



Home care

A focus on digital solutions can pivot workforce challenges in home care



Introduction

We are in the midst of a workforce shortage in home care that is projected to worsen for years to come. Home Care Ontario reported that pre-pandemic, providers fulfilled 95 percent of requests. As of Dec. 31, 2021, the agency says, that number had dropped to 56 percent. Four thousand nurses have left the home care sector since the onset of the pandemic. Anxious headlines paint a picture of a home and community care system stressed by long waitlists, pandemic-induced turnover, and a dwindling number of workers able to care for our ageing population.

COVID-19 mandates and pandemic burnout have further exposed and exacerbated the workforce shortage, highlighting the need for innovative solutions centred on caring for the lives of those who are vulnerable. Traditional workforce solutions from other industries – such as limiting services and working hours – can impact quality and access to care as well as employee safety. Even traditional approaches within healthcare – such as recruiting campaigns, restructuring roles, and overtime pay – have limited sustainability and are only a part of the solution. Home care organizations have tried several strategies such as shifting tasks from specialized resources (e.g., nurses) to non-specialists (e.g., PSWs). Most home care employees are either personal support workers – 58% or nurses – 25%. Shifting tasks to personal workers and other non-licensed nurses under the supervision of licensed nurses have shifted the dial slowly to relieve the burden of nurses relieving their time for other patients. However, this does not alleviate the current workforce issue in

home care organizations since personal support care workers are in shortage similar to other healthcare professionals.

Razor thin margins in the home care sector make it challenging to compete for healthcare workers with other healthcare organizations causing further strain on home care operations. Addressing shortages in home care workforce continues to align with patient and family wishes for preferred care and enable the delivery of care as a more cost-effective solution rather than patients shifting their needs to a hospital.

The move to integrated care, such as Ontario Health Teams in Ontario, has further highlighted the importance of home care as a significant player in the health system but raises uncertainty to providers on how the system will procure home care services in the future. Hence, home care providers must plan now to future-proof their organization in preparation for changes in policies and increased service demand.

We encourage home care organizations to think about workforce solutions as more than just addressing the shortage in these pressured circumstances. Realizing workforce efficiencies and improving patient experience and care must go hand-in-hand. This context presents an opportunity to accelerate investment in digital solutions that can address operational challenges while enabling better service for patients and support for your workforce.

With the increased shift to ageing at home, now is the time for home care providers to think differently about how they can innovate and deliver cost-effective outcomes for their patients.

Healthcare is the largest employer in the world, but by 2030, it is estimated there will be a shortfall of 18 million health workers around the world, or 20% of the total capacity to care.¹ The pandemic has further amplified the workforce crisis in home care, and these urgent issues call for new solutions, now. In Canada, healthcare workforce shortages across care settings and professional disciplines. We see shortages of personal support workers and nurses in home care.

¹Human: Solving the Global Workforce Crisis in Healthcare by Dr Mark Britnell, Global Chairman & Senior Partner, Healthcare, Government & Infrastructure, KPMG International.

Solutions

The path forward is digital

It is predicted that the workforce crisis in healthcare will worsen over the next decade.² Rather than adapting short-term changes and hoping for long-term fixes, it is vital to prepare your digital foundations for ongoing success and iterate on your strategy as your organization continues to adapt to changing workforce strategies and the healthcare ecosystem.

Most organizations can glean additional efficiencies by harnessing the proposed four solutions (Figure 1) no matter their digital maturity. At scale, each of these individual solutions can help optimize labour and offer some relief from the pressure of workforce shortages. But ultimately, these solutions implemented together – can yield a much greater impact allowing for long-term sustainability and efficient operations. With increased public scrutiny and a dwindling workforce, adopting an integrated digital toolkit to deliver on present and future demand for service is necessary.

²Human: Solving the Global Workforce Crisis in Healthcare by Dr Mark Britnell, Global Chairman & Senior Partner, Healthcare, Government & Infrastructure, KPMG International.

