

Position Statement

For 2024 Session

MACSSA has an organizational priority of “Strategic Position Development” with the goal of addressing challenges and leading innovation through thoughtful analysis that incorporates fiscal implications, systemic policy concerns, and legislative strategies in the development of policy and legislative positions.

HS Modernization Requires Strong State-Local Partnership

Proposal

Issue:

Modernization of human services programs, processes, and technology is imperative to effectiveness and sustainability of publicly funded human services. The current system is complex, fragmented, administratively burdensome for all, and doesn't produce the outcomes Minnesotans need from these critical community supports. DHS/MNIT provides the major systems (MAXIS, METS, MMIS, MEC², PRISM, SSIS, MnCHOICES, SMI) that county workers use every day to deliver services to residents. These mission-critical systems capture data, automate complex program policies, and provide functionality to support human services administration. Modernization efforts at the state level in recent years have not kept pace with the rapidly changing technology and service environment. MACSSA advocates for major financial investment in systems transformation, including state/county/tribal technology modernization and administrative simplification, as well changes to governance of strategic/long term investments and day to day system prioritization.

Recent initiatives like the Gartner assessment of Minnesota's modernization approach and Code for America's implementation of the MNBenefits application point to a promising path forward. They offer a new framework for modernization that emphasizes agile and iterative delivery of tools that make service engagement easier and better for the people we serve while also being attentive to the needs of county and tribal agencies.

Alongside the need for new technology to support service delivery transformation is the need to sustain and improve the existing core systems county workers rely upon for their day to day work. Most of the systems DHS requires counties to use are 20 to 30 years old. They are too limited, too inflexible, and too inefficient. Persistent County workforce shortages are adding to the strain. We cannot wait years for new systems to be procured or developed. A more transitional approach is needed, one that addresses county pain points in the short term while putting the state on a solid path toward systems and practice transformation. This is a current and long term workforce issue for county human services. Hiring and retaining staff requires advancement in technology to create efficiencies and to ensure systems, system workarounds, and user experience are not a deterrent to hiring and retention of necessary staff

MACSSA continues to support movement toward an integrated service delivery and the Gartner recommendation with an initial emphasis on the eligibility and enrollment processes that are currently managed in systems like MAXIS, MEC² and METS. At the same time, there is a growing recognition among counties that the social service programs administered in the SSIS system also require renewed attention and investment. Addressing these areas is further complicated, and even more critical, in light of transitions in DHS governing structure and the creation of a new state agency - the Department of Children Youth and Families. Intentionality, with counties at the decision-making table, is needed to ensure the new agency does not merely inherit the shortcomings of transferring existing archaic systems to a new home, miss opportunities to invest available one time transition resources most effectively and within a joint vision with DHS on system transformation that features a genuine county voice in decision-making and that appropriate governance and decisions are made about systems investments in shared architecture.

Recent implementation of the MNChoices Revision system has demonstrated clearly the importance of county voice in identifying the goals and necessary deliverables of system upgrades and replacements. Equally, the recent and ongoing rollout of that system demonstrates the need for county voice in the challenging planning, phasing, and change management of implementing a new system. The importance of county voice in system modernization governance is only enhanced with new investments and new systems transitions we expect to see in the future.

Limitations in the DHS technology budget have constrained the state's ability to respond to the demand counties have for improved technology systems and have inhibited its ability to implement the Gartner recommendations and roadmap. The 2023 legislative session saw historic investment in system transformation funds, with DHS receiving over \$200 million in one time investment. However, this investment is just the tip of the iceberg regarding investments needed and sufficient long-term or ongoing system transformation and technology infrastructure investment spending were not a part of that legislative package. Equally, counties did not receive any investments last session toward county costs of system transformation - particularly towards the local costs of implementing these state investments. DHS leadership has renewed its commitment to service and systems transformation and has expressed a desire to respond more directly and effectively to the technology needs of counties and the people we serve. DHS and MNIT, however, have not had the financial resources needed to pull down federal matching funds and truly invest in the solutions counties are demanding. Equally, counties have not yet been able to maximize their current local investments by drawing down federal matching APD funds to expand and leverage local property tax dollar investments for eligible systems expenditures. Processes through DHS/MNIT need to be developed to ensure these local investments can be matched and maximized.

