

A race to prevent homelessness

How technology helped one county in Nevada keep nearly 250,000 people off the streets.



The COVID-19 pandemic wasn't just a public health crisis, it was an economic crisis. With businesses furloughing or laying off staff, people and their families continue facing financial hardship, food and housing insecurity. In Clark County, Nevada, home to Las Vegas, the loss of tourism and conventions brought much of the economy to a standstill. In 2020, more than 249,700 people in Clark County, more than 10 percent of its population, were at risk of eviction. Facing unprecedented levels of unemployment, Clark County needed to help their citizens as quickly as possible.

The county received US federal funding from the CARES Act. With this money, the Clark County Department of Social Services launched a new program called CARES Housing Assistance Program (CHAP). It helped residents who suffered financial losses and could no longer pay rental costs or utilities because of COVID-19. The agency wanted to move fast. But with face-to-face service centers closed, they needed more options to provide help to residents online. They turned to Cúram™ to help launch a program that was mobile friendly and easy to use.

The agency and Cúram have a long history of delivering projects to support the residents of Clark County. Working together with the agency, the Cúram team built two key technologies to support the program launch in just 11 weeks.

The first component was a Cúram AI-enabled pre-screening chatbot designed to answer commonly asked questions. The second was a citizen engagement portal with a mobile friendly responsive design that helped citizens apply on the devices they had access to.



The virtual assistant chatbot

With service centers closed, caseworkers were working remotely while balancing an increasing caseload with childcare, home schooling and other challenges. To minimize the impact of the CHAP program on caseworkers, the agency wanted to automate the application process as much as possible and screen out people who weren't eligible for the benefit before they submitted an application. Then, caseworkers would only have to process eligible applications.

Cúram deployed a chatbot to pre-screen applicants. By asking a few screening questions, the chatbot could determine if the applicant was likely to be eligible for the financial assistance benefit. Applicants who were likely to be eligible were given a link to the application and invited to apply. In just one month, the chatbot managed 122,000 inquiries that previously had to be handled by caseworkers. The automation meant that caseworkers could focus their time on people who needed assistance the most.



A citizen engagement portal

Launching a chatbot and online application in 11 weeks was possible through Cúram's citizen engagement solution. Cúram's citizen engagement solution is a digital services platform built specifically for governments that supports development and deployment of responsive and secure web applications for public services. Since its technology was used to support 2 million clients at the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services as well as 3 million citizens at the New York City Department of Social Services, this platform was a natural choice for serving the over 2 million residents of Clark County.

Designed to be easy to configure and quick to deploy, Cúram's citizen engagement solution helps governments respond to the needs of their citizens as they arise. Every moment matters when someone is facing eviction, unemployment or other life-altering challenges, so creating a portal that provides a great user experience on any device is vital. In Clark County, qualifying residents can securely apply for CHAP assistance and track their applications on a device they prefer, whether it's a phone, tablet or computer. They can also use the online portal to receive secure alerts and messages from the agency, view their payments and manage their accounts.

More help is on the way

In March 2021, the Emergency Rental Assistance Program made USD 25 billion available to assist households that were unable to pay rent and utilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As cities and counties access these and other necessary recovery funds, more governments will turn to technology to help reach their citizens.

As the successes in Clark County demonstrate, governments can deploy technology quickly to help make the most of their existing resources and provide their workforce with more time to focus on people who have complex needs. Technologies like Cúram's citizen engagement solution and the chatbot provide the security and customization that governments and municipalities need- without sacrificing speed.

In July 2021, IDC Government Insights named CHAP the winner of its Smart Cities North America Awards in the Public Health and Social Services category.¹ IDC states that "winners in the SCNAA illustrate best practice examples of how forward-thinking municipalities are effectively leveraging technology and innovation to offer new services and economic opportunities and to meet the needs and expectations of citizens and residents."

Learn more at merative.com/government

About Cúram

Cúram, offered by Merative, has over 25 years of experience helping national, regional, and local governments transform the delivery of social services, empower caseworkers, and help individuals and families access the programs they need to achieve better outcomes. Used in 12 countries and jurisdictions, available in 14 languages, and supporting over 970 government programs, the Cúram platform connects benefits administrators, social services agencies, and case managers, to serve and protect 187 million citizens annually.

References:

1. IDC. Winners Named in IDC Government Insights' Fourth Annual Smart Cities North America Awards. 13 July 2021. www.idc.com

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Ann Arbor, MI 48108

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