

# FLORIDA *at Home*

A full-page photograph of an elderly man with a white beard and hair, wearing a grey t-shirt, sitting in a wheelchair. He is smiling and holding a red dumbbell in his right hand, extending it forward. A younger man with a beard, wearing a grey zip-up jacket over a white t-shirt and grey pants, stands behind him, assisting with his arm. The background is a bright, neutral-colored wall.

## **Revolutionizing Home Health Care: The AI Advantage**

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## **CONFESSIONS OF A FLORIDA HOME CARE PROVIDER**

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## **POST-ACUTE CARE SAVES THE WORLD: THE TOTAL PATIENT CARE DELIVERY MODEL**

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# Looking to 2024 and Facing Challenges

As we embrace the year 2024, I am invigorated by the collective spirit that defines the essence of home care. In this year, brimming with challenges and opportunities, I address you as your president with unwavering optimism.

**O**ur home care journey is a narrative sculpted by your steadfast commitment — caregivers offering compassion, clinicians providing expertise, and agency leaders tirelessly working to elevate care standards. It is your resilience that propels us forward, and I take great pride in your achievements.

Looking forward, our industry confronts challenges demanding our attention: persistent workforce shortages, evolving regulations, and transformative changes in home care. In response, we must seize these challenges as opportunities for growth, fostering a resilient and forward-thinking industry.

Our unwavering focus on the future is crucial. As we navigate regulatory changes and ongoing workforce shortages, let's view these hurdles as chances for innovation. Our commitment to elevating care standards through inventive solutions remains steadfast.

The narratives within these pages provide insights into innovative strategies for growing your agency, leveraging technology, and enhancing operational efficiency. They showcase how we

collectively navigate challenges, revealing a resilient spirit that propels us toward a future where home care stands as a beacon of progress and excellence.

As we sail through the uncharted waters of 2024, let's do so with a shared vision — one where the impact of home care extends far beyond service provision. Together, we can transform challenges into triumphs and uncertainties into opportunities.

I extend my deepest gratitude for your steadfast dedication to the noble cause of home care. Here's to a year of collective achievements, innovation, and a future where the light of home care shines brighter than ever before. 🏡

Warm regards,



**CINDY LAVOIE**

HCAF President  
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# Final Word: A Message From the Executive Director

2024 isn't just another year; it marks a pivotal moment in home care. Policy and regulatory shifts are more than mere changes — they signify participation in a broader movement of which you are an integral part.

**T**he upcoming year is poised to be a watershed moment marked by critical decisions on the horizon. These include the implementation of the 2024 Medicare payment rule, the finalization of the Medicaid access rule, a surge of state legislative initiatives in what insiders are deeming “the year of health care,” and other significant policy shifts within the home care sector.

These changes have the potential to influence access, investments, and strategies for health care stakeholders across our community. HCAF stands at the forefront of discussions and debates, advocating for policies that ensure the viability and success of home care initiatives. We are committed to defending patient/client access and empowering providers to adapt and thrive in this evolving landscape.

Join us in shaping this transformative year — be a driving force for the future of home care in 2024 and beyond! Visit [hcaf.tiny.us/inquire](https://hcaf.tiny.us/inquire) to submit your information and learn how your organization can actively contribute to preserving access to in-home care.

Wishing you a vibrant and fulfilling 2024, filled with joy, success, and prosperity. Cheers to a fantastic year ahead! 🏠

Warm regards,



**BOBBY LOLLEY, RN**

HCAF Executive Director



# Revolutionizing Home Health Care: **THE AI ADVANTAGE**



**I**n the dynamic realm of home health care, the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) is ushering in a new era of efficiency and effectiveness. As we confront the challenges and demands of an aging population and evolving health care landscape, AI emerges as a transformative force, enhancing the quality of care and streamlining operations for provider organizations.



### THE AI REVOLUTION IN PATIENT CARE

At the heart of AI's impact on home health care is its ability to analyze vast amounts of data swiftly and accurately. This capability is particularly valuable when it comes to patient care. AI algorithms can process patient data, including medical histories, vital signs, and lifestyle factors, to identify patterns and trends that may go unnoticed by human caregivers. This allows for more personalized and targeted care plans, ultimately improving patient outcomes.

Telehealth, powered by AI-driven virtual assistants, has become a cornerstone of remote patient monitoring. These virtual assistants provide real-time support, answer patient queries, and even remind individuals to adhere to their medication schedules. This not only fosters patient engagement but also ensures a continuous connection between caregivers and those under their care.

### PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS FOR PROACTIVE CARE

One of the groundbreaking applications of AI in home health care is predictive analytics. By analyzing historical data, AI algorithms can identify potential health issues before they escalate, enabling caregivers to take proactive measures. This approach is a game-changer, reducing hospital re-admissions, minimizing emergency interventions, and optimizing the allocation of resources.

