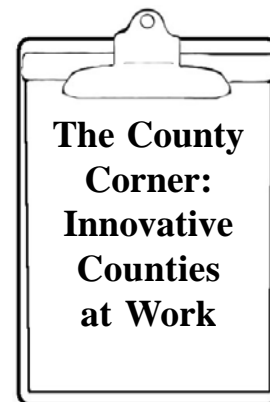


# No Wrong Door Policy Puts Residents First



By Honorable Thomas R. Suozzi  
Nassau County Executive

I grew up in an age when people thought that government didn't work, and in many cases people were right. The Nassau County I inherited confirmed that perception. When I took office in January of 2002, Nassau County had been rated "The Worst Run County in the Country" by Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Public Policy. With massive budget deficits, bond ratings one step above junk bond status and a looming State takeover, Nassau teetered on the brink of bankruptcy. It was our job to reduce expenses, run operations efficiently, and to provide better services – in short, to make government work.

Today a dramatically reorganized Nassau County government has been recognized by the financial community as "one of the top 3 most dramatic municipal finance turnarounds in the nation." Now, back on the right track financially, we are able to make investments for our future, including our long-neglected infrastructure and our Health and Human Services programs.

No Wrong Door (NWD) is one of those investments and, in many ways, has become a symbol of how Nassau County is reinventing government. We have created a system where there is a single point of entry into our Health and Human Services system with an outcome-driven approach to service delivery and case management.

This approach is dynamic and multi-faceted, the centerpiece of which includes a centrally located facility that will house all of the County's Health and Human Services Departments - Social Services, Mental Health, Drug & Alcohol, Senior Citizen Affairs, Youth Board, Veterans Services, Physically Challenged, and the Department of Health.

## Single Point of Entry

No matter where a client enters the human service system, that person will gain access to any other county or community service needed. This consolidated intake function will be partially facilitated by web-based screening software accessible from an internet-enabled PC. This tool will walk a client through a hierarchy of questions that will determine potential eligibility in HHS program areas and will offer alternatives where ineligibility is determined. In addition, to eliminate excessive waiting times, users will have the option to schedule an appointment online.

In cases where a client bypasses the screening tool and arrives at the Health and Human Services facility, they will be greeted by welcoming, skilled customer service professionals who will help with the screening process and make referrals that will meet the client's needs. Volunteers will also be on-hand to assist clients throughout their visit to our new facility.

## Changing the Culture of Health and Human Service Delivery

In order to implement NWD, Nassau County first had to fix the basics. We had to improve communication among departments that historically did not work well together. The culture was one of individual departments functioning as independent silos with insufficient collaboration and cooperation and without a common vision and goals. NWD has changed that to a culture that prides itself on providing a compassionate and respectful

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environment of service and care where ALL Health and Human Service departments share and work toward the same mission of providing quality services to our residents in need.

## Co-location

In a move that is at the same time innovative, efficient and most of all easier for our clients, the eight Health and Human Services departments will soon be housed in one location. The waiting room is a respectful, warm, and comfortable area designed to reflect NWD's client-centered, family-focused orientation including a child care room and specially trained Health and Human Service Specialists. Previously, the five buildings housing the eight departments are riddled with structural problems; including a leaking roof, asbestos and a dangerously insufficient electrical system. Some buildings were non-compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. In addition to all of the programmatic improvements associated with NWD, the move of these departments was necessary to avoid the cost of rehabilitating these buildings, estimated at more than \$40 million.

## Case Management

Clients identified as having multiple needs will be supported by case managers from county and community-based organizations. Nassau County will operate under a holistic approach to services that entails creating an individual or family service plan to meet the needs of the client and the County. Now when a client applies for food stamps or temporary assistance, staff will identify the root cause for the assistance in the first place. Understanding that the client might require vocational training or child care, or might have a substance abuse or mental health issue that has precluded them from maintaining gainful employment will ultimately benefit the client and the County. Better management of cases and

referral to community service providers will promote independence from the social services system, thus providing better services yet saving money in the long run.

Here again, in the area of case management, technology plays an important role. The County has implemented a case management database in which client case notes will be recorded and accessible to County workers where privacy and confidentiality regulations allow. Workers will be in a position to better serve clients by understanding the full compliment of issues facing an individual or family.

## Public – Private Partnership

An important component of NWD is partnerships with community based organizations, which are already underway in the areas of service delivery, case management, model program development, research/evaluation activities, and staff development. These collaborative relationships will evolve and grow as NWD is fully implemented.

No Wrong Door is a dramatic step forward in making Nassau County government both more compassionate and smarter and will, no doubt, become a national model. Through this enhanced service delivery system, the County will better serve the public, and at the same time, save taxpayers money in the long run by putting an end to inefficiency and waste. By having all our health and human services departments in one location, we will provide better services to countless county residents who no longer will have to travel from building to building to receive all the services they need. This program is both the right thing to do on a human services level and the smart thing to do fiscally. No Wrong Door is truly smart government at work. 🏠

