

Annual Report to the Legislature and the Governor

Washington Connection Benefit Portal



RCW 74.04.225

2010 Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 2782, Section 2

Establishment of an Online Opportunity Portal to Provide More Effective Access to Available Services

December 1, 2015



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TTY/VCO users may also call Washington Relay Service by dialing 711.

Executive Summary

This is the fourth annual report in fulfillment of [RCW 74.04.225](#). The 2010 Washington State Legislature enacted legislation, Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 2782, to strengthen existing efforts of state agencies and partners to implement an online benefit portal. The goal was to streamline online public access to a broad array of state, federal and local services and benefits.

Successfully implemented in December 2010 and enhanced quarterly thereafter, the [Washington Connection](#) benefit portal received national recognition through the 2012 Bright Ideas Award from the Ash Center at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. There are now nearly 1,100 registered partners throughout the state, improving residents' access to services and benefits. Currently over 81,000 households use their Washington Connection Client Benefit Accounts to renew their benefits or update information online.

Background

As required by the Legislature, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) deployed an integrated approach in providing online access to services and benefits as well as employment, training and education programs. Through strong partnerships among government agencies, community partners, community colleges and philanthropic organizations, Washington Connection continues to fulfill this requirement.

Washington Connection offers information about benefits and services, provides a pre-screening eligibility function, and includes the option to apply online, removing barriers for many residents seeking help to meet their basic needs. Washington Connection also provides online tools for community partners that can help their clients apply for and renew services and benefits.

The Secretary of DSHS serves as the executive sponsor of the Washington Connection Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from community-based organizations, state agencies, tribes, higher education and the Health Benefit Exchange. While the Advisory Committee guides the direction of Washington Connection's long-term strategies, DSHS is responsible for administering the tasks associated with the daily operations of the portal, partnership development, public outreach, and data analysis.

Strategic Plan Performance Measures and Updates

The Advisory Committee approved the 2013-2015 Washington Connection Strategic Plan in January 2013 and has started the collaboration process to develop the 2016-2018 Strategic Plan in July 2015. The Committee received updates on performance measures and new initiatives related to these five strategic goals: (1) increase community outreach; (2) improve portal functionality; (3) increase access points; (4) expand the online application to include more benefit programs; and (5) enhance the governance structure to support growth and sustainability.

This report includes: (1) Strategic Plan Performance Measures; (2) Advisory Committee Membership in 2015; (3) Benefit Programs through Washington Connection; (4) Number of Active Client Benefit Accounts; (5) Registered Community Partners by County; and (6) Registered Community Partners by Organization Type.

