

OVERVIEW

Audit of the Department of Human Services' Information Systems

Report No. 01-05, February 2001

Summary

The State Auditor initiated this audit to assess the Department of Human Services' information systems' effectiveness in providing for public welfare needs efficiently. The audit was conducted pursuant to Section 23-4, Hawaii Revised Statutes, which requires the Auditor to conduct postaudits of the transactions, accounts, programs, and performance of all departments, offices, and agencies of the State and its political subdivisions.

The Department of Human Services is one of the largest departments in the State with an annual budget of over \$1.0 billion and approximately 1,600 employees. Its mission is to provide high quality, efficient, and effective services designed to achieve self-sufficiency for clients as quickly as possible. Information systems are valuable technological resources that aid in achieving this mission by automating tasks, recording vast and varied information efficiently, and generating accurate management reports. Effective information systems improve government services in supporting public welfare needs and planning for welfare reform.

Divisions within the department use separate and distinct information systems to satisfy program needs and maintain client information. The Benefit, Employment and Support Services Division (BESSD) uses the Hawaii Automated Welfare Information (HAWI) system for its welfare programs and the Hawaii Automated Network for Assistance (HANA) system for its First-To-Work, Employment and Training, and Child Care programs. A social services computer system called the Child Protective Services System (CPSS) maintains records for Social Services Division programs. The Vocational Rehabilitation Division uses the Vocational Rehabilitation Information Statistical System, while the Med-QUEST Division uses a combination of specialized applications running on separate computer systems.

We found that the department's failure to follow state information systems planning guidelines hindered the department's ability to recognize and plan for more effective information systems. The department inadequately followed the State's *Distributed Information Processing and Information Resources Management (DIPIRM)* planning process and failed to form an executive steering review committee according to state standards. This resulted in inadequate linkages among computer systems and ineffective sharing of information. Several intervening manual tasks are required to retrieve information from other systems, reducing the effectiveness of the department's computer systems and hindering operational efficiency.

We also found that the department's major computer systems do not effectively share information. Although some extent of electronic exchange occurs between HAWI and computers of the Internal Revenue Service, the Departments of Health and Human Services, the Social Security Administration, the Hawaii Medical



Service Association, and Citibank, HAWI does not effectively share information with HANA and the social services computer system within the department. Information sharing increases data accuracy, timeliness, and cost effectiveness. For example, in our tests to match HAWI's 233,631 individuals with the social services computer system's 171,561 individuals, we found 47,945 matched social security numbers. However, in these matched records, there were 7,938 first names, 7,141 last names, and 3,175 dates of birth that did not match up. This ineffective sharing of information between HAWI and the social services computer system results in duplicate data entry and increased data inaccuracies.

We also found that inaccurate data and limited usefulness of the department's social services computer system undermine the computer system's effectiveness. Using an automated auditing software called IDEA for Windows, we found significant amounts of missing, inaccurate, and inconsistent data. Out of 171,561 total clients, 16,564 contained no date of birth, 53,999 had no social security number, and 36,539 were not linked to any case. Out of 54,342 cases, 4,980 cases were not linked to any clients. These key data fields are used to track and identify individuals and related information. The discrepancies negatively affect computer system reliability, user efficiency, and program functionality.

Finally, we found that the department missed the opportunity to finance upgrading the computer system's functionality with enhanced federal dollars.

Recommendations and Response

We recommended that the director ensure that the department's *Distributed Information Processing and Information Resource Management* (DIPIRM) plan and its executive steering committee are in accord with State standards and guidelines. In addition, we recommended that the department redesign the social services computer system to better meet user needs and incorporate necessary interfaces. In redesigning the system, the department should consider pursuing federal funding.

The Department of Human Services agreed with our audit findings and states that it is in the process of pursuing the recommendations. It concurred that more automated interfaces would increase efficiencies within the department and with other departments. The department also stated that it is committed to improving the management and coordination of its information technology resources.

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