



LEAN CASE STUDY:

GOVERNMENT TEAM LEADS THE WAY TO BETTER VACCINE DISTRIBUTION

Employees everywhere sometimes feel that established ways will never change. A Saskatchewan Ministry of Health Lean team proved, however, that real change is not only possible, but with dedication and openness to think differently, it is possible to transform services. In a project sponsored by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health, a cross-functional team of employees led the transformation of their Vaccine Management Program. The project got off to a quick start – a 5S process created more storage space for new vaccines, and a strong teamwork culture emerged. The team then took on the routing system for delivering vaccines, and in total, saved \$1.28 million over the 2009-2010 fiscal year. "Nearly \$1M of wastage was happening every year in our Vaccine Program," says Leslie Grob, team leader of the vaccine project "and that was either caused by expired products, or products exposed to unsafe temperatures that we felt could be prevented." In a Value Stream Mapping exercise led by Lean Advisor's Mike Boucher, the team got to the root of the problem. The existing routing system had for many years used a Central Government service as a hub. This resulted in extra steps in the distributions process - vaccines were required to be repackaged and then reshipped to another location. The extra steps exposed the vaccines to temperature risks, and consumed valuable time, effort, and storage space. Removing this extra shipping hub from the routing equation was unheard of but the team was empowered and determined and their approach turned out to be right on the money. Cuts in wastage were well over the 50% target that was initially set. "It was a

huge process change, and we were able to break through the belief that we can't change things, and that the ability to create change is beyond our control," says Grob. The real win was about people. Some government employees may feel that they don't have a voice in how things can be improved. The success of the Vaccine Management Program transformation proved that creativity and change is possible. "Leadership was seen at all levels and that through this journey we learned about hidden talents of our team members" say Tyler Chiddenton, team member of the vaccine project. Members of the team felt empowered to make the changes and as a result were creative in their approaches to the issue. "I think the big thing that we've seen is the engagement of staff," says Grob. "They know the problems, and having them work on the solutions really builds that buy-in – they feel good about the changes." Another team member Lindsay Olson agrees, "LEAN has been difficult but a successful journey." Trish Livingstone, Director, Health, System, Quality and Efficiency Management recalls an incident where a new employee heard a Ministry lean team report on their work and expressed surprise that the employees involved in change were actually embracing it and cheering about it.