



BRENNAN IT

# THE EVOLUTION OF AUSTRALIA'S HOME-BASED AND COMMUNITY HEALTH CARE SECTOR

**How technology is vital in enabling improved outcomes and competitive advantage in home-based and community health care**

A whitepaper from Brennan IT  
[brennanit.com.au](http://brennanit.com.au)

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As the sector becomes more consumer-driven, market-based and deregulated, individuals have greater control over which healthcare provider they choose, and the flexibility to switch providers at any time. New providers are also able to enter the market; expanding the range of services and options available for customers, and raising the overall standard of patient care.

For existing providers, it means more scope and opportunity to help people in need. However, it also means greater pressure to provide quality services and drive operational efficiency. As well as continuing to deliver high quality care outcomes, providers must keep costs low, yet innovate and evolve in order to drive competitive advantage.

To continually improve their level of care, stay ahead and reduce costs, embracing the latest technology, and having a solid ICT foundation, is becoming increasingly essential. In reality, however, many healthcare providers – both in Australia, and around the world – are struggling to select and implement the right solutions.

According to a recent study by Harvard Business Review Analytics Services, 32% of health care decision makers globally reported a low reliance upon digital technologies.

**“** *Whilst progressive health care organisations in Australia have embarked on digital initiatives, like electronic medical record implementations, e-medication programs, and patient engagement platforms, it is clear that significant efforts will need to be pursued to realise the true value of digital health for improving health system efficiencies and outcomes.* **”**

At Brennan IT, we have considerable experience and expertise in Australia's healthcare sector, and currently deliver ICT solutions for many of the largest and most recognised brands in healthcare. In this whitepaper, we outline some of these recent changes to the home-based and community health-care sector, and discuss how with the right technology – and technology partner – providers can innovate and stay ahead.

# WHAT IS DRIVING CHANGE IN THE SECTOR?

Australia's home-based and community healthcare sector has been under pressure for some time, with both not-for-profit and privately operated providers challenged by the need to provide high levels of care, while keeping costs low, and relying upon limited sources of funding.

In recent years, however, the sector has been presented with some new and evolved challenges, as well as some very exciting opportunities. These include:

## **Increasing demand and an ageing population**

Perhaps the most significant challenge in the sector comes from the increasing demand for in-home care. The number of people in Australia aged 65 and over is projected to double, growing from 3.6 million in 2014-15 to almost 9 million or 23% of the population in 2055. The highest growth rate is expected to be for people aged 85 years and over, with numbers rising from 500,000 in 2015 to 2 million by 2055.

In addition to this, more and more Australians – particularly older people – are choosing to live, with support from a primary carer, in their own homes rather than in an aged care facility.

A recent study by the national Cognitive Decline Partnership suggests that, in the case of older Australians, there are considerable positive health and financial benefits to this trend. Their study suggested that residents who remained at home had fewer hospital admissions, and scored higher on quality of life measures, with their overall costs also being 20 percent lower than for traditional care.

For home-based and community healthcare providers, which care for both older people and those with disabilities, this means a need to balance unprecedented demand with the need to provide a high level of care and individual attention. And in order to do so, finding new and innovative systems and process is vital.

## More empowered and aware consumers

Also importantly, recent regulatory changes have enabled Australians to be more active and empowered when it comes to their healthcare.

On 1 July 2015, it became mandatory for all home care packages to be delivered on a consumer directed care (CDC) basis. CDC gives consumers greater choice over the types of care and services they access, how and when those services are delivered, and by whom. It also gives consumers – that is, people with a disability, or older people, more control over their funds for their care, and how those funds are spent.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is the new way of providing support for Australians with disabilities, their families and carers, and offers them more choice and control over the providers they select and the frequency of their support.

Thanks to each of these initiatives, consumers requiring home care can now actively choose a provider that meets their needs, and direct the government to subsidise that provider. It also means that consumers can change their provider if they wish, including if they move to another area to live.

In this context, it's no longer enough for providers to fulfil regulatory and compliance requirements – and to uphold their commitment to providing high levels of care. To ensure consumers choose their organisation over another, providers now need to actively market their services, and achieve a point of differentiation in the industry.

They also need to operate in the most efficient way possible, so that funds can be channelled into the most appropriate and productive areas. And when it comes to doing so, technology is playing an increasingly essential role.

