

NASCIO 2014 State IT Recognition Awards Nomination



Idaho Senior Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA) Volunteer Portal Project

*An Information Technology Initiative of the
Idaho Department of Insurance*

Category: Data, Information and Knowledge Management

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Executive Summary

The Idaho SHIBA Volunteer Portal Project (SVPP), a cross-platform web application, has profoundly improved the Idaho SHIBA and Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) programs' ability to efficiently and effectively deliver Medicare education and support services, complete reporting, and support volunteer forces throughout Idaho.

Before the SVPP, SHIBA and SMP record maintenance and required reporting to federal funding agencies was completed by staff manually entering data recorded on paper forms. In 2010, SHIBA staff manually processed 12,115 paper Client Contact Forms (CCFs). Records maintenance and compliance monitoring were neglected due to the volume of data entry required. Forms were misplaced. Similar problems existed for volunteer mileage reimbursement payments and calendar management.

Following are some of ways the SVPP solves these problems:

- The CCF direct entry system allows volunteers to enter CCFs and timesheets online for timely, accurate and effective reporting and data management. Since its implementation, approximately 2,400 staff hours previously used for data entry were instead used for program delivery and servicing Medicare beneficiaries.
- Online counseling and event calendars, and an outreach tool allow volunteers to be scheduled and verify appointments independently, centralizing the calendars and maintenance and greatly improving communication.
- Mileage reimbursement has gone from 25 hours of effort each month, to 2 hours total. Errors have been reduced, and payments are made in a more timely manner.
- Batch uploading and flagging of CCFs ensures SHIBA and SMP reporting to federal funding agencies is timely and accurate, and volunteers can assume part of the workload.
- Automated processes for maintaining records, reporting to state and federal agencies, compliance monitoring, performance assessment, outreach tracking and program management allow review, analysis and reporting to take hours, rather than days of effort.

The SVPP has allowed the SHIBA/SMP to centralize efforts, improve efficiency and use personnel to expand and improve service delivery to Medicare beneficiaries of Idaho. Its SQL/IIS based programs could be adapted for SMP and State Health Insurance Assistance Programs (SHIPs) across the country.

Business Problem and Solution Description

The Idaho SHIBA Volunteer Portal Project (SVPP), a cross-platform web application has profoundly improved the Idaho SHIBA and SMP programs' ability to complete reporting, support volunteer forces, and deliver Medicare education and support services throughout Idaho.

Idaho SHIBA is Idaho's Senior Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). In conjunction with the SMP of the Idaho Commission on Aging (ICOA), SHIBA provides Medicare resources, workshops, benefits counseling, complaint assistance, and fraud education and reporting to the citizens of Idaho. The Idaho SHIBA and SMP organizations consist of paid staff and an average of 110 volunteers working from 10 regional offices and 80+ local sites across Idaho. Both agencies must submit daily activity and periodic reports to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Agency for Community Living (ACL), federal agencies providing program funding.

Prior to the SVPP, paid staff entered data recorded on paper forms for required reporting and program operations. In 2010, SHIBA processed 12,115 paper CCFs, approximately 780 volunteer time sheets and over 300 monthly mileage reimbursement requests. The processes were riddled with problems. Forms were misplaced, information was illegible, and records maintenance and compliance monitoring were neglected due to the volume of data entry required. Mileage reimbursement payment and calendar management problems directly affecting volunteers arose regularly, as well.

The SVPP solves many of these problems. Written in VB.NET, the program runs on an Internet Information Server 7 platform and is served by a SQL Server 2008 database. It is a web-based portal providing volunteers access to applications related to all areas of their service. By logging in from the Department of Insurance (DOI) SHIBA website, they can post CCFs, make timesheet entries, enter mileage for service, manage their appointment calendars, complete training, read newsletters, and access publications and other resources.

Volunteer, location and activity databases are managed by web-based tools within the Department of Insurance (DOI) Intranet, a communication platform centralizing managerial functions for the department. SVPP allows SHIBA staff and management access to the information they need to manage operations, support the volunteers in their region, coordinate outreach, track activities and analyze results.

The SVPP: has provided the following improvements and returns:

- The CCF direct entry system allows volunteers to enter CCFs and timesheets online for timely, accurate and effective reporting and data management.
- Counseling and event calendars, and an outreach tool allow volunteers to be scheduled and verify appointments independently, centralizing the calendars and maintenance and greatly improving communication
- Mileage reimbursement is a greatly simplified process, reducing both the time required and the possibility for error. Redundancies have been eliminated and payments are processed more quickly, which the volunteers appreciate.
- Batch uploading and flagging of CCFs ensures SHIBA and SMP reporting to federal funding agencies is timely and accurate.
- Federal reports that previously took 18-24 staff hours now take less than 8 hours to complete.
- Reports utilizing the data collected can be used by section and department administrators for assessing, forecasting and strategic planning.
- IT staff have learned about the SHIBA program, making it easy for the staff of both units to regularly collaborate on projects that improve existing systems and create new processes.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the SHIBA Volunteer site. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, Idaho.gov, and Contact Us. The main header features the Idaho Department of Insurance logo and a search bar. Below the header, a sidebar on the left lists various services and news items. The main content area is titled "Welcome to the SHIBA Volunteer site!" and includes a "Thank You, SHIP Volunteers!" message. A central list of buttons provides quick access to various volunteer tasks, such as "Fill out my Timesheet", "Submit a Client Contact Form", and "Review a list of those I've counseled this year". A "Click Below for Training Modules" graphic is also present. The footer contains a map of Idaho and links to "About the DOI", "Consumers", "Licensing", "Companies", "Medicare", "State Fire Marshal", "Contact Us", and "Idaho.gov".