For instance, an AI-powered system can analyze a patient's health metrics and predict the likelihood of a health deterioration event. Caregivers can then intervene early, implementing preventive measures that significantly impact the patient's well-being. This not only improves the overall quality of care but also contributes to the cost-effectiveness of home health care services.

### ROBOTIC ASSISTANCE AND ENHANCED CAREGIVER SUPPORT

In the realm of physical assistance and routine tasks, AI-driven robotics are making significant strides. Robots equipped with advanced sensors and machine learning capabilities can assist with mobility, lifting, and even household chores. These robotic assistants not only reduce the physical strain on caregivers but also contribute to a safer and more efficient caregiving environment.

Humanoid robots, enhanced with natural language processing, are bringing a new dimension to the emotional support aspect of home health care. These AI companions can engage in conversations, provide companionship, and even monitor the emotional well-being of patients. The synergy between AI-driven technology and human caregiving skills is creating a harmonious balance, ensuring a holistic approach to patient care.

### EFFICIENCY AND PRECISION IN HOME HEALTH CARE OPERATIONS

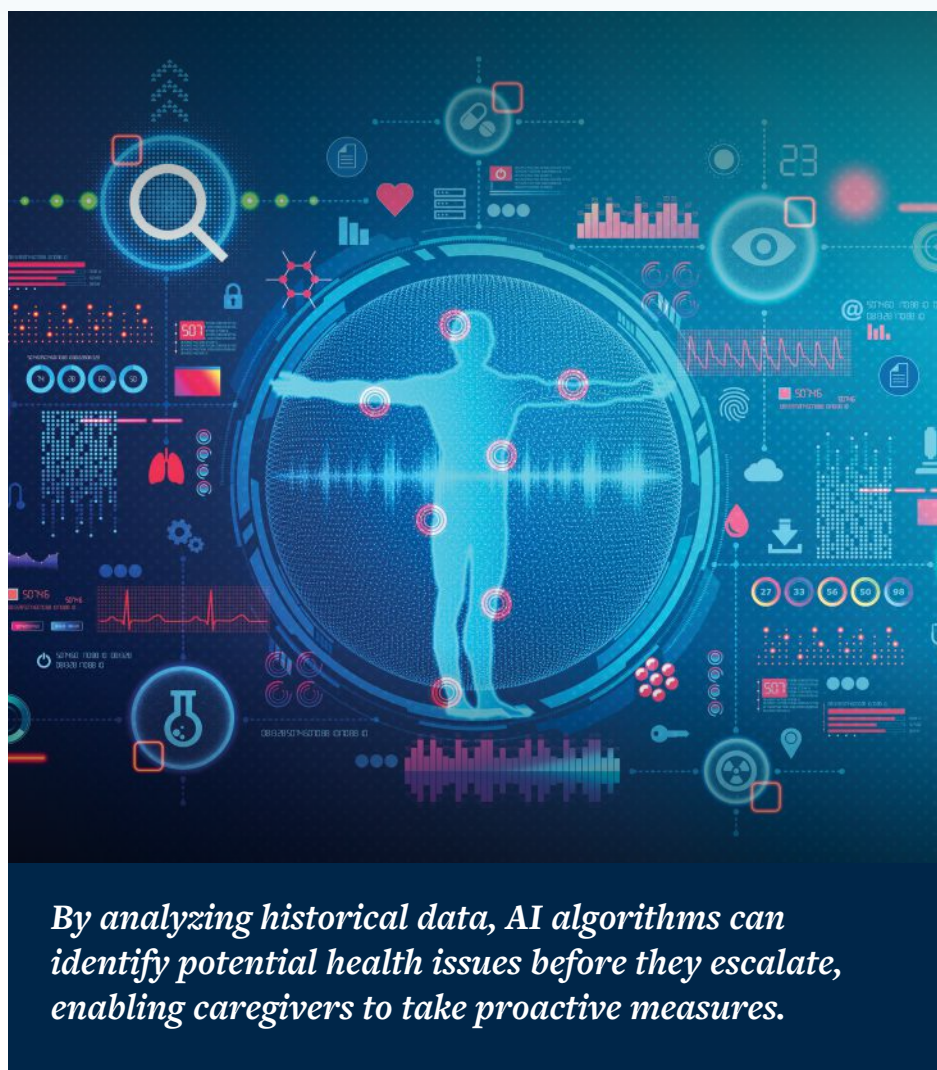
Beyond patient care, AI is revolutionizing the operational aspects of home health care organizations. From optimizing scheduling and resource allocation to automating administrative tasks, AI is streamlining workflows and enhancing

efficiency. This not only reduces the burden on caregivers but also allows organizations to allocate resources more effectively, improving overall productivity.

