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Virginia takes benefits info online

BY [Brian Robinson](#)
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Virginia has developed a Web-based program that enables commonwealth employees to access and modify their health care and benefits information online.

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The application, which integrates data from otherwise incompatible legacy systems, should save seven to 10 days at the end of each yearly open enrollment period that were needed to manually update the Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) databases.

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It is also expected to substantially cut down the three to four weeks it typically takes employees to collect, complete and return updated paper forms to a DHRM office.

The next project, which could be in place by the end of August, will match data from DHRM systems with data held in the Virginia Retirement System (VRS), so that the state retiree program will have the same real-time update capabilities of the employee system.

An initial idea to reconcile files between the two systems once or twice a month was scrapped because it would've been too cumbersome, said Belchior Mira, chief information officer at DHRM. The Web-based system also prevented an expensive upgrade of the various systems to make them compatible.

"We [information technology] people are under increasing pressure to find the best way to spend less money and use fewer people," Belchior said. "So instead of trying to migrate these legacy systems, we thought why not leave them as they are and simply use the Web" to integrate the data?

The state used integration software from Menlo Park, Calif.-based Mitem Corp.

Belchior said the DHRM approach, once its success is demonstrated, could be a template for data sharing programs among other state agencies.

Robinson is a freelance journalist based in Portland, Ore. He can be reached at hullite@mindspring.com.

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