

## Navigating Nuances

### How an ACS-Brokered Relationship is Saving Ohio Millions in Medicaid Dollars

Social issues are complex, and solutions to social challenges will never be brought about by any single government agency or private company. This means strong relationships and partnerships between government and the private sector are essential. But in order for these relationships to succeed, partners must be able to navigate the ins and outs of complex public systems.

This is especially true for the [Medicaid system](#), where players, processes and politics at the state and federal level are enough to send potential partners screaming for the hills. But in Ohio, Advocacy & Communication Solutions (ACS) has helped broker and advise a successful partnership between the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) and corporate partner [HMS](#). This partnership has saved state agencies hundreds of millions and become a national model. At the same time, it has made the Ohio Medicaid system more efficient and effective for Ohio residents.

### Building Relationships

In a nutshell, HMS provides a wide variety of technology-based services to help public agencies like ODM deliver better services more efficiently for patients and avoid erroneous payments that are the responsibility of other insurers. The company began working with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) in 1997, and has steadily made inroads and built relationships with other state agencies.

ACS VP Scarlett Boudier has deep experience navigating the Medicaid system, and led the team that helped HMS government relations staff meet and build relationships with key ODM decision-makers, and understand “how” and the “why” state agency nuances and state politics could influence the process to determine and final decisions related to the use of for-profit partners.



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“ACS helped us gain access to the past and current Medicaid directors,” says Brian Belz, senior manager for government relations at HMS. “They helped us establish a bi-annual meeting with the director, which is important because a lot can happen in a year. We give a progress update, listen to what the priorities are, and have some very productive conversations. It’s a very positive relationship, and something we’d like to do in every state.”

Using ACS’ connections and knowledge, HMS has steadily grown its relationship with the state. Since 2010, HMS has worked with ODM and other state agencies to provide a range of services, including [prior authorization](#), [third party liability \(TPL\)](#) [payment recovery](#), and more. In 2016 alone, HMS recovered nearly \$62 million in third-party and casualty recoveries for Ohio, and has recovered more than \$1 billion for the State of Ohio since 1999.

The success of HMS’s relationship with ODM is rooted in its continuing relationship with ACS, where shared values and purpose are at the forefront.

“HMS is a great example of a corporate client that really does care about the work, is in it for the right reasons, and saves public entities a great deal of money while providing better service for people,” says Boudier. “Not many companies think that way, and we’re happy to have such a long-term relationship with them.”



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## Outside-the-Box Government Relations

HMS is more than just a trusted vendor for ODM. Using ACS’s expertise as advocates, HMS has also provided valuable insight and information to legislators to help them understand how certain Medicaid regulations may work against the state’s best interest, or when changes in policy may make it easier to prevent erroneous Medicaid payments or collect payments owed from third-party insurers.

“Our government relations strategy goes beyond the typical,” says Kristen Ballantine, HMS vice president for state and federal government relations. “It’s more than lobbying and more dynamic. We like working with ACS because they’re creative, and think outside the box to help us work with the state to build policies that better serve the people.”

For example, HMS’s TPL service is governed by legislation for compliance. Different policies can make TPL more efficient and effective, and better at successfully recovering Medicaid payments from third parties. Together with ODM, HMS identified best practices and made policy

recommendations that have made Medicaid better able to recover and save money, freeing dollars to serve more people.

Each biannual budget process, HMS has worked with ACS and state personnel in what Belz calls a “big collaborative effort” to get recommended policies into the budget and approved by lawmakers. A significant recent victory was the passage of a prompt pay standard that says that when a carrier is notified of claim for which they are responsible, they have 60 days to pay or contest. Before this measure passed, there was no timeframe and no penalty, so it was tempting for third party carriers to do nothing.

“Wins like this don’t come without a thorough understanding of the Medicaid system,” says Belz. “Scarlett has deep subject matter expertise around Medicaid and program integrity. She and her colleagues are able to navigate state government and multiple agencies within it, and provide the political context in which all agencies operate. HMS now holds our Ohio government relations effort as gold standard for all other state efforts.”



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### Launching a New Initiative

ACS’s relationships and lobbying acumen have also opened the door to exciting public/private innovations, including a new hospital-based approach to Medicaid savings. The new initiative, called Polaris, helps hospitals coordinate Medicaid and third-party billing for greater accuracy and faster payments.

“Right now, hospitals and their affiliates typically send claims to Medicaid, but about ten percent of Medicaid clients have other insurance that has to pay first,” says Belz. “Chasing that down takes time and money. With Polaris, hospitals upload Medicaid data to HMS, and we match that with our data about third parties and send it back to the hospital the same day. Then, the hospital can bill correctly the first time, increasing revenue and removing administrative burden for themselves and the payers. The entire process uses cutting edge technology and can be conducted in near real-time.”

Polaris began its pilot phase in 2017, with help from ACS, who not only located a willing hospital for the trial run, but also helped HMS secure necessary approval from the state.



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“We knew we’d need a hospital with a large Medicaid population, and ACS found the best,” says Belz. “We’re already increasing revenue for the trail run hospital by more than half a million dollars with greater cost savings in the reduction of administrative burden,” adds Belz. “We anticipate that Polaris will help hospitals across the state and beyond access millions of dollars and will grow exponentially. We believe this will eventually become a new industry standard.”

The impressive savings are matched only by the speed at which the pilot was approved.

“From start to finish, with ACS’s guidance, it took us only three months of government relations work to get approved, then only about 10 months to get the pilot up and running,” says Ballantine. “That exceeded everyone’s expectations.”

HMS is now looking to expand this successful model across the state and the nation.

## Growing Success

Through its relationship with HMS, Ohio has enacted best practices that are models for other state programs. The work of ACS and that of the Polaris product in particular is a proving ground for HMS advocacy efforts in other states.

“We have a really good team in Ohio. We work closely with the leaders and day-to-day contacts at ODM, and ACS works very closely with all of us,” says Belz. “They’re great collaborators and an essential part of the team.”

**“We’re very happy with ACS,” Ballantine says. “With their help, we have secured state and federal contracts, contracts with health plans, and developed new products and services related to care coordination, member engagement and outreach. As HMS evolves, having a creative thought partner like ACS that has a finger on the pulse of legislative arena will be absolutely critical to our success.”**