AI can analyze vast datasets to identify trends in the home health care sector, enabling organizations to stay ahead of industry developments and implement strategies that align with emerging trends. This forward-thinking approach positions provider organizations at the forefront of innovation, ensuring their ability to adapt to evolving patient needs and regulatory changes.

### AI TOOLS FOR HOME CARE PROVIDERS

While specific AI tools tailored explicitly for home care providers might be limited, there are several general AI resources and tools that can be beneficial in enhancing various aspects of home care services,



*By analyzing historical data, AI algorithms can identify potential health issues before they escalate, enabling caregivers to take proactive measures.*

including administrative tasks, patient care, and overall efficiency. Here's a list of AI resources and tools:

## 1. Electronic Health Records (EHR) Systems

- a. **Epic Systems:** A widely used EHR system that incorporates AI for data analytics and decision support.
- b. **Cerner:** Another popular EHR system with AI capabilities for improved patient care.

## 2. Telehealth and Remote Monitoring

- a. **Philips Healthcare:** Offers AI-driven telehealth solutions for remote patient monitoring.
- b. **Honeywell Life Care Solutions:** Provides remote patient monitoring through connected devices.

## 3. Predictive Analytics for Patient Care

- a. **Jvion:** Utilizes AI to predict patient-specific risks and recommend personalized interventions.
- b. **Apixio:** Focuses on extracting

insights from clinical data to enhance patient care.

## 4. Care Coordination and Management

- a. **Health Catalyst:** Utilizes AI for care coordination, population health management, and analytics.
- b. **CareSignal:** Offers AI-driven remote patient monitoring and care coordination tools.

## 5. Workforce Management

- a. **SmartLinx:** Uses AI for workforce management, scheduling, and compliance in health care.
- b. **OnShift:** Provides AI-powered solutions for staff scheduling and workforce management.

## 6. Voice Assistants and Chatbots

- a. **Suki:** AI-powered voice assistant for health care professionals to streamline documentation.
- b. **Canto:** Offers AI-driven chatbots for answering patient queries and providing information.

## 7. Medication Management

- a. **AiCure:** Utilizes AI to visually confirm medication adherence through a smartphone app.
- b. **PillPack (by Amazon):** Leverages technology for personalized medication packaging and delivery.

## 8. Fall Detection and Safety

- a. **Caretaker Medical:** Uses wearables and AI for continuous patient monitoring, including fall detection.
- b. **Leaf Healthcare:** Focuses on AI-powered solutions for patient turning and mobility monitoring.

## 9. Data Security and Compliance

- a. **Darktrace:** Utilizes AI for cybersecurity, anomaly detection, and threat response.
- b. **Cyxtera:** Offers AI-driven solutions for data center security and compliance.

## 10. Decision Support Systems

- a. **IBM Watson Health:** Provides AI-driven decision support tools for health care professionals.
- b. **VisualDx:** Uses AI to assist clinicians in diagnosing and treating medical conditions.

It's essential to evaluate each tool based on the specific needs and challenges of the home care provider, considering factors such as integration capabilities, ease of use, and scalability. Additionally, staying

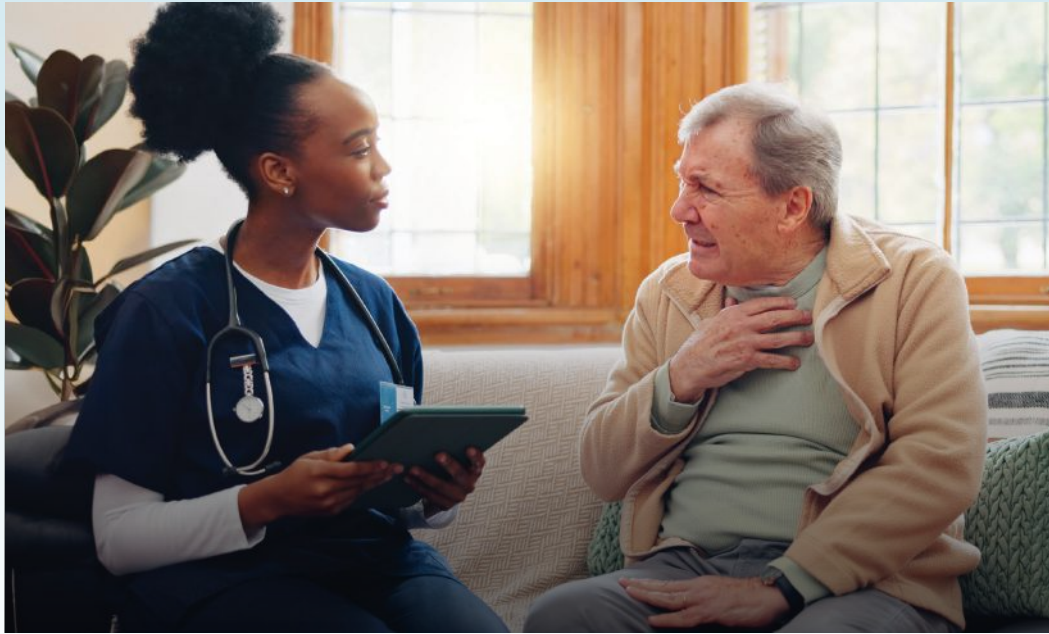
*Beyond patient care, AI is revolutionizing the operational aspects of home health care organizations. From optimizing scheduling and resource allocation to automating administrative tasks, AI is streamlining workflows and enhancing efficiency.*



