Harris County Public Health Increases COVID-19 Case Investigations by 25% Using Avaya OneCloud™ CPaaS

Harris County
Public Health
Building a Healthy Community

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Harris County, TX creates a cloud-based notification solution as part of their Case Investigation and Contact Tracing program using Avaya OneCloud CPaaS. This improved the investigations by 25% which saved lives because citizens were contacted quickly and were able to quarantine appropriately.

"Regardless of your beliefs about the pandemic, we can all agree that we want to return to 'normal.' Our jobs, our children's education, so much depends on this happening," explained Scott Jeansonne, Compliance & Environmental Programs Manager at Harris County Public Health. The department's leadership team has been working tirelessly since the onset of COVID-19 to ensure safety and wellbeing in the third largest county in the U.S.

Core to these efforts is Case Investigation, the process of working with a patient or a case who's been diagnosed, and Contact Tracing, the process of providing support to those who may have been infected through close contact with a patient. Public health departments are responsible for conducting COVID-19 case investigations and Contact Tracing, and they should investigate cases as quickly as possible. At its peak, Harris County Public Health was recording upwards of 1,800 new positive cases per day. "People look to public health departments in times of crisis, but the nature of this virus was making it almost impossible to contain the spread. If it wasn't for Avaya, we don't know how we would have gotten ahead of the curve."

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Avaya quickly stepped in to help Harris County Public Health create a verified, HIPAA-compliant, cloud-based notification solution as part of an effective Case Investigation and Contact Tracing program using Avaya OneCloud Communication Platform-as-a-Service (CPaaS). Avaya and the county launched the solution within a matter of days, and the department uses it to proactively engage with and collect data from thousands of residents daily via automated outbound voice calls and SMS (text message) notifications. "I challenge other large public health departments to have that kind of turnaround time," Jeansonne said.

The solution was simple to set up and is easy to use and control, enabling the leadership team to turn the system on or off as needed while paying only for the services that are used (the department took advantage of this during events like Hurricane Laura, where Harris County temporarily had evacuation orders).

On the heels of this success using Avaya OneCloud CPaaS for automated outbound notifications, Harris County Tax Office has decided to set up a separate instance to increase voter registration in Harris County ahead of the 2020 presidential election. The solution can proactively engage with residents about their registration status, where to vote, how to register, and more.

"The solution has taken our operations to a level we never knew was possible - and it's saving lives."

Prior to using Avaya OneCloud CPaaS, Harris County Public Health was relying on traditional mail and manual dialing to communicate with residents who had been impacted by the pandemic. The state of Texas provides a daily list

of positive contacts to the department that they are then responsible for communicating with to provide health, education, and guidance.

"We were short of the percentage of contacts we needed to reach as part of an effective containment strategy, and we knew time wasn't on our side," Jeansonne explained. "The rate of infection with this disease is so fast that millions can become infected within weeks. We had some strategy sessions with the Avaya team, put together a solution, and fast tracked it within a matter of days."

Avaya OneCloud CPaaS enabled Harris County Public Health to start acting quickly and effectively by applying automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) around patient and contact identification and communications. Contacts on the daily list of positive

cases began receiving automated outbound voice calls from Harris County Public Health with options to communicate in both English and Spanish. If the person answered, they would be immediately put in touch with a Case Investigator. If they didn't answer, the public health department would follow up with an automated outbound SMS notification the next day.

For non-infected or otherwise unknown residents, the county would first send an automated SMS notification and then follow-up with an automated outbound voice call. The message read, "Please contact Harris County Public Health for an important message regarding COVID-19," including the number to the county's verified COVID-19 hotline. With Avaya, the county can validate if a phone number is a mobile number before any messages are sent. If it's not a mobile number, the department can divert to an outbound voice call with a pre-recorded message in English and Spanish. HIPAA compliancy ensures the county meets all requirements for protecting health information per regulations from global health and government organizations.

Jeansonne made clear that Avaya OneCloud CPaaS has hugely impacted Harris County's COVID-19 containment levels, increasing the number of cases the department has been able to successfully investigate by nearly 25%. "The solution has taken our operations to a level we never knew was possible - and it's saving lives."

"Employees sent emails to our IT team thanking them for investing in the Avaya solution."

The initial outbound message is just one small part of Case Investigation and Contact Tracing. Just as, if not more, important is ongoing support and symptom monitoring. With the CDC estimating that 30 Contact Tracers are needed for every 100,000 Americans1 - far short of current state and county tracer workforces - Avaya OneCloud CPaaS has proven vital for ensuring Harris County can keep up with its growing volume of cases. The solution allows for end-to-end engagement over the course of the virus, from checking in with contacts regarding symptom history to making appropriate referrals for testing and clinical services to coordinating to assess residents' ability to self-quarantine and more.

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> —**Alexey Gruber,** Logistics Deputy Chief

"There's only so much we can do with the tracers we have, and we need to make sure we're optimizing those human resources. Avaya OneCloud CPaaS is really helping us with this," Jeansonne said, citing the ability to send personalized automated follow-ups to residents that feel real, human, and empathetic. For example, an automated SMS notification can be sent to an infected person asking them how they are feeling that day or if they are experiencing any new symptoms. Surveys and auto-forms can also be pushed out to capture important information that can be fed back to workers, increasing their productivity and providing more immediate access to patient information for better overall care.