Figure 1 – Strategic Plan Performance Measures

FIGURE 1 – WASHINGTON CONNECTION STRATEGIC PLAN PERFORMANCE MEASURES								
GOAL 1. INCREASE COMMUNITY OUTREACH TO ACHIEVE PUBLIC AWARENESS								
OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURE <i>ONLINE SUBMISSION</i>	BASELINE Dec 2010	CY 2011	CY 2012	CY 2013	CY 2014	CY* 2015	Aug** 2015
A. Increase outreach to Community-based organizations so they can help clients with online applications or refer clients to Washington Connection	Applications for Benefits	52%	54%	54%	52%	52%	49%	65%
	Change of Circumstances	45%	54%	65%	64%	66%	64%	70%
	Eligibility Reviews	17%	20%	27%	28%	30%	29%	35%
	Total Online Submissions	37%	41%	44%	44%	44%	38%	46%
B. Increase client outreach to better serve existing clients and reach more residents in need through Washington Connection	<i>Source: DSHS Barcode and Cognos Report</i>							
	* The CY 2015 data is from January 1 to August 19, 2015. Since the submissions through the Interactive Interview process in the Community Service Offices were counted as paper submissions, the increase of Interactive Interviews has caused the decrease of percentage of online submissions.							
**The August 2015 data is incomplete (August 1-19) but appears to be higher than previous months. We will continue to monitor and analyze the factors.								
GOAL 2. IMPROVE PORTAL FUNCTIONALITY SO USERS CAN EASILY FIND INFORMATION AND COMPLETE TASKS ONLINE								
OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURE <i>SURVEY FEEDBACK*</i>	BASELINE Oct-Dec 2012	Oct-Dec 2013	Oct-Dec 2014	April- June 2015			
A. Improve usability of Washington Connection by enhancing portal functionality for clients**	Customer Feedback from Online Survey							
	Rated as Good/Very Good	42%	72%	73%	70%			
	Would recommend to others	60%	85%	86%	82%			
B. Improve usability of Washington Connection by enhancing portal functionality for community partners**	Reported no trouble using website	42%	64%	69%	69%			
	Community Partner Feedback for Online Survey							
C. Establish a comprehensive customer support team***	Rated as Good/Very Good	65%	76%	79%	72%			
	Would recommend to others	69%	84%	88%	95%			
	Reported no trouble using website	68%	78%	76%	72%			
<i>Source: Survey Monkey Report</i>								
* The three questions listed above stayed in the 2015 survey so they can be measured consistently.								
** To improve the usability of Washington Connection, DSHS implemented 26 enhancements in 2015 in response to feedback from the customers. DSHS continues to identify improvement opportunities for future enhancements.								
***When customers submit questions through the “Contact Us” link, the Customer Support Team responds to their questions within one working day.								

FIGURE 1 – WASHINGTON CONNECTION STRATEGIC PLAN PERFORMANCE MEASURES *(continued)*

GOAL 3. INCREASE THE NUMBER OF ACCESS POINTS (PLACES) WHERE CLIENTS CAN GET HELP (ASSISTING AGENCIES) OR USE A COMPUTER (HOST ORGANIZATIONS)

OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURE <i>REGISTERED COMMUNITY PARTNERS</i>	Baseline October 2011 (Agencies)	Update June 2015 (Agency Sites)
A. Secure additional resources to help partners build capacity	Assisting Agencies	84 (14%)	565 (53%)
B. Recruit and retain Assisting Agencies and Host Organizations by providing training and support	Host Organizations	516 (86%)	507* (47%)
C. Collaborate with organizations to coordinate outreach initiatives to leverage community networks and resources	Total Registered Partners	600	1,072
* Many Host Organizations have changed their partnership level and became Assisting Agencies, which contributed to the decrease of the number of current Host Organizations.			

GOAL 4. EXPAND ONLINE APPLICATIONS TO INCLUDE MORE BENEFIT PROGRAMS

OBJECTIVES	<i>Prescreening Process Indicator</i>
A. Identify, initiate and collaborate with potential benefit administrators	<p>Added new benefit programs to “See If I Qualify” prescreening referral process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free and Reduced Price School Meals – Managed by Office of Superintendent of Public Instructions • Vocational Rehabilitation Assistance – Managed by DSHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation • Start Next Quarter Workshop – Managed by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

GOAL 5. ENHANCE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE TO SUPPORT GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY FOR WASHINGTON CONNECTION

OBJECTIVE	<i>Advisory Committee Indicator</i>	Result
A. Develop and implement a review process of the governance structure to identify needed changes	Review and update the Committee Charter based on present needs	Revised and approved the Committee Charter in January 2015
	Manage committee operations based on the succession model for Co-Chair and Vice Co-Chair	Appointed new Co-Chair and Vice Co-Chair in January 2015
	Recruit new committee members to have balanced representation	Nominated and appointed four new members in January 2015

Sources: DSHS Barcode Report, Cognos Report, Survey Monkey Report, Washington Connection Advisory Committee