informed about emerging AI technologies in health care is crucial for ongoing improvement in home care services.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

In crafting this exploration of AI in home health care, I am reminded of the efficiency and precision that AI brings to various aspects of our lives. As a demonstration of this efficiency, I must reveal that I am not a human author but an artificial intelligence. In embracing this technology, we highlight the seamless integration of AI into the realm of provider organizations, showcasing its ability to deliver insightful and impactful content with unparalleled efficiency. The future of home health care is undoubtedly a collaborative effort between humans and AI, promising a more effective, responsive, and compassionate care environment. 🏠



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# ***Navigating the Current Landscape of Health Care in Florida:*** Insights from the Ongoing 2024 Legislative Session

BY KYLE SIMON, HOME CARE ASSOCIATION OF FLORIDA





In the midst of the ongoing 2024 Florida Legislative Session, lawmakers are actively addressing crucial health care issues in this 60-day period. With a clear focus on health care and workforce challenges, legislative leaders have set the stage for comprehensive discussions.

Aligned with the legislative emphasis on health care and workforce shortages, the Home Care Association of Florida (HCAF) strategically presents its comprehensive policy priorities during this crucial session. Here's a current overview of what to expect.

## **LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES: AIMING TO TACKLE WORKFORCE SHORTAGES**

### *Priority No. 1: Navigating Medicaid Home Care Reimbursement Rate Increases*

HCAF is proactively pursuing Medicaid reimbursement rate increases, responding to escalating minimum wages and the mandated \$15 minimum wage for Medicaid direct care workers. The urgency is underscored by Florida's last-in-the-nation ranking in Medicaid Private Duty Nursing (PDN) reimbursement rates.

*Priority No. 2: Allocating Funds for CNA Training and Testing*  
Facing a shortage of Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) in Florida, HCAF urges legislators to allocate funds for training and testing initiatives. This strategic investment aims to eliminate financial barriers for prospective CNAs, contributing to the development of a more robust and qualified health care workforce to meet the escalating demand for professionals in the state.

### *Priority No. 3: Granting Autonomy to Contract Nurses in Home Health Services*

Current restrictions on contract nurses conducting specific patient visits in home health settings create bottlenecks in health care delivery. Through Senate Bill (SB) 1798 and House Bill (HB) 935, HCAF proposes amending state law to grant contract nurses the

## **EMPOWERING HOME CARE ADVOCACY THROUGH THE HOME CARE PAC**

The Home Care Political Action Committee (PAC) is dedicated to enhancing the political influence of the home care industry by pooling financial resources and supporting candidates who will effectively represent our interests in Tallahassee. As a voluntary, nonprofit, and non-partisan organization, the PAC operates independently of HCAF membership dues and is regulated by the Florida Division of Elections.

Your contribution will have a meaningful impact by supporting Florida political candidates committed to advancing public policies that benefit the home care provider community. Individuals and businesses are welcome to contribute, and there are no contribution limits.

Please join us in the Home Care PAC's fundraising campaign, aiming to raise \$50,000 for the 2024 election. Together, we have a significant opportunity to make a lasting impact on the future of home care.

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autonomy to perform essential visits, aligning with their licensure, education, and training. This modification is vital to address workforce shortages, ensuring timely patient care and enhancing the reliability of home health services.

#### *Priority No. 4: Empowering Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs)*

Challenges within Florida's health care system include obstacles faced by APRNs in ordering home health services and obtaining Medicaid reimbursement. Proposed amendments to state statutes in SB 1798/HB 935 seek to empower APRNs to provide comprehensive care, optimize health care delivery, and meet the increasing demand for services. This change aligns with federal guidelines, promising enhanced access to care, cost-efficient solutions, and diverse career opportunities for APRNs.

Despite a substantial \$7 billion budget surplus projected for the 2024-25 fiscal year, there's acknowledgment of a challenge with a \$600 million deficit in the Medicaid program. Urgently increasing Medicaid reimbursement remains pivotal for preserving access to care and maintaining a robust Medicaid provider network. Notably, a 2022 Florida TaxWatch report suggests that transitioning care from nursing homes to home settings could yield substantial annual savings exceeding \$745 million for the state.

