

Telstra Health Submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety

About Telstra Health

Telstra Health is Australia's largest health software company with a presence across the Australian aged care, disability, and wider health sectors.

We are an organisation of more than 1,000 people, with specialist aged care sector expertise including nurses, care workers, medical practitioners, lifestyle coordinators and facility managers, as well as digital technologists.

Telstra Health is an Australian company and our digital platforms are designed for the Australian clinical setting. We have worked closely with residential aged care providers for more than 10 years and are the principal supplier of clinical and medication software to the residential aged care sector. Our Clinical and Care Management solution is utilised across 55,000 residential aged care beds, our Medication Management solution across 45,000, and our Resident Manager software across 5000 beds.

Our scale and presence in the aged and disability settings, private and public tertiary hospitals, primary care, Aboriginal Medical Services and community care settings, as well as our population health, pharmacy and data and analytics platforms put Telstra Health in a unique place in the Australian aged care and health system. We are the only provider of scale with experience across the spectrum of healthcare delivery. This experience provides Telstra Health with insights and a thorough understanding of the role of digital technology in addressing safety and quality issues, and improving resident and patient care.

Our experience is that investment in technology is a key strategy that residential aged care providers can employ to provide sustainable, innovative, person centred care.

This submission addresses three questions suggested by the Commission, specifically:

- *Challenges and how to best deliver aged care services in a sustainable way (including through innovative models of care, use of technology and investment in the aged care workforce and infrastructure).*
- *Examples of good practice and innovative models in delivering aged care services.*
- *Challenges and how to ensure aged care services are person centred (including by allowing people to exercise choice, control and independence of care and improving engagement with family and carers).*

This submission details Telstra Health's experience with how aged care providers are utilising modern, well designed, person-centred technology to support the following areas:

- Reduced infrastructure resources.
- Reduced-risk medication management.
- Better clinical outcomes.
- Communication with families.

- Workforce improvements.
- Financial sustainability.
- Person centred care and choice.

Reduced infrastructure resources

Good systems can improve safety and quality outcomes and lead to the better wellbeing of aged care residents. Increasingly, residential aged care providers are utilising software solutions to manage their clinical, medication, communication, and resident management needs.

As this trend continues, providers are now moving to cloud hosted software rather than local networks. Cloud based platforms can enable the implementation and upgrade of software with lower infrastructure costs and at faster speeds. These platforms provide the ability to perform minor upgrades on a regular basis, enabling providers to utilise the latest version of software without the time and training associated with a full upgrade implementation.

Utilising cloud-hosted software can also eliminate on-premise operating costs, such as large-scale servers and energy consumption bills, allowing for a provider's resources to be directed to providing high quality care.

Reduced-risk medication management

On average, aged care residents take nine medications per day, representing approximately 1.8 million medicines daily Australia wide.¹

While around 80% of residential aged care providers are believed to operate a clinical management solution, it is our understanding that less than half of providers currently utilise medication management software. Telstra Health believes moving to an effective medication management solution is a simple way that providers can decrease risks associated with medication administration.

Utilising a medication management application via a mobile device can reduce signature omissions and medication errors through the use of prompts and alerts. Without these notifications, staff may forget to document mandatory information, such as adding their signature against medications administered, or providing an explanation for missing a particular medication. Managing the many unknown factors of each medication round without an electronic system – such as staff absences, residents on hospital or social leave, or perhaps refusing to take their medications – only exacerbates these challenges.

Electronic medication charts centralise all medication information to provide a single source of truth. These solutions also remove the risks associated with hand written charts, such as incorrect medications or dosages being administered due to illegible hand writing.

Finally, electronic medication applications enable staff to view all relevant information in the one place during their rounds. These systems display only the medications

¹ NPS Medicinewise, 'Medication charts in residential aged-care facilities', 1 February 2017, <https://www.nps.org.au/australian-prescriber/articles/medication-charts-in-residential-aged-care-facilities>

that are to be administered during that round, and include useful directions to ensure that medications are administered correctly. Photos accompanying electronic records also help staff identify each resident requiring medications during a particular round, which can be particularly useful for agency workers or staff members who typically work at another facility. At the end of the round, all information that was recorded can be tracked and reviewed centrally at any time by management.

Better clinical outcomes

Utilising clinical solutions via a tablet device can lead to better safety and quality outcomes as information can be captured about a resident at the point of care.

This information is then accessible for staff and management to monitor the health of residents without having to wait until the end of the shift.

