Remedies for better citizen experiences

A guide to improving interactions between public health agencies and citizens

Content

Better CX starts with the right mindset | Revitalize websites to be simple and accessible | Make application processes painless | Mend fragmented record systems | Conclusion

© 2024 NTT DATA, Inc. | 2

It takes about five clicks to buy something online. Sometimes less, it's so simple. We expect this ease across all interactions, including with government agencies. As citizens, we must work with public health agencies for essential services such as Medicare and Medicaid, VA benefits and vital information during a public health crisis. When it's challenging to find information, or the process to access that information is too complex and time-consuming, it creates a frustrating customer experience (CX).

Better CX starts with the right mindset

Revitalize websites to be simple and accessible

Make application processes painless

Mend fragmented record systems

Conclusion

© 2024 NTT DATA, Inc. | 3

The Rx is better CX

Improving CX is critical to making sure citizens can access the services they need in a timely manner, without being overwhelmed or frustrated. Federal agencies continue to fall short in CX, with only 38% of U.S. citizens saying they feel like a valued customer when they interact with the government.[1]

The Executive Order on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government, issued in December 2021, aimed to improve government agencies' ability to provide services more equitably, effectively and in a way that people of all abilities can navigate. It instructs 17 federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, to commit to CX improvements. Enhancements span everything from reducing the need for physical forms to providing more digital customer support channels. Overall, these improvements will impact 36 specific citizen-facing systems.[2]

To help agencies successfully implement these improvements, $100 million of the Technology Modernization Fund (TMF) was reserved to help streamline digital services. The goal is to create a better CX for the American people. The TMF prioritizes projects that span agencies and reduce obstacles such as wait times and paperwork. All federal agencies and high-impact service providers can apply for this funding.[3]

However, "currently, only 2% of government forms are digitized, 45% of websites have not been designed to work on mobile devices and 60% of websites are not fully usable by those who use assistive technologies."[4]

The government must upgrade service delivery to serve citizens effectively and make sure it's digitally providing information in a simple, trustworthy and accessible fashion. The funding is available to support agency initiatives, but uncertainties about how to begin improving CX still exist. That's why we've created this guide to improving customer experience. It features common strategies for enhancing CX, CX tools and the importance of building trust in new service delivery systems.

> "
> When you invest in and direct resources to, and have leadership support and priority in this area, you actually can institute programs on the ground level, to improve that sense of trust and experience with veterans over time. It certainly is not something that happens overnight; I would say that it's a journey. It's a build. And we're always aiming high, we want to reach at least a 90% trust agreement. And we're hoping that with the efforts underway, in the next number of years, we'll be able to reach that goal at some point."[5]
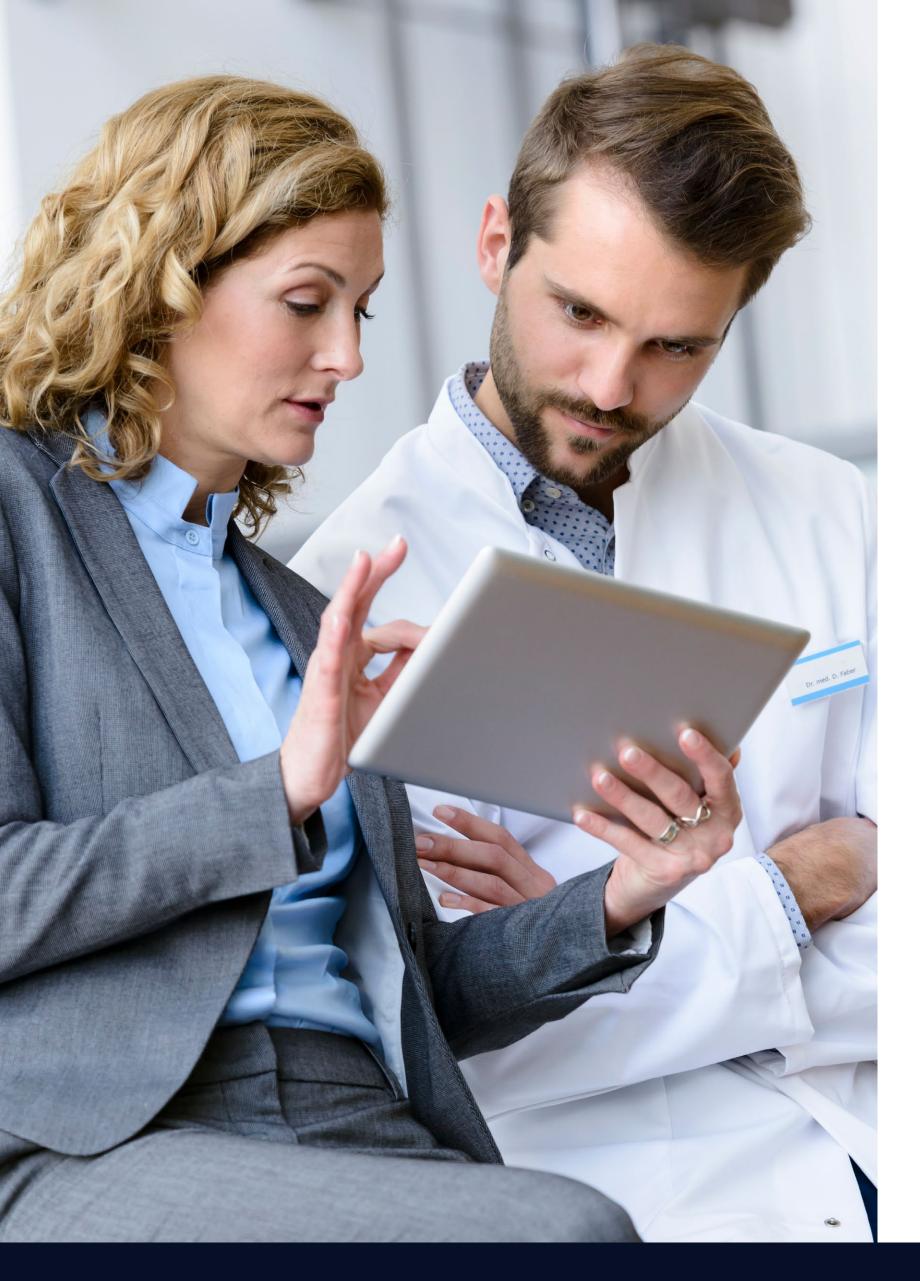>
> — Barbara Morton, deputy chief veterans experience officer, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Better CX starts with the right mindset