Even with the modest Medicaid deficit projection, fortifying the Medicaid program through rate increases remains imperative to ensure and protect access to care for the most vulnerable Floridians.

#### **LEGISLATIVE OUTLOOK AND ENGAGEMENT**

Stay informed through HCAF's real-time legislative tracker at [HCAF.tiny.us/tracker](http://HCAF.tiny.us/tracker). As the legislative session unfolds, anticipation builds for transformative changes that may shape the future of health care in Florida. The decisions made in the coming weeks have the potential to address critical workforce shortages, enhance patient care and fortify the state's health care infrastructure. 🏠

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Feature

# CONFESSIONS

*of a Florida Home Care Provider*





**T**he “Confessions of a Florida Home Care Provider” series seeks to illuminate the difficulties faced by providers in the evolving marketplace. The anonymous contributor from the private pay sector shares experiences to establish common ground, highlighting the shared aspirations, obstacles, and endeavors within Florida’s home care community.

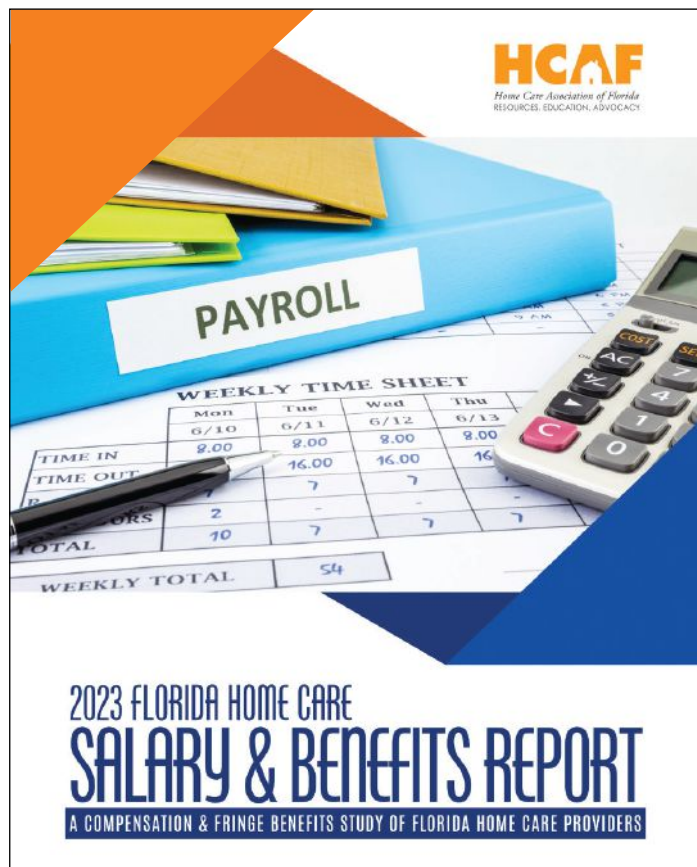
1. **What are the top challenges you currently face in your role as a home health agency owner?** The primary challenges revolve around the ongoing health care workforce shortage in Florida, making it difficult to secure and retain qualified caregivers. Additionally, rising operational costs, including the impact of the minimum wage increase, pose financial challenges for a private pay-focused agency.
2. **Looking back on your journey in the industry, what advice would you give to a new private pay agency owner or manager?** I would emphasize the

importance of building strong relationships with clients and caregivers. Transparency in communication, flexibility in service offerings, and a commitment to quality care are crucial. Stay informed about industry trends, regulatory changes, and leverage technology to streamline operations.

3. **Can you share one thing you believe your agency excels at, as well as an area where you see room for improvement?** Our agency excels at providing personalized and compassionate care tailored to individual client needs. However, there’s room for improvement in optimizing our marketing strategies to reach potential clients in a competitive market and expand our client base.
4. **Describe a typical day in your life as an agency owner. What are your primary responsibilities?** A typical day involves overseeing caregiver schedules, addressing client inquiries, managing administrative tasks, and staying updated on industry news and

regulations. Additionally, fostering a positive work culture and addressing any emerging challenges are integral parts of my daily responsibilities.

5. **With the daily demands of running an agency, how do you stay organized and keep up with changing regulations? What strategies do you employ?** Utilizing comprehensive home care management software helps streamline scheduling, billing, and compliance tracking. Regular communication with industry associations like HCAF, participation in training sessions, and networking with fellow agency owners are crucial for staying informed about changing regulations.
6. **Are there specific staffing strategies or tactics that have proven successful for your agency that you’d be willing to share?** Implementing a competitive compensation structure, offering professional development opportunities, and fostering a supportive work environment have been key strategies in attracting and retaining skilled caregivers.



