



Helping older Australians to live well



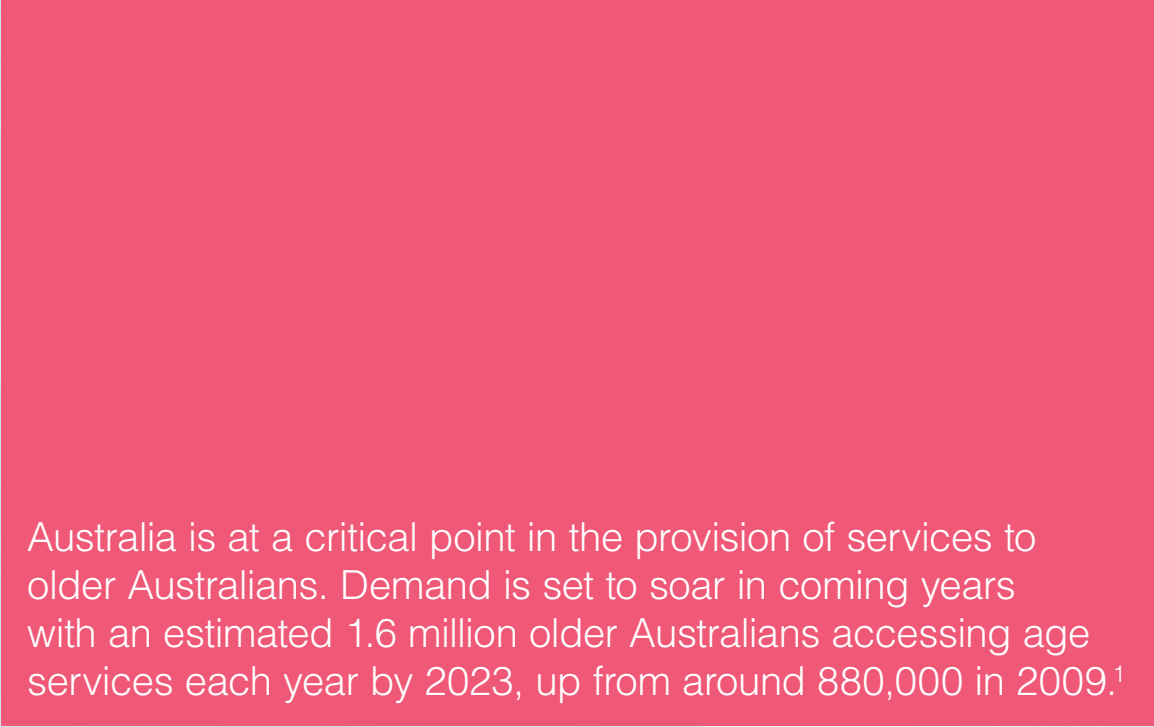
# Digital Care Services

Harnessing ICT to create sustainable aged care services


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Australia is at a critical point in the provision of services to older Australians. Demand is set to soar in coming years with an estimated 1.6 million older Australians accessing age services each year by 2023, up from around 880,000 in 2009.<sup>1</sup>



Aged care consumers expect more from their care providers and government to help them maintain independence and age with dignity. These growing expectations place increased pressures on the transparency and flexibility of the aged care industry to provide a universal standard of high quality services with fast access to a variety of primary, community, residential, hospital and/or home care based services.

The industry is rapidly moving into an era of consumer-directed care (CDC), where older Australians will have a greater say in what services they receive and how they are delivered. This will require providers to offer more integrated services and to collaborate with other providers on care and budgets.

Based on current projections the industry will need to grow from approximately 210,000 workers in 2010 to almost 400,000 workers by 2025.<sup>2</sup> However, there continue to be challenges in attracting and retaining aged care workers while simultaneously the industry is expected to experience consolidation of providers over the next decade.

Leading providers are looking to improve the productivity of their workforce by reducing the administration and travel burden, maximising face-to-face care time, and providing unobtrusive monitoring or assistance when carers cannot be there.

There has never been a better time to plan and implement new thinking and processes to ensure ongoing quality service provision is available for an ageing Australia.



# Charting a course for the future

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The answer is not simply more resources, since resources are both scarce and finite. Instead, it is about making greater use of information and communications technology (ICT) to help the entire system deliver high quality and accessible care. To meet future needs ICT investments need to be closely integrated to encompass the needs of providers, consumers and carers.

ICT is a key enabler in allowing providers to deliver CDC and support personally controlled electronic health records (PCEHR), including through the use of mobility, analytics and cloud-based offerings. The current focus on industry reform – particularly through the Federal Government's 'Living Longer Living Better' reform package – provides an excellent opportunity for providers and government to expand their use of ICT.

We have identified a number of key areas that should be prioritised.

## eHealth

eHealth is the means of ensuring that the right health information is provided to the right person at the right place and time in a secure electronic format. eHealth solutions support greater quality, efficiency and continuity of care when aged care consumers are transferred between services, such as from home care, to hospital, to residential care and specialists.

Government have a role in establishing eHealth infrastructure – such as the PCEHR system – and driving take-up among citizens. Providers should explore ways to easily provide access to eHealth records, and incorporate additional functionality such as patient transfer documents, care plans, advanced care directives and secure messaging. The PCEHR system provides an opportunity for providers to access information, such as hospital discharge summaries, from others.