Revitalize websites to be simple and accessible

Make application processes painless

Mend fragmented record systems

Conclusion

Better CX starts with the right mindset

Public health agencies need to improve multiple aspects of CX, including web portal access, application processes and customer support features. Doing so will allow citizens to access public health benefits more easily. Because these improvements may link to other IT initiatives, such as infrastructure modernization or strengthening cybersecurity, it can be difficult to determine where to start. The truth is, better CX starts with a mindset that places citizens at the center of all initiatives. This guarantees that CX best practices get folded into each initiative. If agencies are to accomplish the tasks the executive order on CX and later communications mandate, they need to understand how citizens interact with public health systems and tools. A better understanding will help agencies make the necessary adjustments and create more positive interactions. For public health agencies, this starts with journey mapping, rapid prototyping, usability studies and A/B testing. The results will help understand how citizens interact with the systems and determine their challenges.

Agencies can work with a trusted industry partner to interview citizens and develop citizen personas, and then run usability tests and analyze the results to determine what improvements

would have the greatest impact on CX. The insights gathered from usability studies can also be used to help justify projects when applying for CX funds from the TMF. Agencies should prioritize "technology teams and systems that are capable of rapidly designing, prototyping and deploying modern digital tools and services based on human-centered design."[3] Projects selected to receive TMF funds must be supported by customer research and data, and agencies must be able to rapidly prototype them to meet the measurable goals that determine success. This will help government agencies develop and plan their CX objectives and initiatives.

While public health agencies are each at different phases of determining how to improve CX, and then implementing the necessary changes, all should consider common strategies for improving CX. These include using human-centered design to improve website navigation, streamlining and digitizing application processes, and improving the accessibility of record-keeping systems.

Better CX starts with the right mindset | Revitalize websites to be simple and accessible | Make application processes painless | Mend fragmented record systems | Conclusion

© 2024 NTT DATA, Inc. | 5

Revitalize websites to be simple and accessible

When searching for key information on a website, the last thing a citizen needs is additional stress. If the site requires citizens to click through multiple pages, lacks a simplified search function and isn't accessible to people with disabilities, then the long time it takes to find information on the website may frustrate citizens. They might even exit the page without receiving the information or support they need. Digital channels are now the primary and preferred way citizens interact with government agencies. As such, agencies must design websites that are simple to use and secure.[6] An accessible, engaging website or mobile application can make the difference between a positive experience and a frustrating one. Using human-centered design to build a website that's easy to navigate alleviates frustrations.

