Registration
- IMS Pending/Appointment Letter
- IMS Missed Appointment

Other notices are targeted to be released by the end of the year.

The first phase of My Account that allows clients to create an on-line account moved onto production at the end of August 2008. More information on My Account is listed under #9. Data shows an overall increase in productivity per ESSI in the new model, in large part, due to specialization of job duties and fewer disruptions for processing staff. Once clients get a worker's direct phone number it is difficult to redirect future calls to others.

**RECOMMENDATION #9:** *We recommend that the department reassign a portion of staff from the call center to application processing units.*

**Status per ACCESS staff: (Do not Concur, Recommend Alternatives)**

The Call Centers received 2.2 million calls in August. We cannot reduce Call Center staffing and still adequately serve clients. Instead, we have taken more efficient measures.

1. My Account provides more self-service for the client. Clients have the ability to:

- View current benefits;
  - View the date that benefits will be available;
  - Print a Temporary Medicaid Card;
  - See when the next review is due;
  - View appointments scheduled;
  - View benefit account history;
  - View verifications needed.
2. The ARU redesign reduced the number of menu options from 9 to 4.
  3. Improved/Enhanced on-hold messages for callers.
  4. Implemented a medical provider email process to reduce calls.
  5. Specialized CCC units to improve change and email processing.
  6. Standardized the Fair Hearing process.
  7. Added additional incoming lines to reduce busy signals.
  8. Acquired Witness Workforce Management software.
  9. Implemented IMS contact (escalation) process.

We are pursuing a Budget Request for improved call center tools that will streamline the process and support future enhancements to expand long distance access and reduce costs.

**RECOMMENDATION #10:** *The department should reassess program staffing levels. We recommend that once the department has implemented its planned technology improvements and our recommendations for additional improvements, it assess whether its workload exceeds its staffing capacity.*

**Status per ACCESS staff: (Completed)**

The ACCESS program needs additional resources and staffing to adequately support the needs of our clients.

The overall caseload increases continue in all public assistance programs. The total number of people eligible for Food Stamps (1,599,181) represents an all-time high for the state, surpassing the November 1993 level of 1,578,261. Overall, the number of persons receiving Food Stamps increased 23% in the past year.

While efficiencies in processes assist our workforce, continuing difficulties in the economy increased applications, making it difficult for the Department to improve responsiveness to its clients

We have reassessed staff levels and concluded we need more staff. We are preparing a Legislative Budget Request for approximately 300 additional positions.

The 4% budget cut adversely affects IS resources planned for technological improvements.

This follow-up audit was conducted as required by Florida Statute 20.055(3)(g) and section 2500.A1 of the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing as published by the Institute of Internal Auditors. Elton Jones compiled this follow-up audit from representations provided by program management. Please address inquiries regarding this report to Jerry Chesnutt, Director of Auditing, at (850) 488-8722.