

## Digital Community Services Hub

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**Organisation:** Department of Community Services, Government of Nova Scotia

**Country:** Canada

**Level of government:** Regional/State government

**Sector:** Social protection

**Type:** Communication, Data, Digital, Methods, Public Service

**Launched in:** 2016

**Overall development time:** 4 year(s)

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# Description

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Digital services (focused on mobile capabilities) for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged Nova Scotians, to provide them with better access to a variety support and services electronically. The Digital Community Services Hub will transform how services are currently delivered to the vulnerable, low income population, enhancing service delivery and the client experience so that it is more effective, efficient and client centric – delivered through self service. In this way, it will support the Department in achieving several of its strategic priorities and outcomes: supports and services are accessible, delivered efficiently, and clients have control over their own lives.

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## Why the innovation was developed

- Due to increasing costs and fiscal pressures, the growing complexity of the needs of Nova Scotians, and the rising demand for critical social services, Nova Scotia's core social programs have historically not been able to keep pace with modern, best practice developments seen in other jurisdictions across the country and globally.
  - As a result, DCS is now currently undergoing substantial transformation of its core social programs, policies, organizational structure and service delivery and communication channels.
  - In the last 5 years, the Province of Nova Scotia has been advancing the digital agenda and growing the number of digital service offerings, however, digital exclusion remains an issue especially for the vulnerable and low-income population including individuals who are: • low-income (working poor) and/or unemployed; • living in social housing; • with disabilities; • family members supporting individuals with disabilities; and, • youth who are at risk.
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## Objectives

Enhance transparency, Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve social equity, Improve user satisfaction

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## Main beneficiaries

Families, High-risk populations, Low-income groups, People with disabilities

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## Existing similar practices

### Centrelink

In other countries' public administrations

Department of Central Services - Australia

Centrelink is an Australian Government agency responsible for delivering a wide range of services and unemployment benefits to Australians who find themselves on a low income or without an income.

Services are delivered through a digital platform with mobile capabilities.

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/dhs/centrelink>

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# Results

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**Results not available yet**

# Development

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## Design

The idea was generated through a partnership of policymakers, frontline staff, private partnerships and through consulting with users to understand how to deliver services through citizen-centered design. Evidence confirms that even the most vulnerable populations would prefer options to access DCS services digitally through a variety of devices (e.g. mobile, tablet, computer), at least when completing more transactional activities and/or applying for services. The department's recent First Voice client engagement with income assistance clients across Nova Scotia confirmed that more than 60% of that client population would access services online if they were available (see supporting attachments). Design time: 1 year(s)

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## Challenges and solutions

- Significant change management and communications challenges are anticipated largely within the public service.
- Minimal challenge anticipated with current clients and general public.

# Lessons Learned

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## Conditions for success

- Through the department's ongoing transformation process, it has been critical to have strong political support and strong change champions/sponsorship at all levels of government.
  - Predictable funding commitments are also critical often coming with commitments to achieve certain benefits and realize efficiency.
  - Perhaps most importantly is the ability of the organization to clearly articulate the "case for change" and the rationale behind it; that sticking with the status quo is just no longer a viable option.
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## Other information

The status quo is currently in person service delivery via 30 regional offices across the province. The status quo is not an option. Today, it embodies social stigma and does not represent an accessible or realistic option for the province's most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens. Moving hundreds of thousands of transactional services online in largely a self-serve manner will enable our clients to have more control over their own affairs, will make the system overall more efficient and fiscally sustainable, and will reduce social stigma (for example, that which is associated with income assistance). The status quo is not an option.

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