How Learning Management Systems Drive Better Outcomes for Health and Human Services Agencies

MARKET TRENDS REPORT

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Introduction

Tight budgets, outdated IT systems and changing workforce demographics are a few of the challenges facing today's health and human services (HHS) agencies. At the same time, they must also balance compliance and performance to ensure that current programs and the quality of care patients receive meet or exceed required standards.

To address these challenges, HHS agencies are exploring enhanced IT tools that empower them to make data-driven decisions. For a growing number of federal, state and local agencies, the solution has come in the form of a learning management system, or LMS.

At its core, an LMS is a software application for administrating, delivering and tracking e-learning or training programs. But an LMS isn't just about training anymore. It's about employee engagement, ensuring compliance and developing critical skills for the workforce.

For the HHS industry, an LMS improves real-time decision-making, increases compliance with regulations and delivers corporate training to employees. The state of Colorado is one example. Workers there use an LMS to centralize data and track and analyze return on investment (ROI). An LMS can be a powerful tool to meet current and future demands and boost employee engagement.

To explore how HHS agencies at all levels are using LMS tools, GovLoop partnered with Cornerstone OnDemand, a cloud-based learning and talent management solutions provider, to produce this report. In it, we explain how an LMS can meet the pressing challenges that agencies face and best practices for implementing one. We also highlight how Colorado is benefiting from this software application and how your agency can, too.

BY THE NUMBERS

3,000

local health departments are in the U.S., and they vary dramatically in size, nature, governmental structure and more.

13%

of state and local professionals said they have a hard time filling healthcare positions.

14

full-time equivalents is the median size of local health departments.

6,500+

public health professionals make up the diverse Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service. The team fills essential public health roles at federal agencies nationwide.

"[Local health departments] have serious and urgent needs for preparing new public health professionals and for upgrading the skills of current public health professionals. They face an ongoing need to train new and current workforces in how to respond to emerging areas, changing diseases, new priorities and new technologies."

In July 2017, the Governing Institute, in partnership with the American Public Human Services Association, surveyed 191 HHS professionals on the topics covered in this report. Here's an overview of the findings.

When outcomes are tracked effectively, agencies gain significant advantages:

52%
are better able to meet funding requirements

47%
improve their administrative process

45%
acheive better client/patient outcomes

32%
increase stakeholder engagement

THE CHALLENGE
Making Data-Driven Decisions to Improve Performance and Compliance

HHS agencies at all levels of government face some common challenges, including the need to centrally track data and outcomes, ensure that staff have the proper training, and comply with regulations and standards.

Federal agencies, in particular, have a host of chronic issues they must wade through. "With the changing landscape that's happening in the federal government, budgets have been slashed and agencies are working with very outdated systems," said Courtney Searles, Federal Account Manager at Cornerstone. Some of those systems are so anti-quated and difficult to maintain, agencies struggle to even use them.

HHS agencies also have the added pressure to cut costs while focusing on outcomes. But to improve outcomes, they need substantive data to justify current programs and make the case for new initiatives. This is often easier said than done, considering that data is dispersed across various legacy systems, some of which are decades old and critical to the mission.

"For state and local HHS agencies, they too are grappling with legacy systems. They are also stymied by the absence of an established way to assess employee training for compliance purposes," said Jared Bogert, Vice President of State and Local Government, Education, and Nonprofit at Cornerstone.

The reality is Microsoft Excel spreadsheets are the norm for most HHS agencies, which creates major issues for tracking information. A lack of visibility into workforce data and other metrics makes it harder to address current and future issues, including skills gaps.

"As workforce dynamics change and more seasoned professionals near retirement, agencies are experiencing a shortage of younger employees," Bogert said. "To ensure all employees have the necessary skills to fill any workforce gaps, agencies must provide adequate training. Although some entities have a way to deliver learning to employees, they don't have a reliable and consistent way to centrally track that information."