Figure 2 – Advisory Committee Membership in 2015

Officers			
Officer Position	Name	Title	Organization
Executive Sponsor	Kevin Quigley	Secretary	DSHS
Chair	David Stillman	Assistant Secretary	DSHS, Economic Services Administration
Co-Chair	Robert Coit	Executive Director	Thurston County Food Bank
Vice Co-Chair	John Bowers	Dean for Basic and Transitional Studies	South Seattle Community College
Committee Members			
Name	Title	Organization	
Sharon Beaudoin	Chief Operating Officer	WithinReach	
Jim Baumgart	Policy Advisor	Governor’s Executive Policy Office	
Jesus Bervis	Eligibility Manager	NeighborCare Health	
Kelly Boston	Associate Director of Communications	Washington Health Benefit Exchange	
Madelyn Carlson	Chief Executive Officer	People for People	
Ed Fox	Director	Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe, Health Services	
Elizabeth Guerra	Community Services Director	Blue Mountain Action Council	
Monica Henry	Director	Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, Social Services	
Lauren McGowan	Associate Director	United Way of King County, Ending Homelessness	
Mary Schwartz	Data Systems Manager	Department of Commerce, Community Services and Housing	
Kathy Thamm	Director	Community-Minded Enterprises	
Mary Wood	Assistant Director	Health Care Authority, Eligibility Policy and Services Delivery	

Figure 3 – Benefit Programs through Washington Connection

The following benefit programs can be applied for or renewed online through Washington Connection:

Food Assistance

- Basic Food – federally funded
- Food Assistance Program for Legal Immigrants – state funded

Cash Assistance (the worker determines programs for which the client is eligible)

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF)
- Refugee Cash Assistance
- State Family Assistance Program
- Aged, Blind or Disabled Cash Assistance
- Pregnant Women Assistance
- Diversion Cash Assistance
- Consolidated Emergency Assistance Program
- State Supplemental Payment

Medical Assistance (Washington Apple Health)

- Health Care Coverage – for individuals 65 or older, blind or disabled
- Medicare Savings Program
- Mental Health Services (for mentally ill prison inmates soon to be released)

