



Social care and virtual visits

Enabling Remote Government

In the first half of 2020, many physical government offices had to close to protect workers and the communities they serve, yet people needed unemployment benefits, temporary housing and financial assistance, food, health services, access to benefits such as public pensions, and support for child welfare, senior care, and foster families, among other benefits.

The need to continue these services in light of COVID-19-related health precautions prompted agencies to fundamentally change how they practice social work.

Delivering highly personal services in a socially distant environment

Many social workers turned to video conference services to conduct virtual visits. This offered workers visibility into their clients' surroundings and the ability to read facial and body language. It also enabled social workers to prioritize in-person visits where they were still required.

Some populations still require in-person visits, which has necessitated prioritizing in-person versus tele- or video conference interactions. According to the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), a chief concern is to safeguard families with risk of family abuse, neglect, and domestic violence.¹ [The Birmingham Children's Services Trust](#) also suggests prioritizing fostering and adoption situations, residential care, and homeless teens.

¹ ["Social Work During Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) – Ongoing Survey,"](#) British Association of Social Workers, May 2020.

Staying in close contact with those in need

To help staff work remotely, the Birmingham Children's Services Trust has increased its investment in equipment, connectivity, and software. Tools such as [Microsoft Teams](#) and [Skype](#) help staff communicate and remain in close contact with clients and each other.

The organization also captures data on employees' circumstances, including sickness, self-isolation, staff with care responsibilities, and staff with health vulnerabilities. Due to Microsoft's secure tools, the organization can safely store personal information in the cloud. This has allowed the agency to be aware of and responsive to staff well-being as they seek to serve clients.



Technology tools for remote social work

Social services agencies have relied on a few key technologies, including video conferencing software such as Microsoft Teams, to stay connected with coworkers and clients. Additional investments are helping agencies get a better handle on the data they're collecting, making it available for analysis and insights while keeping information protected and secure.

For example, the [City of Espoo](#), Finland, uses a solution hosted on [Microsoft Azure](#) to gather, store, and analyze data about how people in the community use various city services at individual and family levels. The solution then creates advanced predictive models that help public servants proactively determine when certain groups may need specific social and healthcare services.



We wanted to use next-generation analytics and AI to better understand the service needs of our citizens and deliver timely unified services."

Tomas Lehtinen,
Data Analytics Consultant,
City of Espoo

The [Georgia Division of Family & Children Services \(DFCS\)](#) also uses Microsoft Teams to communicate and coordinate with multiple stakeholders. The division convenes teams of case managers, interested parties such as the Office of the Child Advocate, legal counsel, and hospital personnel to make decisions related to a child's welfare.

Previously, the process occurred over a series of calls, texts, and emails. With Microsoft Teams, case managers can meet in a matter of minutes, so all relevant participants can contribute to the decision.



Using Teams allows us to connect with our families, give them emotional support, ask the questions we need to ask, and see the home environment on a much more regular basis, even though we're located in our home office—that is a big deal.”

Sabrina Watson and Rita McLendon,
Georgia Division of Family & Children Services
DFCS



Benefits of remote social services

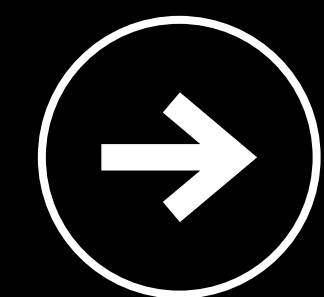
Remote social services will likely continue after social distancing restrictions are lifted, given their unique advantages. These include:

- ✓ **The ability to expand service to more people.**
- ✓ **Reduction in time and travel costs.**
- ✓ **The ability to reach clients in more rural areas via remote visits.**
- ✓ **Reduction in administrative workload provided by meeting recording and automatic transcription.**
- ✓ **Reduced administrative time provided by online, self-service scheduling.**
- ✓ **Ability for people to self-schedule appointments, securely share documents electronically, and other conveniences.**

Enable Remote Access

A modern technology platform can provide a foundation for innovation for years to come. Whether an agency employs AR and VR for training or digitizes processes typically conducted face to face in city hall, investments in digital transformation will continue to benefit agencies and communities in the future.

To learn more about employing technology to connect social work teams and social workers with clients, consider these resources.



[Download the full e-book >](#)

More resources

[View "Maximize personal interaction via face-to-face virtual visits" infographic >](#)

[Learn more about Enabling Remote Government Access >](#)