Public health agencies need to design websites with citizens as the focus. Agencies should conduct a usability study to see which aspects of their websites should be modernized to improve CX. The study may reveal a need to combine disparate sites and reduce the number of clicks it takes to find information. It may also highlight the need to refresh content and create a consistent visual design. That way, citizens always know they're interacting with a government website. This helps build trust.

Public health agencies' public-facing websites must have a search function. It helps citizens find the information they need quickly and easily.[6] Agencies can take this a step further by including a help feature. It enables citizens to ask questions and troubleshoot if they have difficulty navigating the website. Many user-friendly websites incorporate an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot. Citizens can ask a simple question about what they're looking for, and the bot quickly returns the answer. Chatbots also offer 24-hour support, which can save government agencies money by reducing the need for overnight staff support.[7] A step beyond chatbots is a **digital human**. This AI-driven avatar transforms how citizens can interact with government. It's conversational, and responds in a manner that's natural and patient, and in real time. A digital human can even provide onscreen guides and videos to help engage with the user. They're also accessible anytime, anywhere and on any device, making them ideal for citizen support.

Consistency across multiple channels is critical to creating seamless CX. Agencies must deliver information to citizens promptly and effectively, regardless of whether they use a computer or a mobile device. It's becoming increasingly important for a public health agency to make sure its

The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) worked with NTT DATA to apply human-centered design best practices to the design and development of the Vaccine Adjuvant Compendium (VAC). The VAC website provides an intuitive and searchable online database of vaccine adjuvants defined through the adjuvant studies that NIAID supports. The public database helps foster collaborations between the adjuvant researchers who NIAID supports and the broader scientific community.[11]

Better CX starts with the right mindset | Revitalize websites to be simple and accessible | Make application processes painless | Mend fragmented record systems | Conclusion

website is compatible with mobile and tablet devices because most citizens use their mobile devices to access agency websites.[6] The information must also be current and relevant across all channels to increase accessibility and reduce confusion.[8]

A key element of designing a positive CX experience is understanding the audience and making sure that the information is both relevant and accessible. Agency websites must comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and be accessible for users with disabilities, including citizens and employees.[9] Andrea Fletcher, chief digital strategy officer at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), has highlighted that many of the citizens CMS serves use screen readers, speak English as a second language or have a disability. As such, it's imperative that CMS and other public health agencies accommodate these situations and needs when designing websites. Doing so provides all citizens with access to the services they need.[10] Public health agencies can use accessible design principles, such as high-contrast colors, text alternatives to audio and visual content, and labels for buttons, to improve accessibility. Redesigning government websites to be more accessible enables people with disabilities to navigate the website and helps all citizens navigate the site more easily.

Better CX starts with the right mindset

Revitalize websites to be simple and accessible

Make application processes painless

Mend fragmented record systems

Conclusion

© 2024 NTT DATA, Inc. | 7

Make application processes painless

> "In recent years, the annual paperwork burden imposed by executive departments and agencies on the public has been in excess of 9 billion hours."[2]
>
> — Executive Order on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government

Filling out an application can be stressful, especially for critical services such as healthcare or veteran benefits. Often still paper-based, current application processes can be challenging to complete and take months to process, extending the time citizens wait for vital services. This "time tax" imposes a burden on citizens.[2] Public health agencies can reduce this burden by streamlining and automating application processes. IT initiatives focusing on reducing paperwork, increasing accessibility and integrating with other agencies during the application process will help create better citizen experiences.

Agencies can increase the availability of digital applications to reduce paperwork. Enabling citizens to complete and sign application forms online facilitates processing. Citizens don't need to print the forms to complete them, nor do they need to wait for them to be delivered by mail. Digital applications also save federal employees time because they don't need to re-enter the information on the forms.