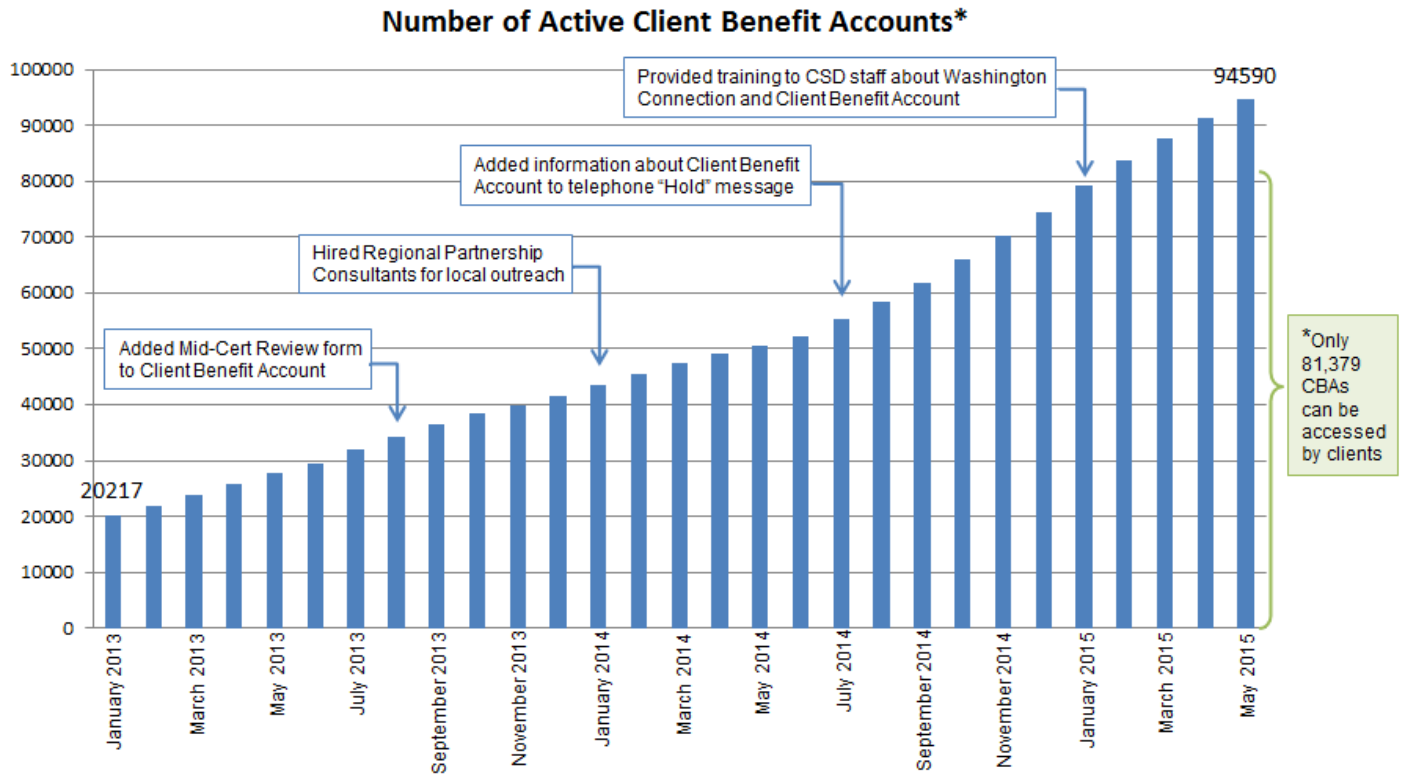
Subsidized Child Care Assistance

- Working Connections Child Care
- Seasonal Child Care

Long Term Care Medical Assistance

- In-Home Long Term Care Services
- Assisted Living Facility / Adult Family Home
- Nursing Home
- Hospice
- Healthcare for Workers with Disabilities
- Developmental Disabilities Services

Figure 4 – Number of Active Client Benefit Accounts (CBAs)