Finally, curbing the growing opioid epidemic is a massive undertaking that requires collaboration and data-sharing among multiple stakeholders. Agencies must tackle the inappropriate prescribing of opioids, combat fraud and address misuse of grant funds.

At all levels, HHS organizations are in dire need of more modern solutions and processes to enable data-driven decisions, eliminate silos, meet compliance requirements and empower their workforce to serve the public.

THE SOLUTION
A Comprehensive Learning Management System

To effectively address these challenges, agencies need a comprehensive solution that is easy to use and allows them to consolidate training, compliance and data tracking into a unified platform.

Training is a top priority as more government workers near retirement. Managers at HHS agencies will need to build and maintain the workforce in a way that retains current knowledge. They must also anticipate advances in medicine and technology, and prepare internal staff for future leadership positions.

That's why a growing number of agencies are exploring enhanced LMS capabilities that strengthen human capital management programs, reduce administrative burdens and improve reporting capabilities. At the core of these efforts is data. But having access to data alone isn't enough.

"Government organizations need the ability to quickly and easily understand their workforce data and to act on it to improve employee and/or constituent outcomes at a faster rate," Bogert said. "For example, an LMS can drive better decision-making through the use of predictive analytics. More specifically, these analytics capabilities can provide the insight for recommending talent management changes and visualizing the impact. Furthermore, agencies gain additional benefits when these tools are hosted in a cloud environment, which enables them to access data any time, anywhere and on any device. It also frees them up to focus more on mission requirements and less on IT implementations."

When it comes to meeting compliance requirements, LMS tools help track and report complex requirements and ensure training records are current and ready for audits and inspections.

In the next section, we share best practices and key capabilities to keep in mind when investing in an LMS.

Leveraging an LMS

I. Evaluate the benefits of a cloud-based LMS.

Many systems and applications are strong candidates for cloud environments, and an LMS is one of them. Having a secure, cloud-based LMS system means your agency can focus on more strategic initiatives while your vendor partner takes on the responsibility of rolling out and maintaining the system. "As the first talent management company to meet Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program requirements, Cornerstone is well aware of the critical need to secure employee data," Searles said.

2. Understand your agency's role in implementation.

One of the keys to successfully implementing any new system, particularly an LMS, is to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the vendor and your agency. You must work collaboratively with your industry partner to address requirements for security, data storage and access, and the availability of customer support. Clearly defining these roles upfront will reduce the risk of delays and unmet expectations.
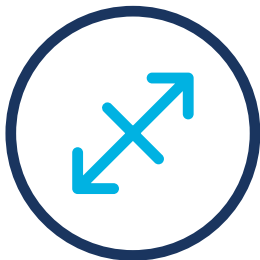
3. Look for a system that is scalable.

A scalable system can more easily adapt to your agency's changing needs, whether it's an increase or decrease in staff size, evolving training needs, or new compliance requirements. At the federal level, recent workforce reforms have already affected hiring and are forcing agencies to rethink what skills they need as more processes become automated.

4. Enlist executive support.

HHS agencies are under increasing pressure to show how their investments drive better business outcomes, such as improved patient care and the ability for employees at all levels to make data-driven decisions. Before investing in an LMS, develop a business case to show senior leaders how the new system can solve your organization's challenges and empower decision-makers.

5. Begin with the end in mind.

Before you dive into the logistics of buying a new LMS, consider what you want the end state to be. What capabilities do you hope to put in place? What requirements do you need to comply with, and how will the new system track employee training? Define what success looks like early in the process to ensure that new investments meet users' needs. For example, many HHS agencies are grappling with the opioid epidemic. An LMS would ensure that employees have the proper training to understand the issues involved and gain insights to educate the public and coordinate with law enforcement and other entities.

