



## Massachusetts Department of Health WIC Program



### An electronic benefits payment system that delivers program-wide improvements

WIC (Women, Infants and Children) is a nutrition program that provides free health and nutrition related services to over 100,000 participants in Massachusetts. The program operates 130 clinic locations throughout the Commonwealth and is staffed by more than 500 employees across 35 regionally-located sites. In response to new federal regulations, the Massachusetts Department of Health WIC Program drew on their decade-long relationship with Ciber for help to upgrade the legacy system replacing the paper check benefit payments with electronic benefits transfer.

#### Government mandated change

In 2010, the federal government enacted a requirement that all WIC programs move from paper-check-based benefits to Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) by 2020. Each state was given the responsibility to either procure a new software system or upgrade their current management information system. To comply with this new mandate, the Massachusetts WIC program leveraged their existing relationship with Ciber to help them develop a technologically-advanced, real-time EBT system, capable of applying benefits (both cash and

prescriptive foods) to magnetic-strip swipe cards and having those benefits immediately available for use at EBT-approved vendors.

From a technical and functional perspective, implementing an EBT system is challenging. Business needs, system users, card reader and pin pad hardware interfaces, security, help desk support, and third-party web service interfaces all need to be factored into the solution. Having worked with the Massachusetts WIC program for the past ten years, Ciber entered this project with an extensive knowledge of

the program's existing system, which was called Eos, and the operational issues that needed to be considered. A state-established phased roll-out plan for EBT meant the team couldn't just flip a switch and institute the new system. During the transitional period, mechanisms needed to be in place to allow the state to issue benefits by paper checks and EBT at the same time.

### A WIC solution that balanced many needs

Ciber planned, designed, built and tested a virtual gateway solution designed around custom Java software with an Oracle database that would provide the required EBT functionality within Massachusetts WIC's existing Eos system. The Massachusetts WIC principals and technical teams played critical roles through collaboration and development support.

To manage both checks and EBT simultaneously in different regions of the state, the team built in functionality where EBT could be enabled and check functionality disabled for a specific site with one "click of a button". The long transition period brought further complications. Source code maintenance and branching, multiple banking systems, vendor inability to process both paper-check and EBT benefits, and program participants moving within the state all had to be balanced along with execution of the roll out plan.

Training posed another significant challenge. Ciber's custom training system was adjusted to handle specific training site requirements and allowed Massachusetts WIC to facilitate a rapid time table for training all their staff without interrupting the day-to-day program operations.

### A new day dawns for WIC

After the rollout of EBT for Eos, the Massachusetts WIC program and its participants experience a level of convenience they never imagined. The banking processes were massively streamlined, with money flowing to vendors in real time. Participants now have immediate access to their benefits and making sure the funds are only used for approved purchases is achieved through automated monitoring by the system itself. The state also has access to every piece of Massachusetts WIC program data, which can be used to make better informed decisions about the program.

Ciber's project team supported an aggressive implementation schedule and high-intensity delivery strategy during the statewide rollout. However the experience and skills of the Ciber team also delivered a solution that achieved zero reported defects during the statewide rollout – a rare and noteworthy achievement when delivering vastly new and complex system functionality. Massachusetts WIC principals are thrilled with the updated system, and Massachusetts WIC program participants are thankful and happier with the way they access benefits.

### About Ciber

Ciber is a global IT consulting company with approximately 6,000 employees in North America, Europe and Asia/Pacific. Ciber partners with organizations to develop technology strategies and solutions that deliver tangible business value. Founded in 1974, the company trades on the New York Stock Exchange (CBR). For more information, visit [www.ciber.com](http://www.ciber.com).