Although digital applications increase efficiency and transparency, federal agencies shouldn't remove the ability to complete applications on paper. It gives citizens without reliable internet access or a digital device a way to apply for the services they need. Meeting citizens on their channel of choice — telephone, website, mobile app, social media or paper — is essential. Agencies may need to invest in more modern IT infrastructure to make sure they can provide services across various channels. They also need to maintain accessibility and consistency across channels to provide positive CX regardless of how citizens engage with them.[12]

To streamline the application process, agencies should increase data sharing and standardize application forms. Centralizing application portals and allowing data to be reused across applications helps citizens understand what assistance they're eligible for. It saves time during the application process. And

it reflects the government's commitment to creating a "Digital Federal Front Door" through USA.gov, where citizens can navigate all benefits, services and programs.[2]

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) highlights better connecting applications across programs. At HIMSS 2023, Andrea Palm, deputy secretary of HHS, underscored that the agency serves "the same families in our Administration for Children and Families that we serve with Medicare and Medicaid, that we serve in our Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration." As such, the agency must increase cross-departmental and interdepartmental cooperation to better serve citizens.[13]

> "I hope that in the future, somebody sits down to sign up for healthcare and they have their kid sitting on their lap, dinner's in the oven and they only have a couple of minutes to fill this form out, and they get it done and they move on with their day, and it's a wonderful experience rather than, I think what we often feel, which is, 'Oh my gosh, this is so stressful.'"[14]
>
> — Andrea Fletcher, chief digital strategy officer, CMS

Better CX starts with the right mindset

Revitalize websites to be simple and accessible

Make application processes painless

Mend fragmented record systems

Conclusion

Mend fragmented record systems

Both citizens and public health agencies benefit from modernized record systems. Like streamlining application processes, digitizing and integrating record systems improves transparency, efficiency and CX. The executive order on CX specifically highlights two needs. The first is developing ways to automate citizens' access to their health records to increase accessibility. The second: creating integrated systems so citizens only need to update their information, such as a mailing address, once and have the change apply to all their records.[2]

The Department of Veteran Affairs launched a mobile application as part of an overall effort to unify platforms. The app helps veterans access healthcare and benefits on a centralized digital platform. Veterans can use the app to schedule healthcare appointments, view claims and appeals status, upload documentation, contact their doctor and locate nearby facilities. Veterans can also update their profile information through this app, and those changes will be updated across the agency, reducing the time tax. It helps veterans spend less time entering duplicate information and reduces the risk of forgetting to update one system and losing access to certain services.[15] Lauren Alexanderson, deputy chief technology officer of health delivery at the Department of Veterans Affairs, explained how the agency is also looking to integrate electronic health records (EHR) with a variety of healthcare applications to improve clinical decision support.[16] The seamless integration of EHR with healthcare applications can make an incredible difference in quality of care and patient outcomes.

Additionally, public health agencies can improve CX by making their record systems easier to navigate. Including search functions and help features for digital record systems can save citizens time and make sure they find the information they need. This increases transparency and builds trust in federal agencies.

Better CX starts with the right mindset | Revitalize websites to be simple and accessible | Make application processes painless | Mend fragmented record systems | Conclusion

© 2024 NTT DATA, Inc. | 9

Conclusion

Improving the citizen experience is imperative for public health agencies. Citizens need to be the focus when designing the systems people use to interact with federal agencies for vital services. Many IT modernization initiatives have the potential to include components that'll also improve CX. These include human-centered design, automation, digitization and data integration. Funding is also available specifically for federal agencies to improve CX, and there's a pressing need for it as the demand for digital service delivery grows.

If your agency is unsure of the steps to improve CX, reach out to a trusted IT partner. Doing so will help you analyze what systems can be improved and develop a strategy that'll work within your agency's budget and resource needs. Improving CX doesn't need to be a headache.

Visit our site to learn how NTT DATA supports public health agencies.

About the authors

Noel Hara, Chief Technology Officer, Public Sector, NTT DATA

Noel is an experienced strategist who infuses technology solutions across the public sector to help solve the most challenging problems. As Chief Technology Officer of NTT DATA's public sector, he blends over two decades of experience in the public and private sectors with an insatiable curiosity for technology and applications. Noel has been responsible for adapting the company's offering portfolio to support clients in their shift to remote working and learning while continuing to support citizens through the expansion of digital government.

Hannah Noah, Marketing Senior Analyst, Public Sector, NTT DATA

Hannah has experience supporting federal civilian agencies, including the Department of Commerce, Department of Health and Human Services, Millennium Challenge Corporation, U.S. Agency for International Development and U.S. Trade and Development Agency. In her role at NTT DATA, Hannah helps develop marketing and communications materials to support the Federal Health and Civilian team. Her marketing experience analyzing and writing for the healthcare, renewable energy and IT industries gives her a unique perspective on the challenges public sector agencies face.