CASE STUDY

The Colorado Health Care & Economic Security Staff Development Center (SDC) is the training connection between the Colorado Department of Human Services, the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, and the Governor's Office of Information Technology. The SDC is responsible for identifying essential training needs and establishing and maintaining competency-based curricula for state employees in 64 Colorado counties. They faced several challenges that are all too common for HHS agencies: decentralized data, disparate training practices and a lack of capabilities to properly analyze ROI.

In terms of training and compliance, on average, only 500 of the state's 5,300 employees were in compliance with necessary training. Employees had grown accustomed to working with a system that was difficult to use and one that didn't provide much visibility into who was taking training.

To address these issues, the state conducted an extensive request for proposals process in search of an LMS that would bring all training into a single system. The state selected Cornerstone Learning to meet their needs.

"With Cornerstone Learning, we got this great product that would enable us to centralize our data, consolidate training practices and start tracking and analyzing ROI," said Michael Martinez, LMS administrator and web content editor for the Colorado Health Care and Economic Security Staff Development Center. "Our employees were used to a system that was very difficult to use. In contrast, Cornerstone is well designed and has a friendly user interface. It was such a novel idea to employees that using it could be that easy."

Using Cornerstone solutions, Colorado increased training completions by 700 percent — up from 500 to 4,000 employees.

Another benefit is ROI analysis. Before using Cornerstone, calculating ROI wasn't possible. "It would have required immense amounts of manual labor," Martinez said. "With Cornerstone, our governing body can see how effective the system has been and how effective the investment in our team has been regarding all our different training initiatives."

One of the greatest benefits the state realized was giving employees access to the data they need, when they need it. "We're not making decisions based on assumptions but on data, and that leads to more effective government overall," Martinez said.

HOW CORNERSTONE HELPS

Cornerstone's software enables agencies to move beyond the traditional LMS and reinvent the way learning and development initiatives affect employees.

"Skills are really driving organizations and their needs, and the emergence of a learning experience platform integrated with predictive analytics allows users to have a Netflix-like experience when consuming content," Searles said. This is a game-changer in terms of how employees search for and consume data and training information and comply with regulations.

Cornerstone delivers a variety of learning through platforms employees will actually use — and does it with ease. Through its partnerships with HHS agencies, Cornerstone provides collaborative tools that engage learners and enable peer-to-peer knowledge capture and sharing. *To learn more, visit: www.csod.com/ federal-government* or *www.csod.com/state-local.*

Conclusion

As HHS agencies strive to improve internal programs, quality of care for patients and compliance with regulations, having the proper systems in place is critical.

Agencies need access to comprehensive solutions that can meet their varying and complex needs, and enable them to track outcomes.

That's why forward-thinking agencies are tapping into the capabilities that LMS tools provide. A modern, cloud-based LMS can transform your agency as it seeks to engage employees and become more data-driven in an era of doing more with less.

ABOUT CORNERSTONE

Cornerstone OnDemand (NASDAQ: CSOD) is pioneering solutions to help organizations realize the potential of the modern workforce. As a global leader in cloud-based learning and human capital management software, Cornerstone is designed to enable a lifetime of learning and development that is fundamental to the growth of employees and organizations. From recruitment, onboarding, training and collaboration, to performance management, compensation, succession planning, people administration and analytics, Cornerstone is there at every phase of the employee lifecycle.

Cornerstone is a single, unified solution that is completely configurable to meet the talent strategy, compliance, business and workflow needs of an organization. Cornerstone works with corporations of all sizes, government agencies, hospitals, nonprofits and schools. Our software and services are used by more than 3,250 clients worldwide, spanning more than 36 million users across 192 countries and 43 languages. For more information, visit **www.cornerstoneondemand.com/federal-government.**

ABOUT GOVLOOP

GovLoop's mission is to "connect government to improve government." We aim to inspire public-sector professionals by serving as the knowledge network for government. GovLoop connects more than 270,000 members, fostering cross-government collaboration, solving common problems and advancing government careers. GovLoop is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a team of dedicated professionals who share a commitment to connect and improve government.

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