# COVID-19 IS CREATING 'THE NEW NORM' AND PROVIDERS NEED TO ACT NOW

## INVESTING IN I.T. CAN HELP

We are constantly hearing the words 'the new norm' in relation to how our lives have changed due to COVID-19, and the vision of what life will be like after the epidemic has passed. While the rest of society may, over considerable time, revert back to something resembling our former reality, there can be no doubt that such a reversion awaits neither the aged care nor the disability sectors. There will be new norms—and IT will be integral to implementing them successfully.

Historic government responses to crisis in aged care indicate that providers can expect increasingly stringent protection and compliance requirements, together with a modest response to calls for funding support. On a positive note, such measures are designed to protect vulnerable residents, consumers, visitors, contractors, staff and the broader community. For providers though, punitive measures for non-compliance will undoubtedly follow.

To comply, providers may be required to:

- increase staff numbers and levels of supervision
- demonstrate greater accountability involving more documentation, reporting, training and inoculations
- revise policies, protocols and procedures

It will be hard, but there is no getting away from the fact that these changes are coming and an action plan will be essential.

### What can providers do right now?

Initial steps for providers can include:

- Redefining service models and existing infrastructure where possible
- Ensuring staff have a clear understanding of the system and the importance of correct and complete documentation and data entry
- Maximising sources of approved and voluntary revenue to strengthen the balance sheet
- Training and upskilling staff to improve safe care and infection control practices

### What can IT do?

The industry needs to constantly review its business model, but never more than now given the obvious additional requirements that will flow in 'the new norm'.

Providers need to ensure their IT systems are being proactively restructured to facilitate the inclusion of inevitable new protection and compliance requirements in the delivery of quality, affordable services, and in the reporting and claiming processes.

Staff and IT need to work together to streamline processes, so that the required outcomes of better compliance reporting and maximum revenue generation can be achieved within budget constraints. Effective and ongoing staff training in software changes and auditing processes will be essential to the success of this collaboration.

### The broader context

In 'the new norm' providers will want to know what level of funding support they can realistically expect in order to provide these essential protections, and will they be able to charge consumers more to cover inevitable cost blowouts and remain viable?

Providers need to fully engage with their local political representatives and industry associations to ensure that they have adequate representation in the upcoming discussions and negotiations over funding and requirement changes.

Engaging with industry colleagues, consultants and advisors, as well as legal and financial representatives, will be essential if individual and collective representation is to be well researched, thought out, prepared and costed.

The solution the industry is looking for will not be delivered on a platter. In fact, the probable solution offered may have significant shortcomings. So, unless individual providers take action—plan, implement, participate and collaborate—the outcome for the industry could well be 'the new norm' it neither wants nor needs.

e-Tools stands ready to help your organisation adapt to the changes ahead, including the electronic HR Management (eHRM) software application that enables you to store staff related COVID-19 information relevant to the current pandemic. ∎

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