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Report on Agency Paper Reduction Efforts

May 2024



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE REPORT ON AGENCY PAPER REDUCTION EFFORTS

May 2024

OVERVIEW

Section 32 of Chapter 158 of the Acts of 2014 required the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to “develop, implement and maintain a plan to reduce the use of paper records and documentation and to eliminate the sole reliance on such paper records for its Operations.”

MISSION

The mission of the Department of Transitional Assistance is to assist and empower low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and supports to help individuals and families achieve greater economic self-sufficiency, including food and nutritional assistance, economic assistance, and employment supports. DTA serves one out of every six people in the Commonwealth including working families, children, older adults, and people with disabilities.

ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT CENTER

In 2014, DTA partnered with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and MassHealth to implement an Electronic Document Management Center (EDMC). Located in Taunton, the EDMC serves as the backbone of DTA’s paper reduction efforts. In conjunction with DTA’s business process redesign, the EDMC was established with a focus on streamlining client case processing by DTA caseworkers throughout the Commonwealth.

Today, the EDMC plays a vital role in the day-to-day operations of the agency. All physical mail sent to local offices is rerouted there for digital scanning and indexing to an electronic case file. DTA monitors the volume of documents handled by the EDMC each year. The following chart displays the annual volume of documents handled by the EDMC by document source from 2015 through 2023, including documents received via the DTA Connect platform.

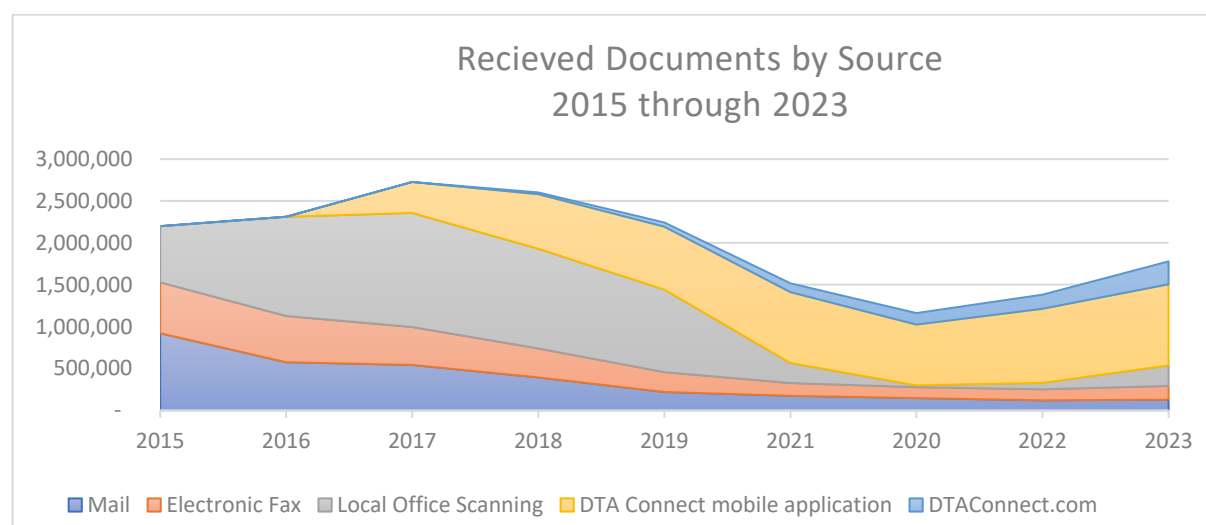


Figure 1. Received Documents by Source

Note: the DTA Connect mobile application was launched in 2017. The DTA Connect web application was launched in 2018.

Since 2015, there has been a significant shift in the type of documentation that is handled by the EDMC each year. The amount of paper-based documentation that is mailed or faxed has decreased significantly. In 2015, paper-based documents accounted for about 70% of the documents received by EDMC. In 2023, paper-based documents accounted for just 16% of the documents received. Conversely, paperless documentation has become much more prevalent as the agency has continued to strengthen its access-on-demand service model. Almost 84% of the documents processed by the EDMC were sent via paperless sources in 2023, with nearly 70% of documents being submitted via DTA Connect.

CURRENT PAPER REDUCTION

DTA continues to focus on modernizing its operations and investing in further technology upgrades to its DTA Connect platform, which is its client facing portal for case maintenance and can be accessed via mobile application and website. Through this work, DTA has significantly expanded access for the vast majority of families and individuals receiving services, allowing for virtually all business with the agency to be done without having to visit a local office. In 2023, there were more than 34,450 new users on the DTA Connect mobile application.

The Department rolled out key technology upgrades to streamline clients' experience and further improve benefit processing, including:

- Adding virtual meeting options for clients with disabilities or medical conditions as an accommodation if they are unable to connect with DTA in person or telephonically,
- Expanding DTA Connect languages to include Haitian Creole, in addition to English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Portuguese, and Simplified Chinese, and
- Adding new features and security improvements to the DTA Connect mobile app, including the ability for clients to apply for SNAP and cash benefits, and complete SNAP recertifications and interim report forms.

The agency continued to use proactive case-related text messaging and emails, expanding available languages from two to six. DTA also continued to work with community partners and sister agencies to connect DTA clients with critical federal and state resources that helped support the health and economic stability of whole families. In calendar year 2023, the agency sent more than 16 million text messages and 4 million emails to clients about case-related information or updates from the agency's partners. In addition, throughout 2023 DTA's text message outreach campaigns aimed at educating clients on additional resources included sharing information about SNAP Ed Outreach, the Restaurant Meal Program (RMP), SNAP into Baby Steps in partnership with the Treasury Department, and Summer Eats available meal sites in partnership with Project Bread.

RESULTS OF PAPER REDUCTION EFFORTS

DTA continues modernizing its business practices and reducing the Department's reliance on paper documentation. The agency is committed to exploring and pursuing innovative ways to build on its access-on-demand model and leveraging new technologies that offer clients more convenient, accessible ways to submit documentation to the Department from their home computers or mobile devices. As the agency looks towards the future, it will maintain many of the innovations and enhancements that have been implemented in recent years that improve the agency's service delivery, improve convenience for applicants and clients, and also continue reducing the Department's use of paper-based documentation.