

TITLE: Re-inventing the wheel? Lessons from the Victorian DHS IM Strategy
AUTHOR/S: Greg Stenton, Jonathan Ashley, Nyssa Dalton and Heidi Rose
Department of Human Services, Victoria, Australia

The Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) is Victoria's largest state government department, with an annual budget in 2008-09 of \$13.1 billion. Nearly 80 per cent of the department's budget is spent on services provided by approximately 2,300 external organisations under service agreements or statements of priorities with the department. These organisations include a range of non-government and government-related bodies such as public hospitals, community housing organisations, community health services, ambulance services and local government.

As would be expected, the volume and complexity of these funding arrangements has potential to lead to an ever expanding web of data collection and reporting requirements creating a burden for both the department and the funded organisations. The wheel has been reinvented multiple times. The DHS Information Management (IM) Strategy was initiated in 2005 to reform information management within the department, specifically to introduce new business rules and processes to:

- reduce the proliferation and duplication of DHS data collection and reporting requirements
- improve data integrity, data quality and timely feedback of collection information to data providers

This is not unfamiliar territory; many have tried reform of this nature and failed. The DHS IM Strategy however, has enjoyed a modest level of success. This success is due to both an effective reform approach, and three key change techniques. Central to the reform approach is a focus on both top-down and bottom-up reform – generating multiple levels of engagement across the department from front line data collection managers to senior executive. With everyone engaged in reform – three key change techniques are employed:

- **Data Collection Governance** to provide oversight, review and rationalisation of existing data collections
- **Strategic Data Reform** to promote use of data standards and embed best practice (tools/ guidance materials)
- **Technical Specialists** to provide ongoing support to data collection managers and demonstrate benefits.