## Telehealth and Mobility

Telehealth uses ICT to address distance challenges. Providers can use home monitoring, call centres and video consultations to manage certain medical conditions and potentially allow more people to remain in their homes for longer.

Mobility solutions allow aged care staff to work remotely, collaborate with colleagues and monitor clients who remain in their homes. The combination of mobility and telehealth helps people play a more active role in their own care. The current telehealth trials for aged care video consults being delivered via the National Broadband Network infrastructure is a key example of current activity in this area.

## Care Management

In an era of CDC, consumers will demand more integrated and tailored care. Providers can use ICT Solutions that help enhance the quality of care by improving integration of care planning, personal health support, medication management and holistic services to help manage chronic conditions.



### Management Information and Reporting

Sophisticated information management, data exchange, analytics and reporting functions are critical to improving care delivery, and support a culture of continuous improvement. Providers have the opportunity to reap substantial business benefits by implementing more modern information and reporting platforms that generate aged care specific insights to help support improved service delivery performance and cost management.

### Core Technology and Support

To better manage the complicated care needs of more people, providers need robust ICT systems to underpin their operations. This includes the use of managed services to reduce capital investment, while delivering the latest technology in functions such as data storage, payroll and transaction management.

# Building capability that enables accessible high-quality care

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So, where does the industry start in building ICT capability?

Think Big, Start Small, Scale Rapidly.

There are opportunities for government and providers to work differently and establish the seeds for industry wide change. Peak Bodies and more advanced providers can help chart the course forward and provide a unified voice.

Government can help foster investment in infrastructure for innovation and solutions that can be scaled across the industry, similar to providing seed funding and leadership as it has with Pharmacies and General Practice. Government may also take the opportunity to review the scope of information currently required and streamline reporting requirements and information access to ensure it becomes useful and affordable to the system.

Providers need to rapidly develop a strategic response. They need to begin by evaluating their current ICT arrangements, and work with vendors and software developers to ensure they have the right capabilities in place. Providers will need to understand their unique challenges and define their own strategic plans for enhancing ICT capabilities. These plans should be scalable to meet the growing need for aged care services and integrate with industry wide solutions.

To ensure this approach is successful, providers may need to make sure board members and advisers with substantial ICT experience are involved. Some providers may need to boost their ICT spend from less than 2% to 4-5% of gross revenue to provide a sound level of ICT investment that enables technology to play a vital role.

Government should focus on creating a framework that enables the industry to change and adapt, including consistent government policies and investments. In addition, government should work closely with the industry peak bodies to develop pilot programs and ensure the outcomes are disseminated across the industry. This requires a scalable investment approach as opposed to the current ad hoc spending approach to aged care ICT investments.

By taking steps now to elevate the status of ICT, all parties can help create an agile and sustainable system that is well placed to meet Australia's aged care needs now and into the future.

# Benefits and Threats

By improving the use of ICT, government, consumers and providers can gain substantial benefits.

Government can help align industry and Commonwealth goals to enhance care quality and safety, improve productivity in the industry, and foster improvements to the cost effectiveness of services delivered.

Consumers gain more choice and control over the services they receive, simplified access to services, and greater independence (including being able to remain in their homes longer).

Providers are able to better meet rising consumer expectations through enhanced service offerings. Also, they can develop more sustainable and cost-effective business models, and collaborate more effectively with other providers and government.

For all parties, the cost of inaction is high. If the system does not embrace the use of ICT, it risks the loss of the ability to offer high-quality, accessible care. This could not only fail those directly involved, but result in additional adverse pressures on the Australian community in general.

## For more information

To find out how your organisation can use ICT to provide high-quality services in an environment of consumer-directed care, please contact:

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## Sources

<sup>1</sup> 'Source Data: Caring for Older Australians', the Productivity Commission, 8 August 2011, [www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/aged-care/report/key-points](http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/aged-care/report/key-points).

<sup>2</sup> Source Data: Productivity Commission - [http://www.pc.gov.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/110919/27-aged-care-appendix.pdf](http://www.pc.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0003/110919/27-aged-care-appendix.pdf)

## About Aged Care Industry Information Technology Council (ACIITC)

The Aged Care Industry IT Council (ACIITC) was formed by the two industry peak bodies, the Aged Care Association of Australia (ACAA) and Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA), in 2007. ACIITC is the leading industry voice on how ICT can improve the operation of the aged care industry. Additionally, it provides ICT policy guidance to peak bodies, government and its agencies. Its home page is [www.aciitc.com.au](http://www.aciitc.com.au).

Leading Age Services Australia (LASA), which replaced ACAA on the Council, is the peak body for age services in Australia, covering the majority of providers in both not-for-profit and private organizations across all service types. LASA has offices in every state and national office in Canberra and a staff of 120. Its home page is [www.lasa.asn.au](http://www.lasa.asn.au).

Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA) is the leading national peak body for aged and community care providers and represents church, charitable and community-based organisations providing housing, residential and community care services to older people, younger people with a disability and their carers. Its home page is [www.agedcare.org.au](http://www.agedcare.org.au).

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