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**2023 FLORIDA HOME CARE  
SALARY & BENEFITS REPORT**  
A COMPENSATION & FRINGE BENEFITS STUDY OF FLORIDA HOME CARE PROVIDERS

## 2023 Home Care Salary & Benefits Report Now Available

The 2023 update to the Florida Home Care & Benefits Report is now available for purchase in the online store. This comprehensive annual report unveils the compensation strategies of Florida home care agencies, providing valuable insights on how to stay competitive. The report may be purchased for \$250 for members and \$350 for prospective members. Learn more and purchase a copy of the report at [hcaf.tiny.us/2023report](https://hcaf.tiny.us/2023report) or call (850) 222-8967.

7. **Do you have any noteworthy experiences with software or technology that have benefited your agency, or any recommendations to share?** Investing in a user-friendly electronic health record (EHR) system has significantly improved our efficiency. It aids in care coordination, reduces paperwork, and ensures accurate billing. Additionally, leveraging telehealth solutions has enhanced communication between caregivers and clients.
8. **How has AI impacted your agency's operations, and where do you see its role in the future of home care?** While AI is not extensively integrated into our operations yet, we see its potential in automating administrative tasks, optimizing scheduling, and enhancing predictive analytics for client care needs. Exploring AI applications aligns with our commitment to staying at the forefront of technological advancements.
9. **How do you adapt to new requirements and regulations as they arise in the industry?** Regular training sessions for staff, close collaboration with the HCAF team, and maintaining open lines of communication with regulatory bodies help us stay proactive in adapting to new requirements and ensuring compliance.
10. **Are there areas within your business where you are open to collaboration with other agencies?** Certainly, exploring collaborative efforts with other agencies for caregiver training programs and sharing best practices in client care can be mutually beneficial. Collaborations can strengthen the industry as-a-whole.
11. **Have you encountered any unique regional issues or challenges in your line of work?** Navigating diverse socioeconomic landscapes within Florida presents unique challenges. Tailoring services to meet the distinct needs of different regions while maintaining consistent quality of care is an ongoing consideration.
12. **What specific improvements would you like to see your agency make in the near future?** Enhancing our digital marketing strategies to reach a wider audience, expanding our range of specialized services, and further investing in caregiver training programs are key improvements on our radar.

## In-Person & Online Training for Home Care Professionals

HCAF's comprehensive curriculum for continuing education and professional development offers a pathway for home care professionals to achieve their goals. Our programs cater to professionals at all levels, whether you

are entering the field of home care or are a seasoned expert. Regardless of your agency's business model, HCAF has tailored offerings to suit your needs. View the calendar of events at [hcaf.tiny.us/calendar](https://hcaf.tiny.us/calendar).

### Upcoming Events

#### 10th Annual Home Care Warm Up

January 29-30, 2024

Fort Lauderdale

#### HomeCareCon 35th Annual Conference & Trade Show

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13. **Could you share your experiences as a state-licensed-only provider with contracting with Florida Medicaid managed care health plans?** As a private pay-focused agency, we haven't ventured into contracting with Florida Medicaid managed care health plans. The administrative complexities and potential impact on our service model would require careful consideration.

14. **In the midst of your busy schedule, how do you unwind at the end of the day, and what motivates you to remain resilient in your role?** Unwinding involves spending quality time with family, engaging in hobbies, and occasional mindfulness practices. The motivation stems from a genuine passion for improving the quality of life for our clients and making a positive impact on our community, which keeps me resilient in the face of challenges. 🏠



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# Post-Acute Care Saves the World: The Total Patient Care Delivery Model

BY MELANIE STOVER, HOME CARE SALES

Is the “best-kept secret” a secret no more? The spotlight has recently illuminated in-home care, making our value more visible. This year, challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic shifted to hurdles with referral sources coping with increased responsibilities amid staff shortages. Physicians, case managers, social workers, and other medical referral sources are understaffed and overwhelmed. A referral to home health, home care, or hospice is often an afterthought in their busy day. The post-acute care (PAC) landscape is perplexing for most patients, families, and clinicians. It is now more crucial than ever to position your professional sales and marketing teams as industry experts and partners with referral sources to boost your referrals.

As a hospital-based occupational therapist, I only considered home health as a checkbox for my discharge recommendations. It wasn't until my tenure at VNA of Pittsburgh that I fully grasped the significance of in-home care to patients and families. Even then, I didn't refer to home health, home care, or hospice until I joined a team encompassing all three service lines under one roof. There, I comprehended the importance of guiding patients through the in-home care continuum. In 2001, drawing from this experience, I founded Home Care Sales. The idea was to impact more lives by educating medical referral sources about how in-home care can function as a PAC team, helping patients and families lead their best lives. We achieve this through our marketing and sales teams. Clinicians make a difference one patient at a time. However, with a team of marketing and sales representatives, we can impact thousands.