A digital transformation for workforce issues

Home care organizations can glean additional efficiencies by harnessing the proposed four solutions

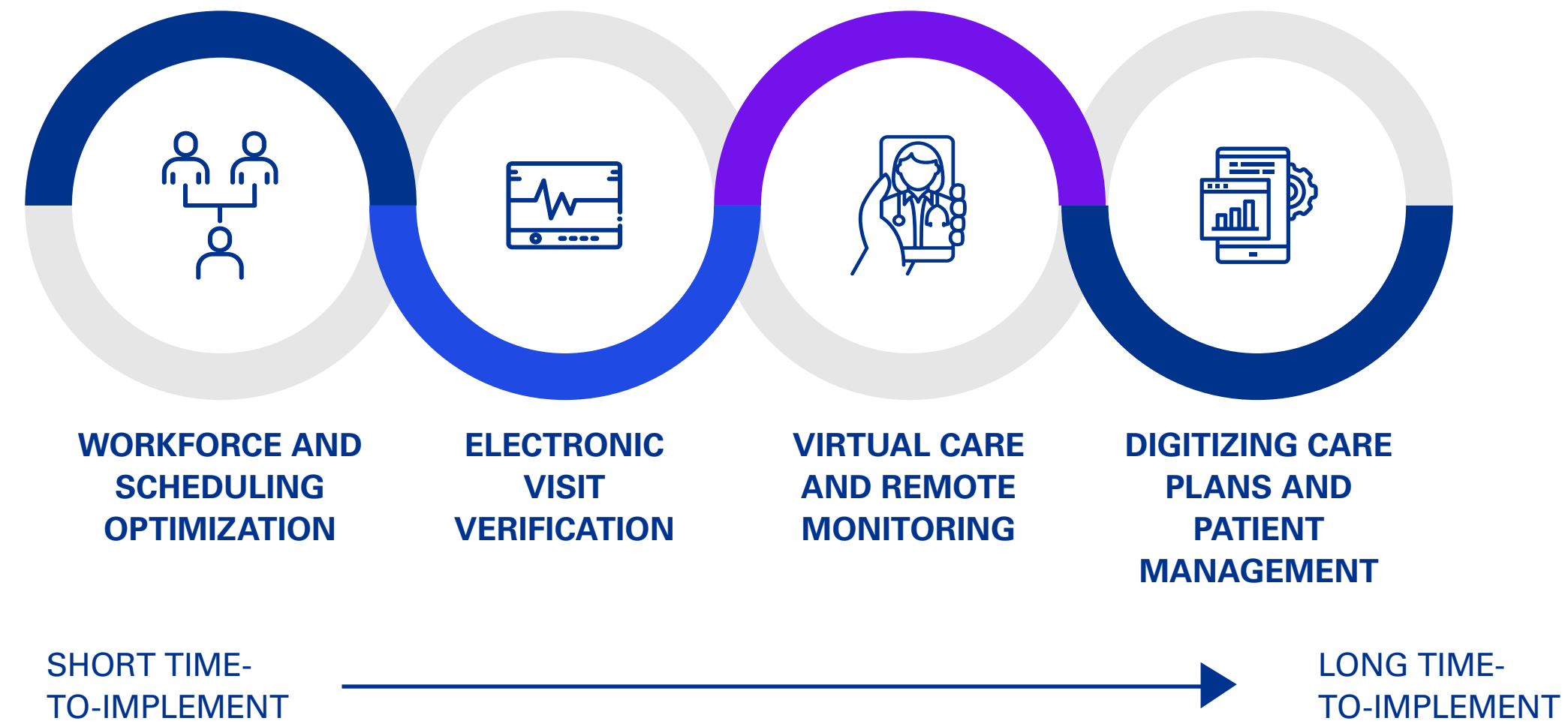


Figure 1: This figure outlines the different digital solutions

1. Workforce and scheduling optimization and routing

With no doubt workforce logistics are complex. Several industries face this issue of scheduling employees based on client demands and needs while maintaining operational and cost efficiencies. World-class logistics operators such as UPS and FedEx utilize digital workforce tools to help schedule their staff and run smoothly. Compared to traditional processes using paper timesheets and/or spreadsheets, workforce tools can save significant time and effort by enabling organizations to eliminate specific administrative tasks such as training and onboarding of new staff members, managing referrals, scheduling, time management tracking, and task assigning and increase overall workforce productivity. Additionally, optimizing staff routing allows home care providers to save on transportation expenses and increase capacity to serve additional patients. In aggregate, this enables an organization's workforce to focus on value-add tasks that have material impacts on patient outcomes and organizational KPIs, thus increasing overall employee engagement while lowering costs. Optimization of scheduling and routing can contribute to better coordination of home care services, translating into more streamlined processes from the patient perspective. Reduction in missed care coupled with more face-to-face time with home care providers can contribute to a better patient experience. More equitable caseload allocation across home care providers helps improve provider satisfaction and prevent provider burnout, which may also improve the patient experience. Tools such as Workday are already widely used across the United States home care sector. Open-source tools such as [Optaplanner] are also making a mark, demonstrating the benefit of optimization software in vehicle routing, employee rostering, task assignment and timetabling.

