

# Office of the Mayor Health and Human Services

Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity | December 2021



Photo credit: Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity

## ACCESS NYC

Agency: **Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity**

### Context

In New York City, 17.9% of residents live in poverty, 40.8% live in near-poverty and millions rely on benefits to feed and house their families. Enrollment in benefits reduces the citywide poverty rate and alleviates poverty's impact. For example, housing adjustments reduce the poverty rate by 5.6 percentage points and SNAP (food stamps) reduces the rate by 2.7 percentage points. Other costs like medical expenses raise the poverty rate by 3 percentage points.

Not all residents are signing up for all of the benefits that they are entitled to. In 2015, our office researched the barriers residents face when seeking information about benefits and explored improving this digital experience.

## Response

ACCESS NYC is a website that serves as a front door to public benefits information and an eligibility screener. Residents seeking benefits, with navigators assisting them, can learn about 80 city, state, and federal social safety net-related programs available citywide and check potential eligibility for about 40 programs. It is written in plain language and is professionally translated into 11 languages as provided for by Local Law 30.

ACCESS NYC was originally developed in 2006. In 2015, our office identified an opportunity to separate benefits information and screening into a new site with the goals of making it easier for people to understand and use, optimize it for use on phones, and make it easier to maintain and update. It was iteratively redesigned and tested in-house, replatformed with a tech vendor, and the new ACCESS NYC launched in 2016. The prior version became ACCESS HRA and hosts HRA electronic services.

ACCESS NYC is open source and its content and screening logic is available for re-use through the NYC Benefits Platform, which includes the Benefits and Programs dataset (hosted on NYC Open Data) and the NYC Benefits Screening API. This extends ACCESS NYC's value beyond a single website.

## Results

What are the measurable outcomes or results?

In the first year after the redesign and replatform, compared with the previous version of ACCESS NYC:

- Screening completion rate - the percentage of completed screenings -- increased from 20% to 67%
- Screenings completed - the monthly average of screenings completed a month -- increased from 3,028 to 8,800
- 800,000 users in the first year

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on how critical easier to understand, accessible, convenient benefits information is. In the period from March 2020 to Oct 31, 2021, user numbers rose significantly: compared to the previous 20-month period:

- 4.13 vs 1.58 million users (+160%)
- 6.47 vs 2.66 million browsing sessions (+143%)
- 326,000 total screenings completed, a monthly average of 16,300

## Beneficiary Stories

The following user experiences were collected from site users through Feedback prompt “Was this page helpful? Why or why not” on program guide info pages (some responses translated into English):

### IDNYC

- Because he told me what documents I should present on the day of the appointment (Porque me dijo que documentos debo presentar el dia de la cita)
- Yes, now I can replace my card and stop worrying.

### Emergency Rental Assistance Program

- It helped me how to apply (Me ayudó como aplicar)

### Child Tax Credit

- It explains everything very well

### Cooling Assistance

- Gave me clear and concise information (me dio informacion clara y concisa)

### NYC Care

- Excellent information with the hope of good medical care for people with low or no resources, but also being human with value, grcs (Excelente información con esperanza de buena atención medica para personas con bajos o sin recursos,pero siendo también humanos con valor, grcs)

## Next Steps

- Continued investment of technology development resources into ACCESS NYC to ensure that it is accurate, easy to understand, and saves time for residents and navigators trying to understand safety net resources.
- Continued exploration of opportunities for re-use of the open source content and API to create new services, outreach initiatives, or identify linkages.

## Relevant Publications

### ACCESS NYC Case Study

- Part 1 <https://civicservicedesign.com/case-study-access-nyc-part-1-5ccdf1c4a520>
- Part 2 <https://civicservicedesign.com/case-study-access-nyc-part-2-f86130ebdead>

### Awards

- “Project Winner” ACCESS NYC, Government Experience Awards, Center For Digital Government - 9/2020

The awards recognize the achievements and best practices of states, cities, and counties that are radically improving the experience of government and pushing the boundaries of how citizen services are delivered.

<https://medium.com/nyc-opportunity/access-nyc-receives-2020-government-experience-award-847f20e38713>

- “Constituent Services Winner” ACCESS NYC, Amazon Web Services (AWS) City on a Cloud Innovation Challenge - 12/2019  
The competition recognizes government initiatives that use the cloud to innovate and improve the quality of life for citizens.  
<https://medium.com/nyc-opportunity/access-nyc-is-named-city-on-a-cloud-innovation-challenge-winner-414df8cfb406>
- “Best Multilingual Website” ACCESS NYC, Adobe Government Creativity Awards (AGCA) - 7/2018  
AGCA aims to recognize the top creative work in government and the public sector and to celebrate the impact it makes on the world. Nearly 500 entries were submitted from governments from eight countries in total.  
<http://adobecreativityawards.com/virtualgallery?livesubmission=2017727>
- “Best Application Serving the Public” ACCESS NYC, Center For Digital Government - 9/2017  
The Best of New York Awards recognize state and local government organizations for their standout contributions, best practices and innovations in information technology that improve citizen services and internal operations.  
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/opportunity/news/013/access-nyc-receives-award-best-application-serving-public-#/0>
- NYC Benefits Platform  
The NYC Benefits Platform supports organizations that make it easier for NYC residents to discover and be aware of multiple benefits they may be eligible for through open resources including:
  - NYC Benefits and Programs Dataset: plain language, standardized public info for 100+ programs available on ACCESS NYC and other websites our office maintains.  
<https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Social-Services/NYC-Benefits-Platform-Benefits-and-Programs-Datase/kvhd-5fmu>
  - NYC Benefits Screening API: Machine-readable calculations and criteria for benefits screening that power the ACCESS NYC screening questionnaire. Accelerate the creation of new screening tools and screen households for benefits based on existing information.  
<https://screeningapidocs.cityofnewyork.us/>
- Benefits Access in New York City - NYC Mayor’s Office of Operations Local Law 60 Report, 2018  
A systematic review of various benefits access initiatives within different City agencies, creating an opportunity to streamline efforts, extend what is working, and explore new ideas.  
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/opportunity/reports/local-law-60.page>
- Information Sharing and System Modernization - NYC Mayor’s Office of Operations Local Law 75 Report, 2018  
A study on client information management systems used by City human services agencies and recommendations involving data sharing and data management to support more

coordinated services and improved experiences and outcomes for clients.

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/opportunity/reports/local-law-75.page>