

MassOptions transforms the way elderly and people with disabilities get much needed long-term services and supports in Massachusetts

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Some of the Commonwealth's most underserved populations—the elderly, people with disabilities, and their caregivers— now have simplified access to the long-term services and supports (LTSS) they need, thanks to MassOptions, an innovative collaboration between [UHealthSolutions](#), the nonprofit business affiliate of UMass Medical School, and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs.

[MassOptions](#), a free resource that connects individuals to multiple agencies has transformed the way LTSS services are secured in the Commonwealth. Trained specialists at UHealthSolutions' Shrewsbury headquarters stand at the ready to provide referrals customized to individuals' preferred method of communication, by phone, email or online chat. Our robust, state-of-the-art website includes a self-service referral, the ability for consumers to submit questions and feedback, and a fully translated Spanish site. Currently, customer support is provided seven days a week. Starting July 1, that support will be available from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. on weekdays.

People in need of in-home supports, day services, equipment and supplies, mental health services and personal care services are now one phone call or click away from getting assistance, and our model is getting attention. The National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities (NASUAD) recognized MassOptions with its Technology in Practice award in August 2017.

Recognizing the need

Before the program was launched in 2015, elders, people with disabilities and their caretakers had to navigate different, complex state agencies and programs, depending on the service they required. The process was exhausting and overwhelming to vulnerable populations, with many giving up in exasperation before they got help.

In 2014, Massachusetts received a Balancing Incentive Program grant from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to increase access to non-institutional LTSS. The funding served as a seed to launch our initiative, and we brought the necessary partners to the table. We recognized the importance of assembling a multidisciplinary team of technical, operational and programmatic experts from the outset.

Creating and implementing the strategy

Once the need was underscored, funding was secured and partners were in place, we devised a strategy to create and drum up support for our cutting-edge deliverables.

It was critical for us to ensure our centralized technological resource to connect to LTSS in a closed-loop way had a human touch. We wanted consumers to be able to reach a live, highly trained, empathetic person invested in helping the elderly or people with disabilities navigate a complicated healthcare delivery system. We also wanted to create an accessible and consumer-focused website—which integrated customer feedback throughout development—to better serve those who prefer online assistance.

We developed an algorithm to ascertain—based on age, demographics and resource needs—the best referral source for those in need. We also designed a secure portal to share referrals with referral agencies with consumer consent. It was created to ensure no one falls through the cracks at MassOptions at any point, from engagement to placement.

To alert the public about these new services, we crafted a branded, multi-pronged awareness campaign on traditional media, including advertisements on television, radio and public transit. It was a state-wide effort customized in both English and Spanish.

We augmented our traditional campaign with a comprehensive social media push to drive traffic to our website, scheduling posts and connecting to social service agency pages. The look-and-feel and language was consistent online and in print.

In addition, MassOptions sponsored and participated in launch events in high-traffic areas across the state to promote the services. Print materials (i.e., posters, brochures) and branded giveaways (i.e., pens, post-it notes, tote bags) were disseminated at the events, to partner organizations and various community locations where elders and individuals with disabilities frequent. Engaging community and business partners are essential to support multiple components, and they have proven critical to our success.

Monitoring our progress

Gauging our impact is crucial to ensure we continue to make a difference for those in need. With this in mind, we designed a portal that's readily accessible to MassOptions, UHealthSolutions and Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs employees.

The portal provides one-stop access to program metrics for Consumer Relationship Management, the Customer Service Center and the website. Metrics include phone calls, emails, chats,

referrals and website visitor traffic and behaviors to give us an accurate picture of how we're doing and pinpoints how we can improve. We also monitor Google Analytics to confirm our website is highly ranked on search engines.

Looking ahead

By continually prioritizing durability and scalability, and adjusting as needed, we have positioned MassOptions for future expansion and configuration.

Our helpline now fields calls and works with the state's Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly, which helps keeps seniors at home, and Senior Care Options, and there's more to come.

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