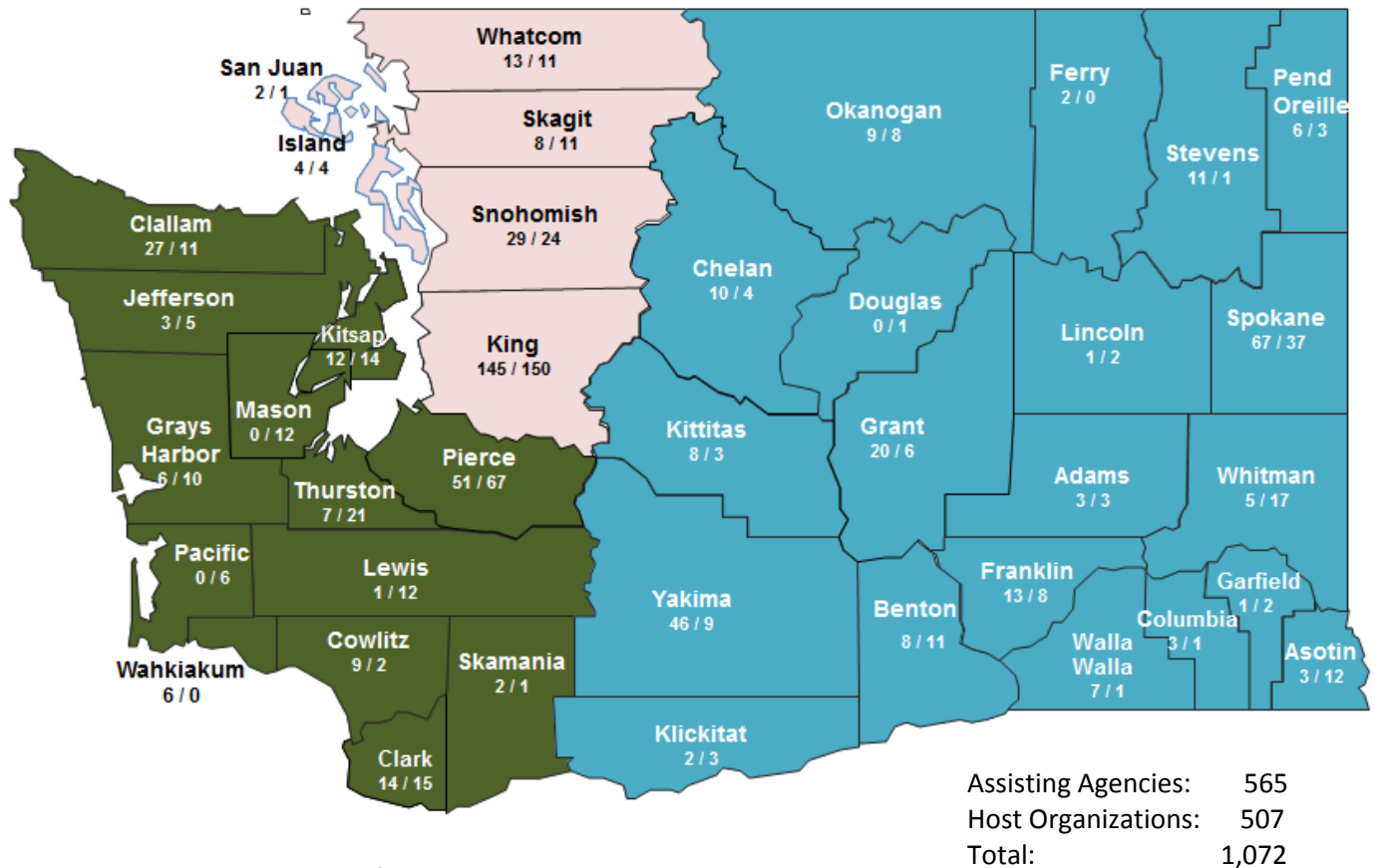


Source: DSHS Cognos Report

* The data shows cumulative count of open Client Benefit Accounts (CBAs) in each month. In May 2015, among 94,590 CBAs, only 81,379 of them were accessible by the Head of Household of the Assistance Unit (AU). To access their CBA, a client must be a Head of Household, have federally verified SS number, and meet one of the following criteria: be active in an AU, have a pending application, be suspended from an active AU, be pending spenddown for a medical AU, be closed within the last 60 days, or be denied within the last 60 days.

Figure 5 – Registered Community Partners by County

Number of Registered Community Partners by County* – # Assisting Agencies / # Host Organizations



Source: DSHS Cognos Report, as of June 30, 2015.

Registered Partners – Organizations that choose to register as Washington Connection community partners and to assist residents in accessing benefits and services. There are two types of registered partners:

1. Assisting Agencies – Organizations that provide applicants with assistance in completing and submitting online Applications, Eligibility Renewals and Changes of Circumstances. An Assisting Agency must fill out Data Share Agreements and Confidentiality Non-disclosure forms. These organizations can view applications and track staff work.
2. Host Organizations – Organizations that agree to offer any of the following: (1) display posters and printed marketing materials about Washington Connection, (2) provide applicants with access to a computer with an icon to Washington Connection on the desktop, or (3) provide applicants with assistance in answering questions about the Washington Connection website.