**48% of providers say creating an exceptional, highly relevant patient experience is a priority in their digital transformation efforts.**

– Harvard Business Review Analytics Services<sup>6</sup>

5. <https://agedcare.health.gov.au/aged-care-reform/home-care/home-care-packages-reform> 6. Harvard Business Review Analytic Services, *Embracing the change mandate: the 2020 Digital Transformation Agenda for Australia's Health Care Sector*

## **New governance, compliance and funding rules**

As part of the CDC initiative, the way in which providers receive funding has also now changed and become considerably more complex.

Now, providers are paid a subsidy by the Commonwealth for each consumer that is being provided with services at home. Providers then claim for subsidy through a process managed by the Department of Human Services.

Importantly, providers now need to work in partnership with individuals (and potentially their carers) to identify their goals and needs. These form the basis of a care plan. Providers need to set out individualised budgets and issue monthly income and expenditure statements, which provide transparency over what budget is available and how funds are spent.

Organisations wanting to become an approved provider are assessed against 53 mandatory criteria, with approved provider status lapsing after two years if the provider doesn't hold an allocation of places.

All of this means a considerable administrative burden for providers, especially if they lack the technology infrastructure to support these new processes. Without the right IT systems in place, producing care plans, and issuing individualised budgets, monthly income and expenditure statements can very quickly become a major overhead.

## **Industry de-regulation**

As of February 2017, approved home care providers are no longer required to hold a government allocation of home care packages in order to deliver subsidised home care.

As such, according to Community Care Review, the number of home care providers grew by 40 per cent in 2017, as 'new entrants flood the deregulated marketplace.'<sup>7</sup> In addition, only half of these providers were already delivering an aged care or home care service.<sup>8</sup>

For existing providers, this de-regulation means enormous pressure to evolve and operate more efficiently, in order to maintain a presence in the market. Again, technology has the potential to play a significant role – enabling providers to operate with more agility, efficiency and customer-centricity than they did previously.

7. & 8. <https://www.australianageingagenda.com.au/2017/07/20/home-care-changes-spark-influx-new-entrants/>

## **Dated ICT infrastructure**

Another key issue for the home care and community care sector is its legacy IT infrastructure. Typically, the industry has lacked overarching IT solutions, and in our experience, most operators are working with disparate, dated and disconnected technology in place. In addition, most healthcare providers employ a wide range of staff from various demographics and with quite diverse skills – which can make it difficult to ensure consistent adoption the entire business.

While most providers are capturing considerable amounts of data, it's often not readily available, and it can be difficult to cross-reference data to derive meaningful insights. This can also make meeting regulation and compliance requirements a challenge. It also means everyday processes are more difficult than they need to be, insights are limited, and patients aren't necessarily getting the level of care they deserve.

And while many providers are succeeding in implementing new technology, other providers are slow to adapt and risk getting left behind. For healthcare providers to be successful, it's important to have a single, streamlined and unified approach to technology – with a centralised solution that delivers overarching insight.



# 5 KEY WAYS TECHNOLOGY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Based on our experience helping a broad range of organisations in the healthcare sector, we have identified five key areas in which technology can make an impact. These include:

## 1. Data-led decision making

Today, data can play a very important role in how home care and community health providers operate on a day-to-day basis. However, while most providers in the home based and community care space are capturing data, not many are using it to its full advantage or 'completing the loop' when it comes to ensuring insights are actioned.

To drive care outcomes and achieve operational efficiencies, data must be put at the very centre of the organisation, and must be accessed and used right across the business. Decision makers can therefore make far more informed and accurate decisions based on accurate and real-time data.

By working with our sister company, Superfluid, Brennan IT can provide organisations with the tools they need to capture, analyse and use available data to their advantage. One such tool is Microsoft Power BI – which offers best-in-class technology, and is rated a leader by Gartner in 2018's Magic Quadrant for Analytics and Business Intelligence Platforms. Via a user-friendly dashboard, Microsoft Power BI can give providers access to a whole raft of information they need on their business – with real-time visualisations, data models and advanced analytics. Armed with insights from Power BI, businesses can very quickly determine which areas of the business can be improved, and which require additional focus.

A home care provider, for instance, could use data analysis to track the average time of home visits, and build its costing model accordingly. Similarly, they could track the financial outlay associated with particular consumables – such as bandages or paracetamol medication – to determine where and how items are being issued.

When it comes to leveraging burgeoning volumes of patient data, it's also becoming more and more important that home-based and community care organisations move key workloads to the cloud. As the volumes of data increase exponentially, and Australia moves towards having a centralised, cloud-based store of patient data, relying upon on-premise data storage is no longer enough. It also inhibits organisations' ability to scale and adapt in a very rapidly-evolving marketplace.