The application of software to help improve care in this way is especially evident in wound management. With electronic wound charts, staff can take a photo of a resident's wound with a tablet device, upload it immediately and compare it with the previous day's photos to track healing. As a result, staff have access to the necessary information to determine appropriate treatments for a resident at the point of care.

Visibility provided by electronic solutions is also particularly important for aged care providers with multiple facilities, as management can use this information to streamline processes and standardise care. By monitoring data across facilities, providers can identify common areas for improvement and benchmark processes.

Communication with families

Residents' families and friends want to feel connected with their loved one.

There is an increasing expectation on providers to share regular updates with families about what is happening at the facility, such as upcoming excursions, hairdressers' appointments, GP visits, etc. Family members also want to feel a sense of connection that comes from personal updates about their loved one.

Electronic communication solutions can be used to send SMS and email updates, manage contact lists, and store a history of communications distributed. These solutions enable communications to be sent to multiple families at once, reducing time staff spend on individual phone calls or messages.

Personalised updates about an individual resident can strengthen relationships between the provider and residents' families, as they can experience the care and engagement being provided to their loved one in near real time.

Similarly, important information such as accreditation announcements or illness outbreaks can be quickly and easily communicated to all relevant families.

Historical communication records can be used to support any family queries or accreditation requirements. This type of information is also important as it provides a level of visibility and transparency of care delivery in line with Aged Care Quality Standards.

Workforce improvements

As Australia's population ages, technology solutions will have a role in supporting the aged care workforce to deliver high quality care.

The Productivity Commission has estimated that by 2050 there will be 3.5 million Australians accessing aged care services each year, requiring a workforce of almost a million direct care workers.² This compares to the more than one million Australians receiving aged care services today, supported by a workforce of more than 366,000 people.³

As the demand for services grows with an ageing population, technology will play an important role in streamlining manual processes and improving care providers' ability to maintain a high standard of care.

Managing clinical, medication, communication and resident management processes via software can reduce undesirable or slow tasks, thereby increasing job satisfaction and engagement.

Technology can also help to reduce time consuming 'back end' functions, eliminating manual processes to allow staff to spend more time on delivering better care. To achieve this, automation is key.

By using a tablet device to document information 'on the go', staff do not have to return to the nurses' station at the end of shift to document the clinical data of the day. Not only is this more efficient, it also reduces the likelihood of errors from staff relying on hand written, difficult to read notes entered hours after the fact.

The enquiry and resident admission process can also be streamlined through the use of an electronic resident management solution. Rather than capturing details about a prospective resident on a piece of paper, staff members can capture personal details quickly and easily into their software whilst on the phone with the older person or a family member. This data can then be accessed by other staff members at their next point of contact with the facility, ensuring visibility of information across the facility. By utilising a connected resident management and clinical management solution, new resident information can flow across to the clinical system at the point of admission, significantly reducing the need for duplicate entry and ensuring data integrity between the two systems is maintained.

Financial stability

Technology platforms have the capacity to support the most efficient allocation of resources and better track how much of an organisation's expenditure is allocated directly to the provision of care.

² Productivity Commission, *Caring for Older Australians*, 8 August 2011, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/aged-care/report>

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *2017-18 Report on the Operation of the Aged Care Act 1997*, November 2018, <https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/Resources/Reports-and-publications/2018/November/2017%E2%80%9318-Report-on-the-Operation-of-the-Aged-Care-A>

Having access to data from across an organisation provides a level of insight needed to determine potential gaps, improvements and solutions to make organisations more sustainable.

Resident administration and funding management tasks are necessary requirements for every provider. Resident management software can help predict and coordinate Medicare funding, manage providers' submissions, and finalise their monthly claims. This helps to ensure a consistency of data which can reduce the likelihood of Medicare rejections, minimise the amount of data entry required and ensure funding is up to date.

Effective solutions also help to improve cashflow, as mismatched Medicare information can be quickly identified and corrected, ensuring funding is received in a timely manner. Good systems can assist facilities to avoid the time spent on duplicative tasks and manual processing, allowing time and resources instead to be directed towards the provision of care and the wellbeing of residents.

Person-centred care and choice

Software can also help providers deliver person-centred care through the high-visibility of resident choices and preferences. For example, electronic systems can display information such as a resident's preferred name, likes and dislikes, hobbies, preferred time to eat, and their preferred time to get ready in the morning.

Providers can also utilise Assessment Forms within their clinical software to help determine a resident's goals and preferences, and how a facility can manage risks to enable them to achieve this. For example, if a resident does not like using a walker in their room, Assessment Forms can be used to identify what a facility can do to help them safely get around and meet this goal. These electronic processes help to ensure that resident choice and dignity of risk is managed through a structured assessment process, consultation and review with the resident and other relevant parties.