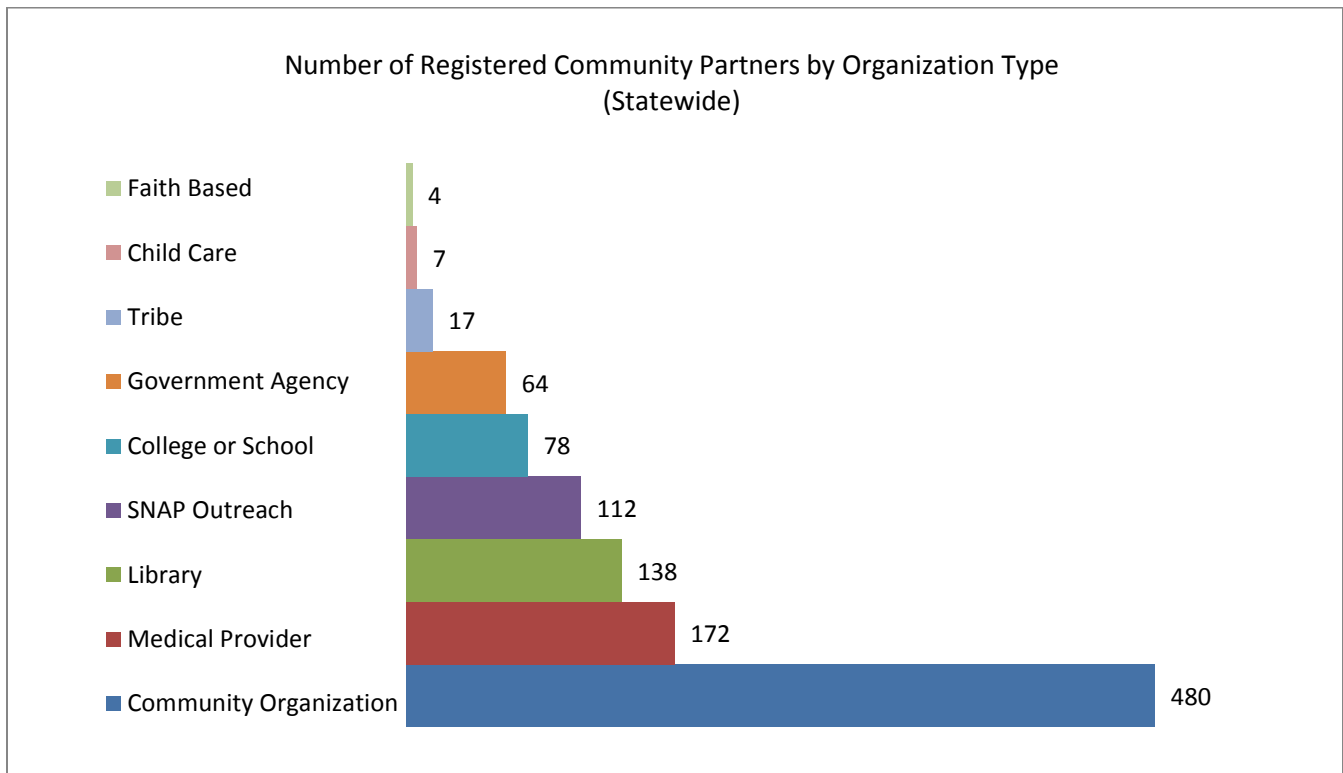
* Color Coding for Each Region:

Blue – Region 1: Includes Counties in the Central and Eastern Washington.

Beige – Region 2: Includes Counties in the North Puget Sound.

Green – Region 3: Includes Counties in the Olympic Peninsula, South Puget Sound, and the Southwest Washington.

Figure 6 – Registered Community Partners by Organization Type



Number of Registered Community Partners by Organization Type – by Region*

Region	College Or School	Community Organization	Government Agency	Library	Medical Provider	Tribe	SNAP Outreach	Child Care	Faith Based	TOTAL
Region 1	25	156	23	40	81	5	22	1	2	355
Region 2	14	199	22	51	59	2	50	4	1	402
Region 3	39	125	19	47	32	10	40	2	1	315
Statewide	78	480	64	138	172	17	112	7	4	1,072

Source: DSHS Cognos Report, as of June 30, 2015.

* Areas Covered in Each Region:

Region 1: Includes Counties in the Central and Eastern Washington.

Region 2: Includes Counties in the North Puget Sound.

Region 3: Includes Counties in the Olympic Peninsula, South Puget Sound, and the Southwest Washington.