However, implementing these tools involves integrating existing software and leveraged tools, which current home care providers have expressed difficulties doing, leading to continuing pain points around

scheduling, matching, and routing. Furthermore, workforce optimization tools need to be aligned more broadly with your organization's technology strategy and may require change management with staff. Another critical consideration in workforce scheduling and routing tools is matching patients' needs with employee skills and capabilities. Patients must receive the right care from the right home care provider at the right time and missed care as a result of suboptimal matching can negatively impact patient safety.

For smaller organizations that have leaner operations, the ROI of implementing workforce optimization tools may not be significant enough to warrant the investment. However, organizations have an opportunity to think of these tools as long-term investments and as their operations expand.

2. Electronic visit verification

Electronic Visit Verification is a tracking system that requires electronic verification of when a person receives home care services. Electronic visit verification, also referred to as EVV, is a solution that can be implemented in the short-term to track home care providers and verify home visits. When interconnected, cost efficiencies can be realized through task verification, absence management, time tracking and financial management.

In addition, EVV offers organizations with data needed to find operational efficiencies in identifying missed visits, and cutting non-value add overhead expenses. EVV, combined with routing solutions can help reduce mileage and create operational efficiencies. Further, EVV can be leveraged as a source of differentiation by organizations through ensuring accountability for services provided to patients.

In the United States, the 21st Century Cures Act aimed to improve patient care and mandated all personal care service providers and home care providers to implement an EVV by 2023. Depending on

the state, providers are required to leverage a system sponsored by the state itself (either an external vendor or state-managed offering) or have the option to leverage an offering of their choosing. While this requirement is not currently in place in Canada, provinces such as Newfoundland & Labrador have expressed their intent to improve the ability to monitor home care delivery and minimize the risk of fraud within the sector.

However, as EVV is implemented, organizations will need to think about upfront costs and any additional administrative processes will be required to support with visit tracking, time logging, and task verification, potentially leading to additional labour expenses to maintain accurate reporting.

3. Virtual care and remote monitoring

For many healthcare providers, the COVID-19 pandemic was the long overdue catalyst for the adoption of virtual care. Virtual care provides timely access to patient care addressing the challenges of the workforce shortage enabling offsite providers to deliver care in a convenient manner to seniors at their home. Although not all patient needs can be provided through virtual care and remote monitoring solutions, it improves patient engagement and helps streamline care across multiple specialties and healthcare providers ultimately improving patient outcomes. Some of these tools can monitor multimorbidities and generate and optimize care plans unlike any single provider can. Virtual care can improve the quality of care for patients as it also allows for calibrating the levels of care of low acuity cases, leaving in-person care for higher acuity cases. Even though only a small percentage of services can be augmented virtually, home care providers will be able to serve more patients with the existing workforce. At an operational level, virtual care platforms help improve workflow and workforce efficiencies and reduce costs. Home care organizations, adopting virtual care visits and remote monitoring can minimize unnecessary

transit costs for the workforce and provide better patient scheduling and accessible care. For example, as part of the COVID-19 Virtual Tool Kits, the Office of Virtual Health at PHSA has outlined TELUS Home Health Monitoring Platform as a tool to monitor patient's health and shares the information electronically with health care teams.

Understanding the limitations of virtual care and remote monitoring and its benefits is essential for organizational leaders. Organizations should consider that virtual care and remote monitoring should not replace essential in-person care when required. Home care organizations should account for these scenarios by developing appropriate processes that align with clinical guidelines, policies, and regulatory requirements.