And finally, using communication solutions can help residents' families to see regular examples of how their family member is being cared for and supported to meet their goals and preferences.

Conclusion

Telstra Health would welcome any invitation to share our sector knowledge and expertise with the Commission as it conducts its inquiry, or respond to any questions or clarifications in relation to this submission as appropriate.

For the Commission's reference, a background document on 'The role of digital technology in aged care' published by Telstra Health in May 2019 is also included.

The role of digital technology in aged care

Mon May 20 15:14:06 AEST 2019 - Published by Telstra Health



The aged care sector is currently undergoing changes that are placing increased focus on quality of care and reporting of clinical outcomes. This article examines the role of digital health solutions in the aged care sector, and the policy settings that could be considered in order to maximise benefits.

Approximately 90% of residential aged care beds are managed using digital information systems, including software that assists in the management of clinical information, medication and resident management. About 90% of beds are covered by clinical software, and 40% for medication management software.

The key drivers for uptake of digital solutions in aged care have been government policy and funding requirements. In 2005, the Commonwealth implemented a range of initiatives, including infrastructure funding for upgrades to residential aged care facilities. Many facilities used this funding of around \$1,000 per bed to invest in digitisation and most have prioritised software systems that help them with accreditation reporting and maximise their Aged Care Funding Instrument (ACFI) funding.

Digitisation has a key role in helping to address some key issues in the sector:

- Over 90% of aged care residents have at least one medication-related problem, with an average of 3.2 problems per person. Up to 17% of unplanned hospital

admissions from aged care facilities are due to inappropriate medications.

- **Issues with the quality of care are becoming increasingly apparent**, as emerging through the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. This will lead to an increased focus on enforcing standards and accreditation, transparency on how providers are performing against these standards, and the need for providers to report meaningfully and accurately against these measures. As the incoming accreditation standards have an increased focus on consumer choice and respecting resident preferences, compliance and transparency around these measures will also become more important.
- **Transitions of care are high risk and inefficient without transfer of good quality information** both for transition from community into the aged care facility, and for planned and emergency hospital admissions.

The role of digital technology

As elsewhere in health sector, technology has a role to play, alongside policy and funding enablers, in supporting providers to deliver safer and higher quality care to consumers. There are some key ways for digital health to support quality care and sustainability of the sector:

- Wider use of electronic medication management systems can help to reduce errors and harm to residents, through accurately documenting what medications are prescribed, and how and when they are administered to the resident. Connecting medication information digitally between aged care facilities, GPs and pharmacy would significantly help to improve medication safety, especially across transitions of care, such as planned or emergency hospital admissions.
- Digital records have a key role to play in supporting how care is provided and driving compliance and auditing against accreditation standards. Once aged care facilities have high quality, codified data, it can enable software systems to provide alert and decision support for members of the care team, enabling better informed decision making.
- Digital information systems can also facilitate consumer-directed care, by ensuring that resident and family preferences are recorded, transparent, and acted upon by various members of the care team.
- Higher quality data will also be a key driver in producing meaningful, transparent and robust reporting. Capturing and reporting data as a by-product of clinical and administrative workflows will enhance data quality and minimise burden of compliance.
- As an increasing proportion of low needs care is delivered in the home, over time the service needs in residential aged care will become increasingly clinically complex, and will require more clinically sophisticated information systems to manage these care needs. These systems will need to evolve to enable management and reporting of care outcomes and adherence with care pathways and best practice medication management.

- Digital consumer engagement tools will enable resident information to be accessible by family and carers through portals and apps, and will be an important engagement mechanism for residents and their families.

Policy enablers for benefits realisation

Adoption of technological tools alone will not drive quality in aged care. In order for benefits to be realised from digital technology, policy and funding enablers must be in place:

1. **Aligning aged care accreditation standard reporting requirements with quality measures:** Reporting processes for compliance with standards will drive investment and activity by aged care providers, including in digital technology and data quality. If accreditation standards reporting requirements align with quality measures, the effectiveness of that reporting will be optimised.
2. **Aligning funding criteria and claiming information requirements** so as to reward aged care providers using quality clinical systems, workflows and data. A key lesson from digital health adoption is to leverage clinical and administrative processes where possible, rather than introduce additional requirements to capture information for a separate purpose. Support change management and transition.

Support change management and transition

Changes to standards, clinical quality requirements and digital systems are likely to require residential aged care providers to undertake organisational and workforce changes. If these changes are to be successfully implemented, providers will need support in transitioning. The pressures on aged care providers and their software providers in 2019-20 due to the incoming standards.