In addition, MACSSA recognizes that not every county has equal ability to invest in what is currently needed at the local level to interface appropriately with state human services systems. A growing concern is an expansion of a digital divide between large vs small county access to tools and local infrastructure solutions (technology, systems, and software) to best meet the needs of consumers and end users. Beyond access, system changes must also consider the needs of small counties, ensuring their processes are not enlarged by system improvements needed to support large counties. Individual counties may not have the resources to develop these solutions alone, but if the state allocated counties flexible technology resources for collaborative projects, more counties can have a voice in innovations and investments that prioritize county needs and perspectives. Working together, we know that counties develop innovative solutions that are informed by workers and end users that meet their local needs.

During the summer of 2023 MACSSA passed a white paper that explores more broadly MACSSA Technology EcoSystem Recommendations. The MACSSA Ecosystem Document reflects the voice of Counties across Minnesota. The goal of this document was to offer technology modernization recommendations in alignment with 2021 Gartner findings to define and build a future state "integration platform ecosystem," that includes state and county-based solutions. General recommendations of the document include:

- 1) Include counties as full partners in the work to develop strategies, architectures, plans and roadmaps to build the new eco-system, not just in the implementation phases of introducing new solutions.
2. Create a comprehensive interoperability architecture that recognizes and supports our blended ecosystem of multi-agency state, county, tribal and vendor-provided system with a goal toward more shared and centralized technology options for counties, eventually reducing the county technology footprint and expenses.
3. Invest significantly more resources into modernizing, improving, or replacing state provided technology systems used by county staff.

(<https://cms5.revize.com/revize/macssa/MACSSA%20Technology%20Eco-System%20Recommendations%2006%2005%202023.pdf> .

It is also important to note several dangerous current political dynamics around system modernization. 1) The legislature is likely to consider their 2023 investment as checking a box and addressing human services systems needs. 2) In light of the politics and urgency of the end of the federal peacetime emergency - and the unprecedented task of conducting medical assistance renewals on our paper-based systems that are out of Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) compliance - a risk exists that the county priorities and the system ecosystem governance values will fall victim to centralized DHS-driven political decisions and political reactionism. Federal compliance for health care eligibility systems

is a joint priority, but it can not eclipse and eliminate the other system advancement and investments, including at the local level, that urgently need to be made.

Implementation:

MACSSA will advocate for major financial investment in systems transformation, including state/county/tribal technology modernization and administrative simplification.

MACSSA supports investments that:

- Advance projects that improve user experience and reduce administrative burden for both clients and workers in addition to planning for modernized state eligibility systems
- Architect and implement a technology environment that is person-centered and provides interoperability across state systems and local systems
- Support innovation and efficiency at a county level by providing counties with more direct access to the data that resides in DHS systems
- Allocate a portion of state transformation funds and enhanced federal funding to local county innovation efforts
- Allocate a portion of state transformation funds for county implementation of new state-provided technologies
- Restore resources and projects to address the functional gaps that persist in the METS system
- Improve the capabilities and usability of SSIS, a system that has fallen out of sync with evolving service and case management practices
- Sustain the other existing DHS technology systems that counties depend upon to do their work until such time as they can be moved to newer technologies

Systemic Priority/Paradigm Trend Alignment (highlight all that apply and explain why)

- **Equity:** Promote racial equity and eliminate racial disparities in the human services system for all people across the state. *(systemic priority)*
- **Workforce:** Advocate for strategies to sustain and equip the workforce, and simplify work given the forecasted labor shortages. *(systemic priority/paradigm trend)*
- **Technology:** Collaboratively seek state investment in systems transformation and modernization which must include appropriate county collaboration, oversight, and guidance. *(systemic priority/paradigm trend)*
- **Governance/Partnerships:** Co-create state/county governance that results in clear accountability, appropriate allocation of resources, stabilized service delivery, and improved outcomes for people served. *(systemic priority/paradigm trend)*
- **Resident Service:** Adapt to individual needs to support real choices *(paradigm trend)*

The current Modernization strategic plan and implementation strategies prioritizes equity considerations and authentic community engagement. Work to date has leveraged trusted partners, such as the Wilder Foundation, to conduct community engagement, particularly within communities experiencing disparate impacts. Furthermore, tools to measure impact on equity will be incorporated into the evaluation framework. From the GARE Toolkit (See www.racialequityalliance.org): What are the racial equity impacts of this particular decision? Who will benefit from or be burdened by it? Are there strategies to mitigate unintended consequences? In summary, current approaches to Modernization will answer these questions.

As noted earlier, the strategic plan and the recent Gartner report validates the Integrated Services Business Model (ISBM). They also validate the concept of a human services practice and technology ecosystem that extends beyond DHS and MNIT supported programs and technologies. Data is the foundation of this ecosystem and is essential to integrated services and interoperability.

