

## Department of Human Services Assists More Than 5,500 Bushfire-Affected Families



Department of Human Services  
Melbourne, Australia  
[www.dhs.vic.gov.au](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au)

**Industry:**

Public Sector

**Employees:**

6,000

**Oracle Products & Services:**

Oracle CRM On Demand  
Oracle Advanced Customer  
Services

*“Within three days we were able to roll out these systems, using Oracle CRM On Demand, to assign workers to people affected by the bushfires and ensure they received the help they desperately needed.” – Grahame Coles, CIO, Department of Human Services*

The Victorian government’s Department of Human Services (DHS) provides rental housing, training, and employment to public housing tenants, child protection and youth services, and support to people with disabilities.

On February 7, 2009, bushfires devastated large areas across regional Victoria; 173 people died and more than 2,000 homes were destroyed. The disaster became known as “Black Saturday.”

DHS was responsible for providing assistance to individuals and families affected by these fires. This catastrophic event, one of Australia’s worst natural disasters, presented DHS with several unique challenges. The department needed to help geographically-dispersed case managers provide valuable assistance to these people. To do this, it needed a Web-based system that was easy to use and required minimal training, so case workers could start using it immediately.

At the same time, DHS, in conjunction with the Australian Federal Government and the Australian Red Cross, established The Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund to help traumatized individuals and families rebuild their homes and community buildings. A grants management system had to be established to identify those in need and distribute the funds effectively.

To meet these objectives, DHS engaged Oracle Advanced Customer Services to deploy Web-based case- and grants-management systems based on Oracle CRM On Demand.

“The fires had destroyed towns, people had lost their homes and even their lives,” said Grahame Coles, CIO, Department of Human Services.

**Key Benefits:**

- Enabled more than 800 case workers across Victoria to identify people affected by bushfires and arrange accommodation, clothing, food, and other services
- Trained case workers on the system in 30 minutes
- Completed 4,000 registrations within four weeks so that today more than 10,000 people representing 5,500 cases are be looked after by case workers
- Provided Web-based access to case workers carrying laptops so they could record information about each case while on the road rather than typing up case notes and re-entering the data back at the office
- Determined who needed financial assistance and successfully dispensed funds to these people
- Achieved visibility on where funds were being distributed to ensure they were allocated fairly
- Designed, built and deployed a case management system in three days

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**Thousands of Cases Registered in Four Weeks**

The Web-based case management system enabled more than 800 case workers across Victoria to identify individuals and families affected by the bushfires and arrange accommodation, clothing, food, and other services.

“On February 10, 2009, the Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd and the Premier of Victoria John Brumby, announced that they wanted to offer case management to all people affected by the bushfires,” said Colleen Clark, assistant director of the Victorian bushfire case management program, DHS.

“This meant we needed to get a case management system ready three days later. The system also had to scale easily as more and more people registered for assistance. Using Oracle CRM On Demand, we achieved our goal and even trained case workers on how to use the system in 30 minutes.”

Guidelines, policies, consent forms, and other documents case workers needed on a daily basis were posted online. “The system was so intuitive that even case workers who had little to no computer experience could use it,” said Clark.

Within four weeks, case managers had used the system to process 4,000 registrations. Today, more than 10,000 people, representing more than 5,500 cases, are being looked after by case workers.

“Because the system is Web-based, it is accessible to large numbers of case workers across Victoria,” said Clark. “Case managers can gather real-time information about the impact of the tragedy on individuals and enter it into the case management system. This has really helped steer the recovery effort.”

**Information Anytime and Anywhere**

Case workers carry laptops to record information about each case directly into the case management system. In the rural areas of Victoria where electricity had been cut after the fires, case workers can access the system using wireless devices.

They enter their user name and password to access the system that provides access to client files, temporary addresses, and other information relating to lost property.

“In my previous experience doing investigative work and writing case notes, I would collect data out in the field, go back to the office, and spend two or three hours entering data into a system,” said Cindy Tarczon, case worker, Department of Human Services. “Using this case management system, the data is recorded immediately.

“It is a really practical application; being able to upload data relating to all my cases using a laptop with an internet connection is very useful.”

DHS collates data related to each case in the central repository to assist with assessment and rebuilding. The system’s assignment management capabilities also enable individuals from several organizations involved in the appeal to easily identify workers.

“Information is stored in one place, enabling DHS to determine exactly which people in each community need the most help and which government and welfare agencies really need to be effective during this terrible time,” said Tarczon.

### **Funds Distributed to Those in Need**

The Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund has raised US\$337.2 million (A\$375 million) for bushfire-affected individuals and families since February 2009. The DHS, which is managing the funds in a trust account, deployed a Web-based grants management system to best determine who needed financial assistance and to dispense funds to those people.

The grants management system was developed using Oracle CRM On Demand. It enables fund administrators to register individuals and household relationships, record key demographic information, confirm identities, establish eligibility for multiple grant types, and approve payments.

Around 50 grants officers at the DHS can determine who is eligible to receive financial assistance based on whether their homes or other buildings were damaged or completely destroyed by fire.

“The solution provides visibility on where the money was being distributed to ensure funds are allocated fairly,” said Coles.

“These grants not only help people re-establish themselves, they also pay for other costs associated with arranging funerals for their loved ones.

“It also offers security around the management of funds and ensures grants officers and administrators are accountable for reporting exactly where funds are distributed, while validating that people aren’t filing claims twice or for the wrong things.”

### Why Oracle?

DHS chose Oracle CRM On Demand because it can be configured easily and scales as more data is entered by case workers in the field.

“Because Oracle CRM On Demand is Web-based, case workers across Victoria could start using it very quickly,” said Clark. “It’s a stable platform with one simple screen that allows users to scroll down and capture everything on one page. It also enables the IT department to implement changes very quickly.”

Coles added: “Oracle Advanced Customer Services were fantastic. They provided Oracle CRM On Demand licenses and technical consultants to help configure the solution.”

### Implementation Process

Oracle Advanced Customer Services built and deployed the case management system in three days. DHS worked with Oracle Advanced Customer Service technical staff to design the solution on the first day, build it on the second day, and roll out a prototype to a limited number of users on the third day.

“It worked well so we went live to 800 case workers from eight regions throughout Victoria over three weeks,” said Clark.

“Oracle technicians were working with us late into the night and over weekends.”

Oracle Advanced Customer Service staff also developed the grants management system over two weeks.

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