Better CX starts with the right mindset | Revitalize websites to be simple and accessible | Make application processes painless | Mend fragmented record systems | Conclusion

© 2024 NTT DATA, Inc. | 10

Sources

1   Pamela Powers and Tom Frame. "3 keys to CX success." Nextgov/FCW. October 19, 2023. https://www.nextgov.com/ideas/2023/10/3-keys-cx-success/391341/

2   The White House Briefing Room. "Executive Order on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government." December 13, 2021. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/12/13/executive-order-on-transforming-federal-customer-experience-and-service-delivery-to-rebuild-trust-in-government/

3   The White House Briefing Room. "OMB and GSA Announce Technology Modernization Fund Will Designate $100 Million to Improve Customer Experiences with the Federal Government." June 16, 2022. https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/briefing-room/2022/06/16/omb-and-gsa-announce-technology-modernization-fund-will-designate-100-million-to-improve-customer-experiences-with-the-federal-government/

4   Clare Martorana. "Why the American People Deserve a Digital Government." The White House Briefing Room. September 22, 2023. https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/briefing-room/2023/09/22/why-the-american-people-deserve-a-digital-government/

5   Robert O'Shaughnessy. "Human-centered design at the heart of VA's CX initiatives." Federal News Network. October 11, 2022. https://federalnewsnetwork.com/veterans-affairs/2022/10/human-centered-design-at-the-heart-of-vas-cx-initiatives/

6   "Delivering a Digital-First Public Experience." The White House Office of the Federal Chief Information Officer. September 22, 2023. https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/management/ofcio/delivering-a-digital-first-public-experience/

7   Chris Bechtel. "Narrowing the CX gap to deliver the support that today's public expects." Route Fifty. August 25, 2022. https://www.route-fifty.com/infrastructure/2022/08/narrowing-cx-gap-deliver-support-todays-public-expects/376336/

8   Andy Beamon. "Improving CX through consistency." Nextgov/FCW. August 15, 2022. https://www.nextgov.com/ideas/2022/08/improving-cx-through-consistency/375851/

9   Ashley Johnson and Daniel Castro. "Improving Accessibility of Federal Government Websites." Information Technology & Innovation Foundation. June 3, 2021. https://itif.org/publications/2021/06/03/improving-accessibility-federal-government-websites/

10 Summer Myatt. "Andrea Fletcher Shares How CMS Is Centering Customer Experience." ExecutiveGov. October 31, 2023. https://executivegov.com/2023/10/andrea-fletcher-shares-how-cms-is-centering-customer-experience/

11 The National Institutes of Health and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. "Vaccine Adjuvant Compendium." https://vac.niaid.nih.gov/

Better CX starts with the right mindset   Revitalize websites to be simple and accessible   Make application processes painless   Mend fragmented record systems   Conclusion

Sources

12 Evan Davis. "Channel of Choice: The End Goal for CX in Government." Nextgov/FCW. August 29, 2022. https://www.nextgov.com/ideas/2022/08/channel-choice-end-goal-cx-government/376450/

13 Mike Miliard. "HHS is prioritizing consumer experience, data exchange, explainable AI." Healthcare IT News. April 28, 2023. https://www.healthcareitnews.com/news/hhs-prioritizing-consumer-experience-data-exchange-explainable-ai

14 Summer Myatt. "Andrea Fletcher Shares How CMS Is Centering Customer Experience." ExecutiveGov. October 31, 2023. https://executivegov.com/2023/10/andrea-fletcher-shares-how-cms-is-centering-customer-experience/

15 Sarah Sybert. "VA's New Mobile App Centralizes Veteran Services." GovCIO. August 30, 2022. https://governmentciomedia.com/vas-new-mobile-app-centralizes-veteran-services

16 Summer Myatt. "Inside the Healthcare Revolution: Experts Say Emerging Tech & Human-Centered Design Are Transforming US Healthcare." GovCon Wire. October 25, 2023. https://www.govconwire.com/2023/10/inside-the-healthcare-revolution-experts-say-emerging-tech-and-human-centered-design-are-transforming-us-healthcare/

Better CX starts with the right mindset

Revitalize websites to be simple and accessible

Make application processes painless

Mend fragmented record systems

Conclusion

Visit us.nttdata.com to learn more.

NTT DATA is a $30 billion trusted global innovator of IT and business services. We help clients transform through business and technology consulting, industry and digital solutions, applications development and management, managed edge-to-cloud infrastructure services, BPO, systems integration and global data centers. We are committed to our clients' long-term success and combine global reach with local client service in over 80 countries.