Lastly, this Modernization position acknowledges the role the state, counties, tribes, and partners have in developing and resourcing Minnesota's human services practice and technology ecosystem. It encourages blended fiscal solutions that promote appropriate and shared accountability for the system and its outcomes.

MACSSA believes that counties, tribes, and DHS should continue operationalizing effective solutions. There is real value in increasing equity and ease of access to services to all Minnesotans. County agencies are innovating and allocating funding along with staff resources to create operational solutions and there is concern of further fragmentation due to lack of interoperability between county agencies and potential state government systems. DHS and counties need to find ways to innovate together. These principles, including the focus on interoperability, align with the recent final deliverable from the Gartner Curam Assessment project and its updated implementation roadmap for Modernization.

Operational Priority (Committee) Alignment (highlight all that apply and explain why)

Adult Services
Behavioral Health

Children's Services
Equity

Healthcare
Modernization

Policy
Self-Sufficiency

Why:

The Modernization committee was formed for the express purpose of advancing MACSSA's interests in this topic area. Its membership includes the people who represent MACSSA on DHS modernization governance groups. We also recognize that modernization and system transformation can not, and should not, be divorced from the expertise and experience of MACSSA's operational priority and policy areas across our human services system.

Rationale/Background:

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Counties and tribes have been promoting these principles for many years. The below are historic rationales from MACSSA. These principles align with the jointly owned Modernization Strategic Plan.

- Modernization is needed to build in equity within our system and eliminate disparities.
- Form should follow function; design is people-centered. The consolidation and redesign of State information technology organizations should work to maintain and improve the service-orientation of people-serving systems. This "customer-service focus" is balanced with the necessity of ensuring equity of services, maintaining data security, privacy, client safety, reporting accountability and reducing fraud.
- The health and human services system should be architected as a State-County enterprise. Within an enterprise, outcomes are a whole interplay of "policies, processes, and systems throughout the organization"
- Counties are partners in an extended enterprise architecture framework; we are the primary "business owner" of the health and human services delivery system; we are the business customer of the State-County I.T. systems and counties, and our clients and providers are the end-users of state-county enterprise solutions. Counties have representation at many levels within the current governance structure.
- The State and Counties should strategically align; service (business) needs should drive systems, processes, and solutions. Business needs and requirements for the state-county enterprise are legislative and policy mandates; strategic missions, visions, strategies, and desired outcomes within a performance management architecture, as well as preferred administrative (business) processes, which drive technology infrastructure and solutions.
- Digital era government and governance can be facilitated by direct service. The future state of the system is realized when the public has remote access to self-service by "anyone, anyplace, anytime"; the service provider is enabled at the point of service; the taxpayer sees and understands apparent results; intergovernmental transactions are sleek and unmediated; and people-serving agencies and groups connect to one another to collaborate on their programs and services.
- IT service (business) solutions need to be affordable, effective, and sustainable. The current business model for information technology does not meet these criteria. The enterprise architecture should be integrated and inter-operable with reusable solutions. The architecture must also be flexible and scalable.

Modernization efforts should achieve these goals:

- Provide people with more choice and greater control over their services
- Produce a simplified human services system that proactively addresses individual, family, and community needs, while increasing equity
- Support increased use of data to improve service delivery while putting consumers in the driver's seat as to how they want their data used
- Introduce and enhance modernized technology tools and supports that automate tasks and save time so staff can focus on supporting individuals and families
- Reduce the growth in administrative costs by simplifying, automating, integrating systems and processes
- Provide frequent, incremental improvements to county service delivery capabilities (including continuous improvement of existing systems to meet immediate needs)

High-level, one paragraph description of the issue and its importance:

The MACSSA Ecosystem Document reflects the voice of Counties across Minnesota. Despite important investments last session by the legislature, MACSSA recognizes the need for additional major financial investment in systems transformation, including state/county/tribal technology modernization and administrative simplification. DHS and counties need to find ways to innovate together following principles that include focus on interoperability and alignment with the recent final deliverable from the Gartner Curam Assessment project and its updated implementation roadmap for Modernization. MACSSA will ask the legislature to allocate a portion of state transformation funds and enhanced federal funding to local county innovation efforts and for implementation of new state-provided technologies. An expanded county role and voice in decision-making is necessary for the success of any system transformation to be successful. This is essential for meeting the needs of people we serve and supporting a thin county human services workforce.



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Approved on: