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# Don't Let Your Data Keep Secrets
## Keys to Analytics Success in Human Services

Human services practitioners once had to rely mostly on experience and instinct to make critical decisions. Yet the volume and quality of data today has changed decision making by providing a tool to help manage programs. With advanced analytics, organizations can unlock data insights to guide policy, improve services and drive human services outcomes.

### First, unlock meaning

A recent Accenture survey of government decision makers in six countries revealed that nearly half of respondents had a need for a greater understanding of analytics.[1] These findings reflect the buzz around analytics in human services, which can be described as a mix of interest tempered by uncertainty.

One cause for confusion is that analytics means different things to different people. Most human services practitioners currently using analytics employ descriptive analytics to reveal "what happened" by deriving insights from patterns and relationships in the data. Predictive analytics, which is used less commonly, refers to more advanced statistical methods that use data insights to understand "what is likely to happen."[2]

### Go beyond detect and correct

Extracting future-focused insights from data can help human services organizations make the most of data to improve performance. Today's resource-strapped, high-demand climate is an ideal time for organizations to explore such advanced data analysis. While there are clear challenges to building analytics-infused organizations, agencies can begin by understanding several keys to success:

**1. It's not just where you've been— it's where you need to go.**

Tools such as data warehouses, business intelligence, dashboards and reporting are becoming more widespread in human services. While valuable, these tools are only a piece of the puzzle. Practitioners often use them to help track metrics, assuming that they provide a better view of the business. The challenge is that this view looks backwards, offering the benefit of hindsight rather than the power of foresight. It's like managing through a rear view mirror.

With more advanced statistical analysis, forecasting and predictive modeling techniques, agencies can continue to identify what has already happened, while focusing more on what they would like to happen in the future. Leaders get a bigger, proactive view to improve the business in line with their mission and business goals.

This is happening at the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), in the State of Georgia's Department of Human Services. Using an enhanced reporting solution integrated with the statewide child welfare information and

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case management system, DFCS benefits from dynamic reporting that makes data relevant, actionable and transparent. The solution is already delivering improvements for Georgia's children and families—for example, a reduction in overdue investigations from 600 to 800 per month to less than 50, and an increase in timely monthly visitations from 70 percent to more than 90 percent. A key innovation is that the solution empowers staff with predictive reporting so they can track progress and change likely outcomes before they happen.

### 2. It's about more than just compliance—it's about improving outcomes.

Human services agencies are using analytics to help improve compliance by addressing waste, fraud and abuse. With more sophisticated analysis, agencies can take data insight further—using it to target resources and program and policy design to improve outcomes.

The Tennessee Department of Children's Services is focusing on its outcome goal of family reunification and permanency by using analytics to create performance-based contracts that align payment for foster care services with outcomes. Drawing on the state's electronic SACWIS records, a data system tracks outcomes, establishes baselines and sets targets. Over five years, Tennessee's foster care providers lowered the utilization of foster care by 235,000 days and generated nearly $20 million for investment in service improvements.

### 3. It's about having the data insight—and integrating it with the business.

Analytic insight in isolation is interesting, but embedded insight in decision making and case management provides immense value, allowing the focus to remain on what is most important, program integrity.

Despite technology advances, business integration is essential to success.

With this in mind, the City of New York is using data to understand trends and to design right-fit programs around them. The Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence, part of the Mayor's office, is working across the City's health and human services community to analyze data to identify areas of service need. The data insight is helping the City get the right people to the right services at the right time, and when necessary, create new programs. Leaders recognize that success will mean integrating technology and business perspectives. "I try to pair the best of hard scientific data with the rich context of the human experience," says Dr. Maryanne Schretzman, the Center's Executive Director.

### 4. It's about managing expectations—analytics is only part of the picture.

As much value as analytics can provide to the human services community, it is not a panacea. Data insight must be understood in line with the broader context, and limitations must be acknowledged. The key is to take a measured approach and continually manage expectations among staff and leadership about how—and the extent to which—data insight can and should shape operations.

The San Bernardino County Transitional Assistance Department took this kind of pragmatic approach in an analytics pilot program that identified non-compliant food stamp recipients to improve the fraud investigation process. Rather than relying solely on traditional referrals based on reporting hot lines and caseworker experience, leaders also used data and predictive modeling to prioritize resources to more efficiently and accurately deploy investigative resources to achieve a higher level of fraudulent identification and disposition.

## Move from data to action

Exploring more advanced analytics techniques is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Organizations can work in pockets to use data insight to know more and guess less for solutions that challenge their assumptions—and as one Human Services Summit attendee says—"come up with real solutions that we can implement in real time that will make a difference for most people most of the time."

## For more information

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The ideas in this point of view reflect perspectives from the 2012 Human Services Summit: Outcomes and Impact, a gathering of human services leaders, industry experts and academics at Harvard University in October 2012. Visit www.accenture.com/integratedservicedelivery to learn more.

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1. Source: Government Analytics: What Governments Stand to Gain (or Lose), Accenture
2. Source: Competing on Analytics: The New Science of Winning (Davenport/Harris)