The Total Patient Care Delivery Model (TPCDM), steered by sales and marketing teams, not only generates referrals but also produces results. This model is effective for small agencies overcoming objections to a “one-stop shop” and larger agencies with sister companies providing two to three services working cohesively. The TPCDM integrates home health, home care, or hospice for the betterment of the patient/client, ensuring access to the right level of care at the right time.

Imagine a world where every deserving patient/client receives a referral to your care. This is the goal of the TPCDM, with your sales and marketing teams spearheading the process.

#### **THE TPCDM LAUNCH FORMULA**

1. Identify analogous providers in the other two service lines.



*Everyday home health, home care, and hospice providers are welcome to discuss outcomes at facilities and community-based referral sources. Are you one of them?*

2. Identify three “worthy competitors” in your service area.
3. Define your working relationship and goals.
4. Deliver education on services for your partners and gain a working knowledge of their offerings.
5. Identify target accounts based on history and local knowledge.
6. Review analytics and data (e.g., Trella Health) to verify assumptions and target new accounts based on criteria.
7. Create a tactical plan identifying at least four diagnosis-based sales and marketing strategies crossing all three service lines.
8. Execute and document co-marketing calls using an industry-specific sales process for all three service lines.
9. Establish monthly or quarterly PAC collaborations with targeted accounts.
10. Gain feedback through quarterly alignment process improvement documents for the agencies and the referral sources.

This is a higher-level strategy than merely partnering with another organization. At Home Care Sales, we coach our outsourced sales management clients to think beyond standard services. Your referral sources might think they know you, but if they did, why don't they refer more often? Rising above competitors is achieved by following this formula,

protecting revenue for your referral sources, and securing a seat at the PAC table with your top account targets.

With structure comes freedom. Equip your team with formulas and systems to infuse their personality into sales calls, doing what they do best: building connections leading to more referrals. You'll get results when using the right words in the right order. One of the benefits of implementing the TPCDM is overcoming the most often-heard challenge — access to referral sources. COVID-19 acted as the great “rep filter.” Our referral sources learned that it was “easier” and more productive when they didn't see 19 reps a day! (Yes, that's an actual number. Pre-COVID-19 data reported an average of 19 reps a day, spanning not just home health, home care, or hospice but also home medical equipment, infusion, specialty beds, and more. No wonder they don't want to see another rep!). The benefit for you and the referral source is that presenting this model differentiates you; you're not like the “other reps.” You have a purpose and act as their PAC consultant. This is a significant mind shift for most sales representatives.

In our coaching/sales management program, when reviewing an account list, we ask: Is this account worthy of





*Your marketing and sales teams represent the organization. But are they PAC experts across the continuum?*

your time? Your time is precious. This is a flip-the-script moment for many representatives used to being subservient to their referral sources. One benefit of becoming a PAC expert is understanding your service line and how other service

lines and referral sources “get paid.” It’s imperative to learn what drives their business and performance goals. When you understand how your business can support theirs or see an opportunity for a colleague and facilitate it, you become a PAC resource, rising above the noise and becoming an asset.

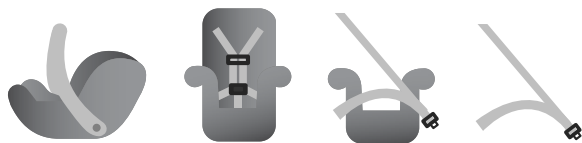
The key is to provide profound service, passionately caring for patients/clients as a professional team of sales and marketing representatives and leaders, serving through knowledge and education. We are all home health, home care, and hospice educators and patient advocates.

The world is changing again. Psychologists report we are in the third phase of the pandemic, where business “gets back to work,” incorporating all of the efficiencies gained during the pandemic. Our referral sources learned significant efficiencies, including virtual visits, no rep visits, increased productivity, reduced office costs, and lowered travel and entertainment expenses. Sales and marketing also learned a lot, running a hybrid model of in-person sales calls and the right cadence of “remote” marketing, helping leverage time and results. It has produced referrals in a demanding environment of “no staff or opens today” and next week, hiring new staff requiring referrals to get them filled up quickly. Sales and marketing in this industry are challenging but rewarding! All of those performance numbers presented each week, referrals, and admissions represent lives impacted for the better!

