

# Integrated Case Management System Puts Client Privacy and Organizational Relationships at Risk

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We live in a digital age. Much of what was once done by hand, is now being done with electronic devices and records. These electronic marvels can be hugely beneficial in terms of delivering services more effectively and efficiently while reducing costs. But they also bring their own set of risks.

When it comes to the delivery of social services to vulnerable people, the biggest risks of the digital age are:

- the transformation of independent service providers, including not-for-profit organizations, into collectors of personal information for, and agents of, government,
- too much scrutiny by government into the private lives of citizens, and consequently,
- a potential decline of service quality due to the loss of confidentiality and trust agencies need to serve people effectively.



*Darrell Evans (top) and Vincent Gogolek of FIPA*

## Community study underway

The BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association (FIPA) is conducting an independent investigation into the new government initiative that is bringing the digital age to the health and social services sectors in BC. Our preliminary findings should be a clear warning to government, the independent social service sector and the general public that all is not well with the BC government's plan for Integrated Case Management (ICM). In the government's words:

Integrated Case Management" will provide the holistic view of each citizen required to truly integrate delivery of social services - linking case information collected by other organizations delivering services to the public, such as the ministries of Health, Education, and the Attorney General, other provinces, the federal government, and Service Delivery Providers.\*

Does that sound a bit like "Big Brother" to you? It certainly did to us when representatives of some concerned service organizations came to FIPA asking that we look into this project.

The United Community Services Co-op had become alarmed at the extraordinary new demands that would be made for access to the personal information of their clients under ICM systems. They were concerned about the ethical, legal and procedural ramifications for their organizations and for their relationship with their clients.

Protecting the privacy of citizens from governments and other powerful entities is one of FIPA's main goals, so we launched a study into the ICM system with the support of the Co-op and the Law Foundation of British Columbia.

Our study is still in progress, but preliminary findings indicate that, while the ICM system may have some very worthy goals, it is more likely that it will contribute to a Big-Brother "Surveillance Society" than better service to the public.

As it says in the government's own description, the ICM System would provide government officials with unprecedented access to extensive information about BC citizens' daily lives. The information grab will not stop within government: it will extend well beyond to capture the social service agencies contracted by government to provide services to the community.

We're looking at a massive and comprehensive system for sharing the most sensitive and potentially prejudicial personal information of every citizen in the province--because, after all, who doesn't receive government services?

## **What ICM could mean for service organizations**

FIPA's research also indicates that ICM could seriously degrade services to the public by radically changing the culture of the independent social service sector.

These service groups--mostly not-for-profits and charities--if they do their job of service well, will grow and may eventually be recognized by various government and private sector bodies as an effective, efficient and low-cost way of delivering services to a needy part of the community.

ICM has the potential to transform that culture from one where helping people in distress is paramount to one where service organizations become agents of government. Their new function will include funneling their clients' most intimate personal information to the provincial bureaucracy.



Another problem is that the provincial government contracts with independent service providers are not consistent. The contract language can vary considerably on the question of government access to information held by the organization.

For example, if the work an organization does is by way of a contract for or on behalf of the government body, all the information it collects, uses and discloses for the purpose of that contract will be subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. However, the Personal Information Protection Act would still apply to the organization itself and it will have legal obligations around security, openness and consent imposed. Those obligations will apply to all the other personal information it collects, uses and discloses which is not covered by a contract with a public body.

This will cause a great deal of confusion for service providers. How will these obligations be balanced? Under this proposed system, can they be balanced at all?

## **The community's role**

An ICM system that has the capability to harvest, store and inter-relate vast amounts of data about individuals, families, groups and communities will inevitably over-reach and eventually undermine that system's legal and moral credibility. This type of data matching is shortsighted and will ultimately prove to be destructive to a system that in most cases serves and cares for clients very well.

All of us, clients and service providers, will have to bring pressure to bear on the government of BC to ensure that the proposed Integrated Case Management system receives thorough public scrutiny, rigorous legal, ethical and procedural review, and in the end only moves forward with a workable system of privacy protection.

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<http://www.bccpd.bc.ca/transitionlive.htm>

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\* Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance, "Request for Proposals: Case Management Software [RFP] SATP-239", November 6, 2007 at p. 9. Full text:

In 2005, the Province set out "Five Great Goals for a Golden Decade" to help British Columbia realize its full potential as the best place on earth to raise a family, to live and play, and to work, invest, and get ahead. Great Goal 3 commits to building the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, those with special needs, children at risk and seniors. To achieve this goal, service delivery will need to be collaborative and citizen-centred – not from one organization alone, but across the social sector.

The Office of the Chief Information Officer in the Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services is leading the Social Sector Integrated Information Management Project to develop a secure, privacy-protected information sharing framework and a context for Integrated Case Management and Contract and Supplier Management. This will provide the holistic view of each citizen required to truly integrate delivery of social services in support of Great Goal 3, linking case information collected by other organizations delivering services to the public, such as the ministries of Health, Education, and the Attorney General, other provinces, the federal government, and Service Delivery Providers.