

Meet "AVA": The State of Tennessee's family support virtual agent





Call for change

Crisis assistance demands rapid responses

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) rapidly addressed the surge in family assistance requests by scaling up its contact center response. Once its call volumes became more manageable, the Department began looking at improving efficiency further and expanding its support beyond Pandemic Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (P-TANF).

That's when DHS introduced Tennesseans to "AVA," a ServiceNow virtual agent that embeds intelligent automation into the Department's customer service. Given the urgency for services like supplemental nutrition assistance, pandemic childcare support, food service and more, families wanted easy answers fast, at their convenience. Navigating portals or waiting on hold for a live agent wasn't always possible, practical or desirable. With AVA deployed across its various web pages and portals, DHS meets customers, when and where they are.



When tech meets human ingenuity

A self-service, omnichannel virtual agent

Accenture was there to help DHS quickly set up a [contact center solution](#) on Amazon Connect when it experienced a surge in call volumes for P-TANF in March 2020. When the Department was ready to future-proof the solution, it turned to its trusted partner once again.

Within weeks, the team deployed AVA on the Department's ServiceNow platform to provide secure, self-service capabilities. We then launched the virtual assistant on the DHS website and the P-EBT Parent and School Portals, enabling users to easily ask questions on the channel of their choice and receive immediate responses without having to wait for a live agent. While human interactions supported the initial launch of pandemic assistance, it was just two days before AVA—along with the system's

FAQs—began addressing routine issues to free up bandwidth for live agents to help with more complex concerns.

To provide a seamless, end-to-end conversational experience, the AI-powered chatbot technology uses natural language understanding to address common queries and service requests. The ServiceNow platform also comes equipped with robust reporting and tracking capabilities that give DHS insights into the conversations users have with AVA. These real-time analytics allow the Department to make informed decisions and identify ways to improve the overall user experience.



A valuable difference

24/7 instant resolutions

Since its launch in June 2020, AVA has handled nearly 375,000 conversations and over a million messages across multiple channels. The virtual agent is live on the P-EBT Parent and P-EBT School portals and DHS's various web pages, giving users quick answers to commonly asked questions without the need to speak with an agent. Parents can find out about benefits and application status. District administrators can get immediate help with eligibility requests or submission errors.

By taking pressure off the call center, DHS can move resources to other priorities. That includes employees who can focus on more complex work while AVA answers families' questions. The convenience of 24/7 availability means users get support where they are, when they need it. In fact, about 51% of these conversations now take place outside of DHS's regular operating hours.

With built-in intelligence covering over 50 typical topics, the average exchange with AVA takes only three messages. Conversations are monitored weekly, so if users ask different questions, we can release updated content within a week. For specific needs, AVA can connect the user directly to LiveChat for additional assistance.

The value of this virtual agent is not limited to DHS. The flexibility and scalability of the technology give other state agencies access to a readily available tool to support broader groups of citizens. As it expands the technology, Accenture will look at introducing Interactive Voice Response (IVR) deflection to reduce call volumes and wait times and integrating AVA to Facebook Messenger to give users additional access to a channel they already use. The endless possibilities of this user-friendly tool achieve what public service agencies continually strive to do—deliver better service to those who need it most.

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