According to Harvard Business Review Analytic Services: "Whilst organisations increasingly understand the value of digitising this data, the sheer size of the data stores – growing 48% per year according to EMC – poses a data management challenge."<sup>9</sup>

At Brennan IT, we have considerable expertise in helping home care and community care organisations transition their infrastructure to the cloud – where appropriate. We can also determine the best possible approach to the cloud, facilitate this move, and provide ongoing support and services.

**“** *We are on the verge of the most significant shift in how we deliver health care since the scientific method arrived. People’s records can’t be locked up anymore. Those who adapt will gain work, and those who don’t, won’t.* **”**

- Dr. Chris Pearce, GP and president of the Australasian College of Health Informatics<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Improved field service management/mobility

Managing a team of remote carers, and coordinating home and community centre visits for people with a range of disabilities, as well as older Australians still living in their own homes, can be a major administrative burden, especially if the provider lacks the systems and tools to manage it effectively.

With the right technology in place, however, providers can more effectively manage field service staff – ensuring the most appropriate workers are always allocated to the most appropriate jobs, the status of a job and a particular visit is accurately recorded, and that field service workers have the information they need at their fingertips.

A carer who is going out to visit a person with a disability in their home for the first time, for instance, could simply use their smartphone or tablet to check the address they need to go to, the estimated travel time, and if the person has any particular medical or psychological needs to be addressed. Once at the home, they could enter an update regarding the person’s health and what happened during the visit – rather than waiting until they are back at the office to enter any notes. By doing so, healthcare workers can be far more efficient, and improve the overall level of care they are able to offer individual consumers.

Yet empowering remote workers with internet-enabled devices also raises all-important security concerns. And today, with cyber-attacks on the rise healthcare providers need to be particularly vigilant. With a solution such as Microsoft 365,

however, providers can get all-important peace of mind. They can give individual employees access to a whole raft of tools that can help them work more productively and effectively – and enable access from anywhere, at any time, any device. Plus, thanks to solutions such as Windows Defender anti-virus and Microsoft InTune, providers can protect their corporate apps and data on any device. With InTune, businesses can manage their devices, determine which resources devices can access, locate a particular device, remotely lock it, and even remote-wipe corporate data while protecting personal data.

When it comes to managing devices and security on an ongoing basis, Brennan IT can also offer direct support to mobile workers – so they can get on with their core focus of caring for the individuals they are visiting. Recognising that mobile healthcare teams don’t typically work 9am – 5pm, we offer direct support 24/7, which means we can help if – for instance – a healthcare worker is locked out of a device, can’t connect to a particular app, or is having trouble accessing the details for an upcoming job. We support any user, working in any location and on any device, as long as they are enrolled in a corporate mobile device management program.

**“** *Cloud services provide cost effective and secure data storage and can also aggregate the fragmented data stores across the health care continuum.* **”**

- Embracing the Change Mandate: the 2020 Digital Transformation Agenda for Australia’s Health Care Sector

### 3. Backup and disaster recovery

For a healthcare organisation, IT downtime can be extremely inconvenient as well as costly. In fact, research indicates that for a small to medium business, the cost of downtime can exceed \$100,000 per hour.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this, the disaster recovery and backup systems and processes relied upon by many home care and community health providers are no longer sufficient. The growth in disparate hybrid IT environments means disaster recovery and backup is far more complex and nuanced than ever before. Plus, disruption to a company's network can also be now caused by a very wide range of factors, including an error by a staff member, a natural disaster, or potentially, a cyber-attack.

To maintain continuity and be ready for any situation, thorough planning and strategy is critical. This involves having both a reliable data backup process in place, as well as a disaster recovery solution.

Brennan IT can help by providing rigorous solutions that are completely tailored to individual organisations – ensuring that if a disaster occurs, the business can be back up and running extremely quickly – without disruption to essential services.

We have partnered with market-leading vendors to ensure we can provide the best possible options to home care and community healthcare operators. Before recommending any solution, we work closely with the provider to understand their IT environment, business drivers, current capabilities, limitations and budget. We also offer flexible payment options so that providers can avoid large-up-front capital costs.

11. <https://www.zerto.com/infographics/the-disaster-recovery-challenge/thechallenges.html>

## 4. Data security

With new data regulations in place both here in Australia and in Europe, data security is becoming increasingly vital. Under the Notifiable Data Breaches Schemes (NBD) here in Australia, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe, organisations must actively implement measures to ensure data security and compliance, or risk serious fines. Plus, organisations must also now develop transparent information handling practices, and disclose any breaches that are likely to result in serious harm to an individual.