4. Digitizing Care plans and Patient Management

Care plans are essential to outline the health and social needs to ensure that patients receive the right level of care. Traditionally, care plans are written documents that include nutrition, mobility, sleeping, positioning, oral care and personal hygiene for patients. More detailed care plans might include sections on fall prevention, psychological needs, recording of clinical signs, communication and information. With the accelerated adoption of digital care tools, there are emerging opportunities to optimize care plans and, in turn, reduce workforce inefficiencies. For example, data-enabled care plan optimization can help group tasks to maximize patient benefit and reallocate resources within a care home or geography.

The best digital care planning systems are mobile and easy to use, enabling providers to evidence the care they have given in real-time. It is estimated that an effective digital mobile monitoring system can save three days a month in administration time compared to a paper-

based system³. This person-centred approach gives staff more time to spend caring for their patients. The accuracy and quantity of data recorded in digital care planning systems provide care managers and staff with better tools to analyze whether the optimal care is being given. In essence, digital care plans help improve the quality of care that patients receive.

For example, in the UK, digital care plans such as LogMyCare and GetWellLoop provide access to personalized patient care and allow providers to access and edit patient information in real-time, and relevant tasks can be distributed as and when required.

Given the collective circle of care that contributes to each patient's well-being, there are more opportunities for care plan optimization as more providers are embedded in the system. With several shared resources across the organization, home care organizations are especially ripe for this level of transformation.

Workforce challenges in home care run deeper than recruitment and staff retention. A paradigm shift is warranted to drive attention to an integrated strategy including a digital toolkit to deliver on present and future patient needs.



³ Digital Care Plans in Elderly Care. [Digital Care Plans - Autumn](#)

NEXT STEPS

Taking action now

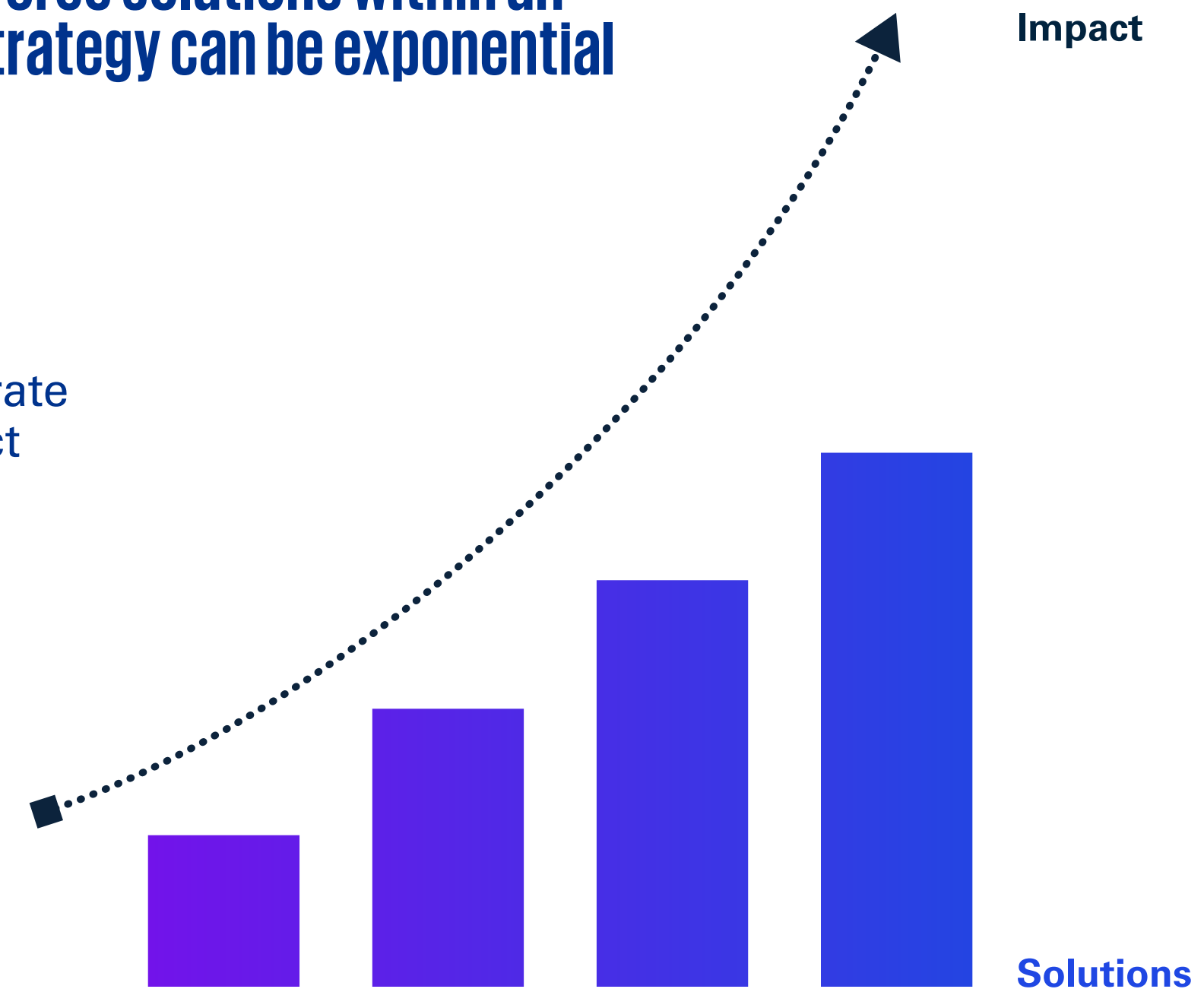
The pandemic has required providers to be immediately responsive to changing guidelines, many of which directly impacted the workforce. With the accelerated adoption of new staffing models and digital tools, now is the time to build on previous efforts and invest in opportunities to remain competitive post-pandemic. In addition, the rapid rate of changes observed as a function of regulations and market trends requires organizations to become agile in their responses to these changes. When acting, it is important that organizations think about short and long-term impacts to balance the need for immediate solutions and workforce challenges with the need to enhance the attractiveness for nurses and PSWs to work in home and community care.