As more residents interact with the outbound notification system in this way, the county's workers have more time to assist with complex conversations that build personal relationships and public trust. "Over the last several years there has been an inherent distrust not just in government but overall communication systems," Jeansonne said.

"We all receive fraudulent calls and text messages, even before the pandemic started. There are people who are trying to take advantage of this crisis because they know government agencies and healthcare groups are trying to reach out to individuals to get information. Avaya OneCloud CPaaS has given us a great way to reach out in an official capacity to improve public cooperation, which has directly helped increase the amount of cases we are able to investigate and contacts we are able to communicate with."

He added, "It's also making our workers' jobs easier. Our operations are running 7 days a week and our staff is committing themselves to stopping this virus in its tracks. The outbound notification system has provided them with great relief, to the point where some employees sent emails to our IT team thanking them for investing in the Avaya solution."

CHALLENGES

- Manual outreach through the mail dangerously delayed proper contact tracing protocols

- Citizens not answering the calls from COVID-19 Case Investigators

- Needed verified, HIPAA-compliant, notification solution to contact community

VALUE CREATED

- Increased number of successfully investigated COVID-19 cases by 25%

- Trusted, single number from Harris County to citizens improved call answer rates

- On the heels of their success using Avaya OneCloud CPaaS for automated outbound notifications, Harris County Tax Office used separate instance to increase voter registration

SOLUTION USED

- Avaya OneCloud CPaaS

"Avaya had our best interests in mind from the start."

One of the most important factors for Harris County Public Health was the strong level of customer service Avaya provided in their time of need. "We were very impressed with the customer service. Avaya had our best interests in mind from the start when they proactively reached out to ask us how we were doing during the crisis and suggested how we could make use of the CPaaS solution. From there on out, they have been responsive and quick to meet our needs," Alexey Gruber, Logistics Deputy Chief, explained. "The entire team was devoted not only to resolving issues but identifying ways to improve so that we could increase efficiencies. Many times, the team would find ways to eliminate three or four steps that would otherwise be required."

Serving Citizens with Innovation for Voter Registration

Seeing how successful Avaya OneCloud CPaaS is for automated outbound notifications, Harris County Tax Office has decided to set up a separate instance to increase voter registration in the county ahead of the 2020 presidential election.

"Elections are some of the highest call volume events for counties, especially presidential elections," Jeansonne said. "Harris County is planning to add 200 additional agents during this period to handle an influx of inquiries. The Avaya OneCloud CPaaS solution will enable us to get ahead of this peak in call volume with automation that deflects basic inquiries so that our agents can assist with more complex or difficult questions to create overall better experiences. It's going to be huge for us."

![Harris County Public Health logo](Harris County Public Health — Building a Healthy Community)

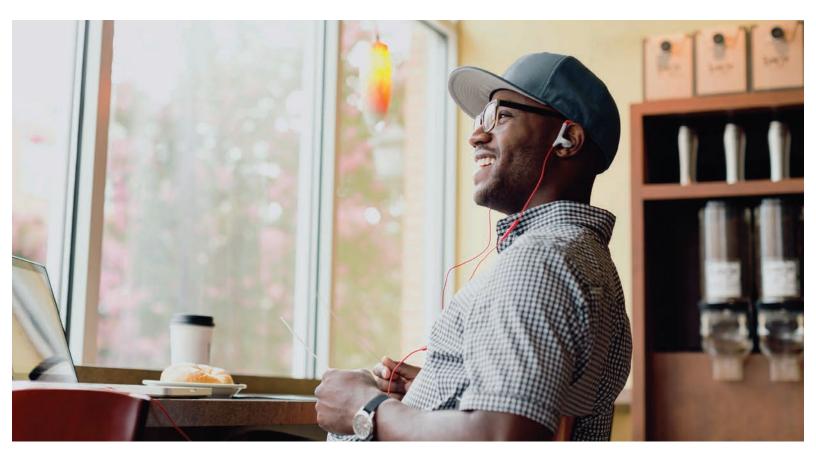## About Harris County Public Health

Harris County Public Health (HCPH) is the county health department for Harris County and provides comprehensive health services and programs to the community through a workforce of approximately 700 public health professionals – all dedicated to improving the health and well-being of Harris County residents and the communities in which they live, learn, work, worship, and play. The HCPH jurisdiction included approximately 2.3 million people and over 30 other municipalities located in Harris County (not including the city of Houston). Learn more at **publichealth.harriscountytx.gov.**

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[1]The National Association of County & City Health Officials: https://www.naccho.org/uploads/full-width-images/Contact-Tracing-Statement-4-16-2020.pdf

About Avaya

Businesses are built on the experiences they provide and every day millions of those experiences are built by Avaya (NYSE:AVYA). For over one hundred years, we've enabled organizations around the globe to win—by creating intelligent communications experiences for customers and employees. Avaya builds open, converged and innovative solutions to enhance and simplify communications and collaboration—in the cloud, on premise, or a hybrid of both. To grow your business, we're committed to innovation, partnership, and a relentless focus on what's next. We're the technology company you trust to help you deliver Experiences that Matter.

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