In the home based and community care sector, which relies on keeping very accurate and in-depth information about individual consumers, data security is of particular concern.

It's for this reason that Brennan IT offers Microsoft 365 to a wide range of healthcare customers looking for enhanced data security and control.

The new Microsoft 365 includes a range of sophisticated privacy and data control measures to ensure compliance, including:

- **Deep content analysis** to easily identify, monitor, and protect sensitive information from leaving the organisation.
- **Consistent security configuration** across Windows 10, Android and iOS devices.
- **Document encryption** and enforced Multi Factor Authentication and restricted copy/paste.
- **Device data encryption** with BitLocker and remote wipe for lost or stolen devices.
- **Information Rights Management**, intelligent labelling and data loss prevention tips.

Brennan It can also provide overarching and practical security services – designed specifically for the modern healthcare provider. Our security solutions provide the most comprehensive protection for data and devices, both in the office or wherever staff are working.

## 5. Communications infrastructure

To operate effectively in the healthcare sector, communication and networking is vital. To deliver optimal levels of care and get the best results for consumers, providers need to have reliable, multi-channel communications between staff and patients, as well as carers and regulatory authorities. And everyone needs to be able to communicate readily, from any device, when it suits them.

In order to facilitate this communication and networking, healthcare providers need highly

available and reliable ICT systems.

If the infrastructure fails, vital information can be missed – or communication interrupted – which can have serious consequences.

Brennan IT can help fulfil these needs, by providing reliable, fully-managed network infrastructure and services. As well as recommending an appropriate ICT infrastructure from the beginning, our experts can also provide ongoing management and support – so you can focus on what matters most: looking after the people in your care.

**“** *Australia can retain its world-leading standing in health care through effective use of digital technologies. Making health care data more accessible and manageable will improve treatment options, increase efficiencies and connect patient journeys.* **”**

– Embracing the Change Mandate: the 2020 Digital Transformation Agenda for Australia's Health Care Sector

## How Brennan IT helps Wellways look after Australians in need

Wellways Australia Limited is a leading not-for-profit mental health and disability support organisation with locations in Eastern Australia. Their services span mental health, disability, aged and community care, and reach thousands of people each year.

To fulfil its objectives, Wellways needs to provide the best possible care and services, while keeping its operating costs low. And as the healthcare sector becomes increasingly consumer driven, Wellways also needs to continually refine and improve its offering in order to maintain a competitive advantage.

As Wellways' strategic IT partner, Brennan IT implements and supports a broad range of technology to help the organisation enhance its services and the level of care it offers the Australian people.

In 2016, Brennan IT was engaged as Wellways' ongoing IT partner. This involves providing a broad range of Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) services, including maintaining their network infrastructure, desktop support, device support, security, backup and recovery, and telephony.

A key area of focus has been providing Wellways with a very scalable infrastructure, especially as the business has undergone several mergers and acquisitions as part of its growth mandate.

Ensuring the productivity of Wellways' staff has also been vital. Primarily Wellways achieved this through a range of solutions to help staff members operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. This has included implementing a collaboration resource built on SharePoint and a robust Unified Communications platform, which facilitates flexible and multi-channel collaboration.

In addition, with less than 30% of the business now using desktops, Brennan IT provides direct support to all Wellways staff, ensuring they have the right devices, applications and support they need to work effectively from anywhere - without compromising the organisation's data security.

Since working with Brennan IT, Wellways has been able to focus more on providing the best possible care to participants, and much less on maintaining their IT.

# HOW BRENNAN IT CAN HELP

Brennan IT can offer unparalleled ICT strategy, solutions and services which are proven to help the health care sector help others. This includes:

- **Industry experience** - we currently work with many major health services clients, and have been working with at least half of these clients for over five years. This gives us a deep understanding of the specific challenges faced by providers in the healthcare sector.
- **Solution experience** - we have extensive capabilities, from security to mobility and networking, which enables us to meet the complex and broad needs of health care providers.
- **Partnership model** - we work very closely with our clients to deliver the best results, and to help us respond to complex changes in the industry.
- **Support services** - our expert team offers support and advice, 24/7, 365 days of the year.
- **Microsoft Gold partner** - we have been a Microsoft partner for 21 years, and have been the number one Microsoft Services Partner in Australia for the last eight years.

## WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

If you're interested in finding out which technology solutions are appropriate for your home care or community care business, contact us to request a complimentary Discovery Workshop.

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