

Benefits Data Trust: Using Data to Deliver Services Where They Are Needed Most

Ginger Zielinskie 17 November 2016

Summary

Despite the availability of public programs to help Americans meet myriad basic needs, millions do not enroll. Benefits Data Trust is a results-oriented and outcomes-driven organization with the mission of connecting those who need but do not access these benefits to the relevant service providers. Partnerships between Benefits Data Trust and various Pennsylvania departments have helped at-need individuals realize hundreds of millions of dollars in essential services. Benefits Data Trust relies on data to ascertain who is in need as well as downstream impact, and provides a useful model to be replicated nationally.

Understanding The Challenge

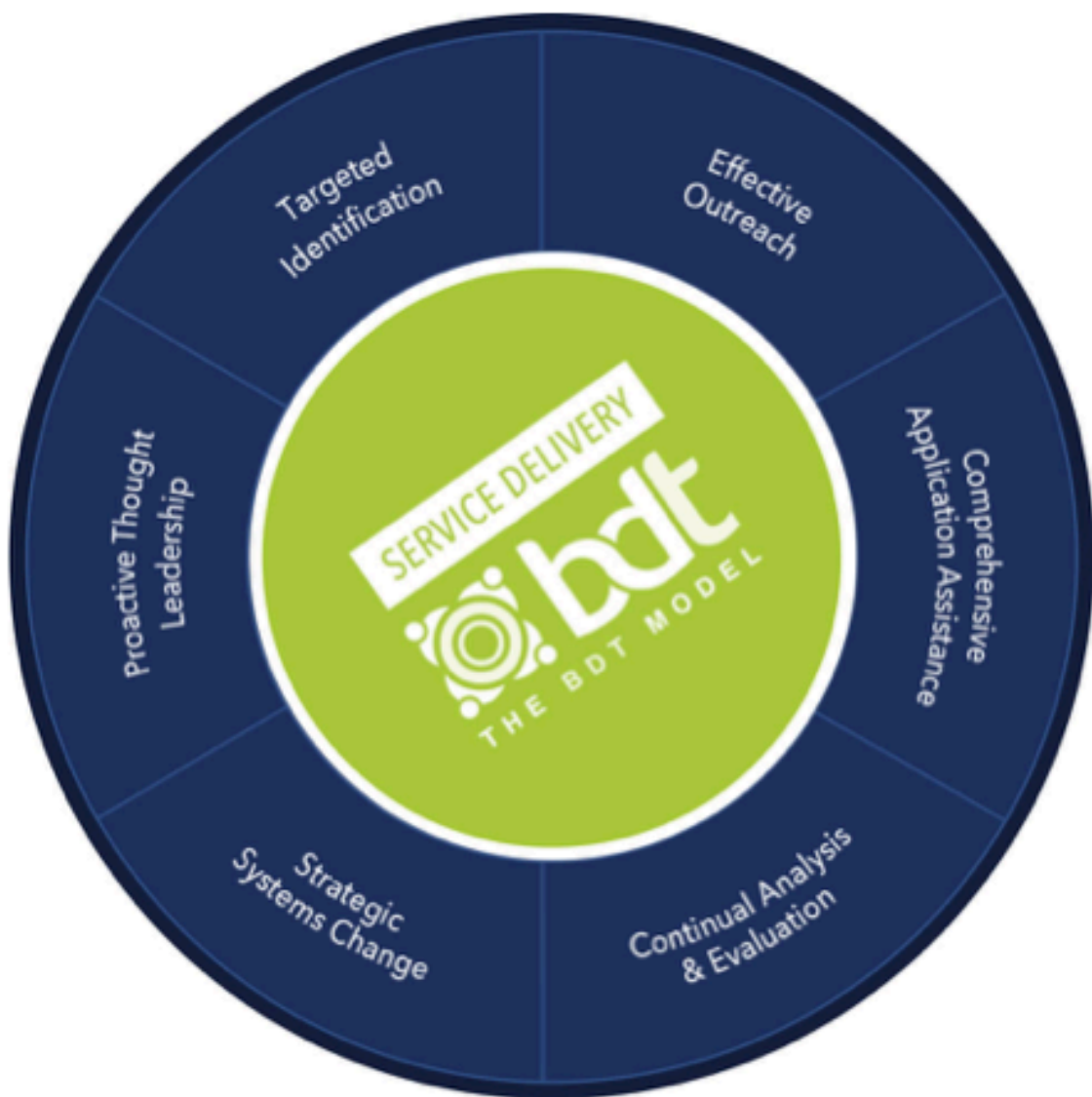
In a country as rich as America there should not be 46 million people who cannot feed their families, heat their homes, or pay their medical bills.

Even though public programs exist to meet basic needs, millions fail to enroll. For example, only 42% of eligible seniors access the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and an estimated 8.8 million people are eligible but not enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP.^{1, 2}

Applications are confusing and the health and human services system is fragmented. Technology falls short of providing adequate solutions and caseworkers are overburdened. All these factors lead to an existing benefits access system that is fractured and in need of repair. Every year countless dollars are spent to locate and enroll people into benefits and services, but ultimately these efforts fail to move the needle on poverty and millions of people are left unable to meet their basic needs.

However, there is a solution. We know who is poor and in need. The private sector has long used data to target marketing efforts; the social and government sectors must keep pace. Current systems capture client data once and let it languish, like gold that remains unmined.

Government is sitting on a literal goldmine, one that if used effectively has the power to significantly buffer the effects of poverty, create dramatic efficiencies within the health & human services ecosystem, improve outcomes for vulnerable populations, and save government billions of dollars.