Significance

The SVPP has significantly improved functioning for every area of SHIBA operations. Over 250,000 Idahoans are eligible for Medicare. SHIBA and SMP provide free and unbiased services and resources to Medicare beneficiaries, and those who help them. As state agencies depending on federal funding, both organizations are required to comply with performance expectations, rules and reporting stipulations of both levels of government.

The SHIBA and SMP programs are largely dependent on having networks of volunteers across the state to meet the expectations of their funding agencies. To increase the reach of both programs, resources and efforts are combined. Both programs have regional offices across the state to support the development of volunteer networks across greater Idaho. Most SHIBA and SMP staff and volunteers provide information for both groups, when meeting with clients and participating in outreach activities in local communities. Standardized process, tools supporting effective conveyance of information, means for scheduling and booking appointments and events, and submitting accurate information in a timely manner are essential to the basic functioning of the programs.

Without the standardization, tracking ability and accessibility to information provided by automated processes, offices operated autonomously. Operations and training tended to be more reflective of the local staffs' strengths and priorities, and SHIBA staff was unable to deliver a consistent counseling experience to Idaho citizens in different areas.

Volunteers tend to have expectations that the time and energy they spend on efforts is valued, and put to good use. When operations are fragmented, it can easily seem like an organization does not know what it is doing, and volunteers will choose to donate their resources to groups that can use them effectively.

Prior to the SVPP, there was no direct access to service data since most the data gathered was submitted directly to CMS. Performance assessment, decision making and planning processes within the organizations were generally performed based on individual reports and the limited information provided by periodic reports issues by CMS.

Every state has a SHIP and SMP program facing the same expectations and challenges for service delivery and reporting. The systems supporting ACL data management issue reports quarterly, and limit the options for the organization of data. Many programs manually enter contacts and volunteer time, and lack automated processes that save time, improve accuracy of reporting, and allow more flexibility for evaluation and performance assessments.

Benefits of the Project

The SVPP improves the ability of SHIBA/SMP staff and volunteers to service the Medicare beneficiaries of Idaho, report to federal funding sources, and use data from activities and operations for strategic planning, forecasting and decision making.

Since its launch, SVPP program features have provided the following tangible benefits:

- SHIBA staff saved approximately 3,965 hours of work for data entry. Direct entry of CCFs by volunteers has saved approximately 2,400 staff hours. The volunteer assigned to the processing of daily batch uploads and SMP federal reporting has saved the program about 1,565 paid staff hours.
- Processing mileage reimbursement taking 25 hours of exasperating effort for 12 SHIBA, fiscal and managerial staff each month, is reduced to 2 hours total for 6 staff.
- 800 call center staff using the site map and scheduling calendar can easily connect citizens with counselors and events in their area.
- Volunteers can control and change their availability at their convenience. SHIBA can more effectively use volunteers and the staff freed from counseling.
- Administrative support staff, supervisors, and managers, have information useful for planning, forecasting and decision making in an accessible, centralized database.
- The ability to develop in-house reports introduces the ability to perform statistical and data analysis previously impossible, such as trends in service.
- Mailing and faxing costs associated with sending in paper CCFs have been eliminated.
- Documentation is less susceptible to loss, misplacement, and entry errors that render them invalid for federal reporting.
- Batch uploading of daily activity and monthly SMP reporting completed by a volunteer, has saved SHIBA about 1,535 hours of paid staff work time.
- Automated processes for maintaining records, reporting to state and federal agencies, compliance monitoring, performance assessment, outreach tracking and program management allow review, analysis and reporting to take hours, rather than days of effort.

The SVPP has produced a number of extraneous benefits, as well. From the volunteer point-of-view, the SVPP is a valuable tool. Automating the CCFs - with dropdown lists and form fields that check for both missing and incorrect types of data - has made it easier for them to track their efforts and prevent duplication or missed

entries. With improvements to the mileage reimbursement process, volunteers are receiving their payments nearly a month sooner than they used to, which is a welcome improvement. When elements of the SVPP were introduced at training sessions, volunteers consistently expressed appreciation for the convenience and ease the platform provides for completing tasks associated with their service and accessing resources. A centralized one-stop-shop for their training needs is yet another way that the SVPP is of use and value to our volunteers.

Having information stored digitally provides for data backup and recovery that was previously challenging, if not impossible, and storing information takes up a relatively small amount of disk space (presently 168 MB) instead of shelf after shelf of boxes filled with printed forms.

The SVPP has also allowed IT and SHIBA to develop beneficial working relationships for both groups. IT staff has learned about the multi-faceted nature of SHIBA's core functions and its people, and SHIBA staff has learned to consider the role IT can play in the development of new programs and projects.

The SVPP has dramatically changed the way Idaho SHIBA/SMP does business to the benefit of the volunteers, groups, and agencies it supports, and the citizens it serves.