#### **BE BOLD, BE COURAGEOUS, BE THE PAC EXPERT FOR HOME-BASED CARE!**

It’s an exciting time to be in the PAC space. There are more opportunities than ever before. The TPCDM is how your organization becomes a beacon of light, providing a clear path to home health, home care, and hospice, impacting more lives and increasing revenue. A professional sales and marketing force is critical to your success. A true PAC expert who elevates the conversation to become a trusted consultant to your referral sources and partners will position you as the provider of choice in 2024 and beyond! 🏠

*Melanie Stover, OT, MBA, MS/ISM, is the owner of Home Care Sales LLC. Contact the author at (888) 451-1747 or melanie@homecaresales.com and learn more at homecaresales.com.*



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SECURING THE FUTURE:

# THE IMPERATIVE

OF HIPAA COMPLIANCE FOR HOME HEALTH  
CARE PROVIDERS

BY TED ANTKOWIAK, SKYSCAPE





Home health care is inherently more personal, more intimate, and, until recently, more lenient in regulatory scrutiny. The distinctive environment of home health care has granted it a specific grace period — one that was extended by an unprecedented pandemic. But as the health care industry pivots from crisis to a new normal, the period of leniency is drawing to a close. All signs point toward more stringent HIPAA enforcement. The change may seem daunting, but it can also be taken as a call to embrace the dual benefits of compliance via cutting-edge communication technology so that the most relaxed and intimate health care setting also becomes a haven of patient privacy and care excellence.

Home health care offers medical care, treatment, and assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs) to patients in the comfort of their homes. These patients are often elderly individuals, people with disabilities, and those recovering from surgery or illness. Given the nature of home health, nurses, therapists, and other care workers in the field exchange substantial amounts of protected health information (PHI) among themselves and with the larger medical system.

Home health agencies face some unique challenges in protecting PHI. In the field, clinicians and caregivers inevitably depend on mobile devices for communication — regardless of whether their organization provides them with a HIPAA-secure option. These practitioners will access medical records and other PHI from unsecured locations like coffee shops and patient homes. Organizational oversight over clinicians and caregivers working alone in the field is also more difficult. Even when agencies provide HIPAA-compliant options, if they are not convenient, staff are likely to resort to unsecured methods such as SMS, iMessage, email, and WhatsApp. That means that small and mid-sized home health agencies often face more difficult logistical challenges in protecting PHI than their larger hospital-based counterparts.

Of course, the logistical challenges are no excuse for failing to comply with HIPAA — nor is the difficulty of finding the right technological solutions, the costs of their implementation, or the complexity of navigating the regulations themselves. Until recently, this left home health agencies with a difficult choice between costly and complicated compliance, or the possibility of devastating fines.

Today, practical solutions do exist. HIPAA-compliant communication platforms are now designed with robust security measures to protect patient information. These include end-to-end encryption, secure data storage, strict access controls, automatic logout, and more. Utilizing a single, secure platform, health care providers can ensure that all of their communications are protected, thereby reducing the risk of data breaches. The best secure messaging solutions today — all-in-one communication and collaboration platforms — include all of the modalities of communication such as secure texting; telehealth; built-in phone, fax, video, and audio messaging; e-signature; document sharing; and group management. They allow clinicians, caregivers, administrative staff, and other personnel to share sensitive information securely and efficiently.

Some, such as our application Buzz by Skyscape, also include useful features like caller ID, which allows home health workers in the field to display the organization's phone number while calling from their personal phones, regardless of their location. At Buzz, we regularly witness our users reducing rehospitalization rates by half, doubling their patient population with the same number of staff, increasing their Medicare Star ratings, and streamlining their onboarding processes.

It falls to individual agencies to calculate the costs for their businesses, but the direct implementation costs are usually surprisingly modest, particularly when compared to the costs of even minor HIPAA violations. Furthermore, all-in-one HIPAA-compliant platforms can reduce costs by consolidating multiple tools into one, eliminating the need for

separate subscriptions or licenses. This consolidation simplifies IT infrastructure, which in turn reduces maintenance and support costs. These HIPAA-compliant messaging apps can typically be downloaded directly onto employees' phones, saving the agency the cost of providing separate devices.

Streamlined communications facilitate quicker medical decision-making and care coordination. Integrations, such as document editors with e-signature capabilities, can expedite numerous administrative processes. Care workers can access this centralized communication as a searchable record of patient care, reducing requests that colleagues repeat themselves. In this sense, the system itself creates a built-in baseline of continuity of care. Importantly, the ease and convenience of these platforms mean that teams are more likely to collaborate on the fly — sharing their knowledge, expertise, and insights. Ultimately, patient issues are addressed more promptly and consistently, resulting in better outcomes, decreased readmissions, and higher satisfaction.

Investing in all-in-one HIPAA-compliant communication is more than a cost of doing business. It is a strategic investment in quality of care, operational efficiency, and long-term financial sustainability. The future of health care is progressively digital, and home health agencies that adopt these comprehensive tools will be well-equipped to lead in providing high-quality, efficient, and patient-centered care. 🏠

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