Workforce shortages highlight the need to reconsider the role of digital solutions in your organization. Each of the described solutions has an impact of overall patient care and can reduce the cost of care. Each step through your digital transformation can make incremental changes to care and efficiency of service delivery, but it is only with the complete integration of care optimization solutions and workforce optimization solutions that you will get the exponential benefit of what digital solutions can offer – for your operations, your employees, and the people you serve (Figure 2).

The impact of workforce solutions within an integrated digital strategy can be exponential

Workforce solutions can independently yield incremental benefits, but when integrated, can generate transformative impact

Figure 2: This figure outlines the power of integrated tools on workforce and their ability to generate exponential impact



Existing tools in the market combine all functions of workforce optimization, EVV, virtual care and digital care plans providing a great opportunity for organizations to reap incremental and multiplicative effects of all solutions and tools combined.

With the everyday evolving landscape and increased pressures on home care, organizations should act now to prepare as their operations expand bearing in mind improved patient care and provider experience while sustaining cost.

In the absence of simple solutions to the imminent workforce shortages, we encourage providers to think of the following principles with a close look at their organizations.



1. Apply patient-centric design

Workforce, and patient care cannot be decoupled. Solutions to the workforce crisis must consider current and future patient needs and emerging care delivery models, such as shared decision-making between patients, their families and care providers to enable better healthcare outcomes. Home care organizations need to think: Are my operations patient centric and provide an opportunity for my employees to deliver on the best patient care?



2. Think differently

Organizations can't expect to deal with workforce challenges with status quo solutions. Home care providers need to think about different ways and strategies to enhance their operational efficiency and mitigate ongoing healthcare shortage of workers. Home care providers have an opportunity to look at other industries and transfer lessons learned to their organizations. Industries such as retail, construction and hospitality have developed integrated strategies and solutions to solve for workforce shortages. It's time for home care organizations to think: What are other industries offering similar service models doing to solve for their issues? What can we do differently?



3. Focus on employee and provider well-being

Workers are the greatest asset home care providers have. Loss of staff due to burnout has severe implications on patient care and the cost of recruiting new talent. It is essential to recognize that provider and patient experience is inextricably linked. The workforce shortage affects current staff safety and well-being; hence organizations should consider ways to enhance their employee's safety and well-being while dealing with the current shortage and patient needs. Looking at the employees in your organization think about: Are they satisfied and able to do their jobs effectively? Do they feel that they play an important role in the healthcare system?

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