Data to Impact Lives

Many individuals have accessed government programs at some point. Mrs. Jones relies on Social Security Income, Mr. Lopez used Medicaid when he had emergency surgery, and the Xi family needed food stamps to overcome a rough patch. Benefits Data Trust has developed a proven Service Delivery Model³ that relies on the use of diverse data sources from the private and public sectors to effectively assist individuals in need and demonstrate the positive outcomes associated with increased access. Specifically, BDT uses data from

government, healthcare organizations and other key sources to:

- **Identify Individuals in Need:** By matching existing city, state, federal and private data of persons who are eligible for or enrolled in at least one public benefit, BDT is able to identify thousands of individuals who are very likely eligible for but not enrolled in public benefits and services.
- **Outreach to identified individuals:** Once the most accurate lists are generated, BDT uses direct mail and contact center strategies to conduct targeted outreach and communicate with potentially eligible individuals, many of whom may not realize that they are eligible or have applied unsuccessfully in the past.
- **Provide Comprehensive Person-Centered Application Assistance:** BDT utilizes a contact center approach to educate responders about benefits and help eligible individuals to apply. BDT's staff is highly trained to communicate complex benefit information to individuals in a patient and user-friendly manner in order to overcome common application barriers.

CASE STUDY: BenePhilly

Beginning in 2010, Benefits Data Trust, in partnership with the City of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania's Departments of Human Services and Aging, launched the BenePhilly

Demonstration Project to increase SNAP participation among seniors using a data-driven approach. Using federal and state waivers to streamline access, BenePhilly proved extremely successful, increasing senior SNAP participation in Philadelphia by 23% in less than two years.⁴ Commissioned by the United States Department of Agriculture, Mathematica Policy Research released a report in 2014 that deemed the BenePhilly model more cost-effective than other national models of outreach and application assistance, saving government agencies "at least 30 minutes per case." In 2013, BDT formalized a more integrated partnership with the City of Philadelphia, Mayor's Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity to help individuals of all ages throughout the City access benefits and services, offer phone-based and in-person services, and screen for a total of 18 benefit programs. Since 2010, when BenePhilly began, BDT, through combined efforts, has submitted nearly 70,000 applications in Philadelphia, infusing over \$408 million into the homes of eligible individuals.

Data to Transform Systems

BDT is a results-oriented and outcomes-driven organization. Through continual program evaluation and data analysis, we are able use what we learn to work with our government partners to construct programs that better serve their clients at a more cost-effective price point. We also use our data to educate and provide technical assistance to state agencies on an ongoing

basis.

CASE STUDY: PA Fast Track

In 2016, BDT, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, implemented Fast Track. A waiver promoted by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Fast Track uses enrollment data from SNAP to streamline enrollment into Medicaid, as income eligibility guidelines are similar. By using verified SNAP data, it reduces application process time by nearly 75%. Fast Track has been employed in seven states, including Pennsylvania, and has yielded over one million enrollments and significantly decreased administrative time for states. Since implementation began in the Commonwealth in March, 2016, PA Fast Track has enrolled nearly 27,000 individuals into Medicaid, infusing approximately \$348 million in medical benefits into the homes of eligible individuals.

Data to Catalyze Outcomes

With increased access to data it is also possible to more acutely understand what programs deliver impact, save money and improve outcomes. Benefits Data Trust, in collaboration with its diverse partners, uses data to understand the long-term outcomes of its work for the individuals it serves. Our goal is to successfully enroll individuals in the benefits that impact their financial circumstances today, but also improve their long-term

social and health outcomes. BDT has worked with government and academia to build on secondary research that correlates poverty to poor health and social outcomes to demonstrate the powerful effects of safety-net services. To date, we have learned:

- Helping people afford their prescriptions through the PACE program prolongs nursing home admittance by two years.⁵
- Enrollment in SNAP and the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program significantly reduces the likelihood of nursing home admittance, emergency room use and hospital stays.⁶

Benefits Data Trust uses data throughout the project lifecycle to create impact. As a health and social service system we need to find better ways to work across sectors to unlock the power that data provides to serve individuals comprehensively, deliver services more comprehensively and focus on true fiscal and social outcomes. Data is a little-tapped commodity that holds the key to transform lives, systems and communities. We can make this happen if we strengthen our data security, develop shared consents, and work across sectors to broker strong data-sharing agreements.

ABOUT BDT

Benefits Data Trust is a national not-for-profit social change organization committed to transforming how

individuals in need access public benefits and services. BDT envisions a health and human services system that proactively connects individuals and families in need to all the supports they need to reach economic stability. We believe that when services are well-coordinated across sectors, people will be healthier and more economically secure; the system will be more efficient and cost-effective; and our communities will be stronger.

To achieve this vision, BDT works closely with partners in federal, state and local government, as well as the for-profit sector to increase participation in public benefit programs that help cover the cost of food, shelter and healthcare. BDT also pushes for policy change that makes benefits access more simple, comprehensive and cost-effective, and engages in cross-sector research to prove the value of safety net services. Since its inception in 2005 BDT has submitted over 650,000 applications on behalf of low-income clients, resulting in over \$6 billion in benefit dollars delivered to families and individuals in need.

Author bio

Ginger Zielinskie is the President of Benefits Data Trust (BDT), leading a team of approximately 150, where she collaborates with regional, state and federal government officials and other key stakeholders to bring best practices to the social sector as it relates to big data informatics, business

process re-engineering and continuous quality improvement. Ms. Zielinskie has grown BDT by 300% in just 5 years, focusing on efficiency, vision, and opportunity. She is a graduate of Skidmore College and Brandeis University School for Social Policy.

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Enrollment in the Pharmaceutical Assistance Contract for the Elderly Program (PACE)," unpublished application to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (August 2011).

6. Benefits Data Trust, publication pending.