



SYNZI

Optimizing Resources: Solving for the Staffing Shortage with Virtual Care

The Staffing Shortage

The aging of baby boomers means that older population segments will outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. According to Jonathan Vespa, a demographer with the U.S. Census Bureau, “there will be 78.0 million people 65 years and older compared to 76.7 million (previously 76.4 million) under the age of 18” by 2035. By 2030, all baby boomers will be older than age 65 and 1 in every 5 residents will be retirement age.

The evolution of this generation presents challenges and opportunities for home healthcare as baby boomers will need care – and will want to receive that care at home. The key issue is that the demand exceeds the available and forecasted home healthcare workers. According to the [Bureau of Labor and Statistics](#), the demand for home health staff is projected to increase by 36% from 2018 to 2028, much faster than the average for all occupations.



Here are a few examples of states forecasting gaps in care due to the increased size of the older population:



In Florida, people over 60 make up nearly 23% of the State’s population. By 2020, the State is expected to have a population of over 23.5 million, and people over 60 will make up over 28% of that population according to Florida’s Department of Elder Affairs. To meet the demand, the state anticipates a 47.5% projected growth in the number of home health aides needed from 2016 to 2026, according to Projections Central.



In Texas, the aging of the Baby Boom generation is projected to yield an elder population of 5.9 million, or 19.4% of the state’s total population in 2030. At this point, just under 1 in 5 people in Texas will be over 64 years of age. This growing population is likely to present new challenges. To meet the demand, the state anticipates a 42.7% projected growth in the number of home health aides needed from 2016 to 2026, according to Projections Central.



If California simply maintains its current level of coverage, the California Employment Development Department forecasts that an additional 200,000 homecare workers will be needed by 2024. If the homecare industry were expanded to cover all individuals who have a self-care limitation, the UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education estimates that California would need at least 600,000 and as many as 3.2 million additional workers by 2030.

Many home health agencies are currently dealing with a staffing shortage and also anticipating a greater health workforce shortage in coming years. According to the 2020 Home Health Care News Outlook Survey and Report, released in collaboration with Homecare Homebase, staffing was cited as the in-home care industry’s No. 1 challenge. 44% of survey respondents named staffing their top challenge vs. 43% of survey respondents who cited PDGM as their top pain point.

The Burden of Care

The increasing aging population, along with the rise in chronic conditions and need for assistance with activities of daily living, has placed a great burden of care on post-acute care organizations. Despite the rising demand for home health, hospice, and home care staff, the in-home care industry suffers from high turnover rates.

According to a Home Care Salary & Benefits Report from NAHC and the Hospital & Healthcare Compensation Service, licensed practical nurses (LPNs) turnover rate was at 22.50%. Therapists experienced a lower turnover rate (12.52%) but analysts expect this rate to increase if agencies evolve their therapy service line(s) under PDGM. And, the median caregiver turnover rate across the industry was 66.7% in 2017 and skyrocketed to 82% in 2018, according to the Home Care Pulse's recent [Home Care Benchmarking Study](#).

Employee churn can lead to poor patient outcomes. Cancelled and rescheduled appointments – as well as a revolving door of home health care workers – can lead to a breakdown in the continuum of care, weaker overall outcomes, and an increased risk of readmissions. Consistent, ongoing patient engagement is essential to addressing patients' questions about their care and is critical to minimizing medication errors, miscommunications, etc. that may arise when new care team members are constantly brought on-board. The inability to sufficiently care for the existing census can undermine an agency's ability to take on new patients. Ultimately, this can adversely impact an agency's reputation amongst community and institutional referral sources.



High turnover also means that existing team members may need to work extra shifts or pick up additional duties. Additional work and more responsibilities can impact staff's performance and satisfaction and indirectly compromise patient outcomes. Moreover, a constant need to hire and train new team members may detract from agency leadership ability to communicate and collaborate with tenured staff.

Given the continued demand for home health services, agencies are highly focused on recruiting and retaining qualified staff team members. A [study](#) from ElevatingHOME and the Visiting Nurse Associations of America (VNAA) highlighted that factors such as retiring home health nurses, a lack of applicants, and growing patient needs contribute to agencies' ability to attract and maintain skilled team members.

In order to account for the expected demand and current deficiency, home health providers will need to implement innovative care delivery methods.

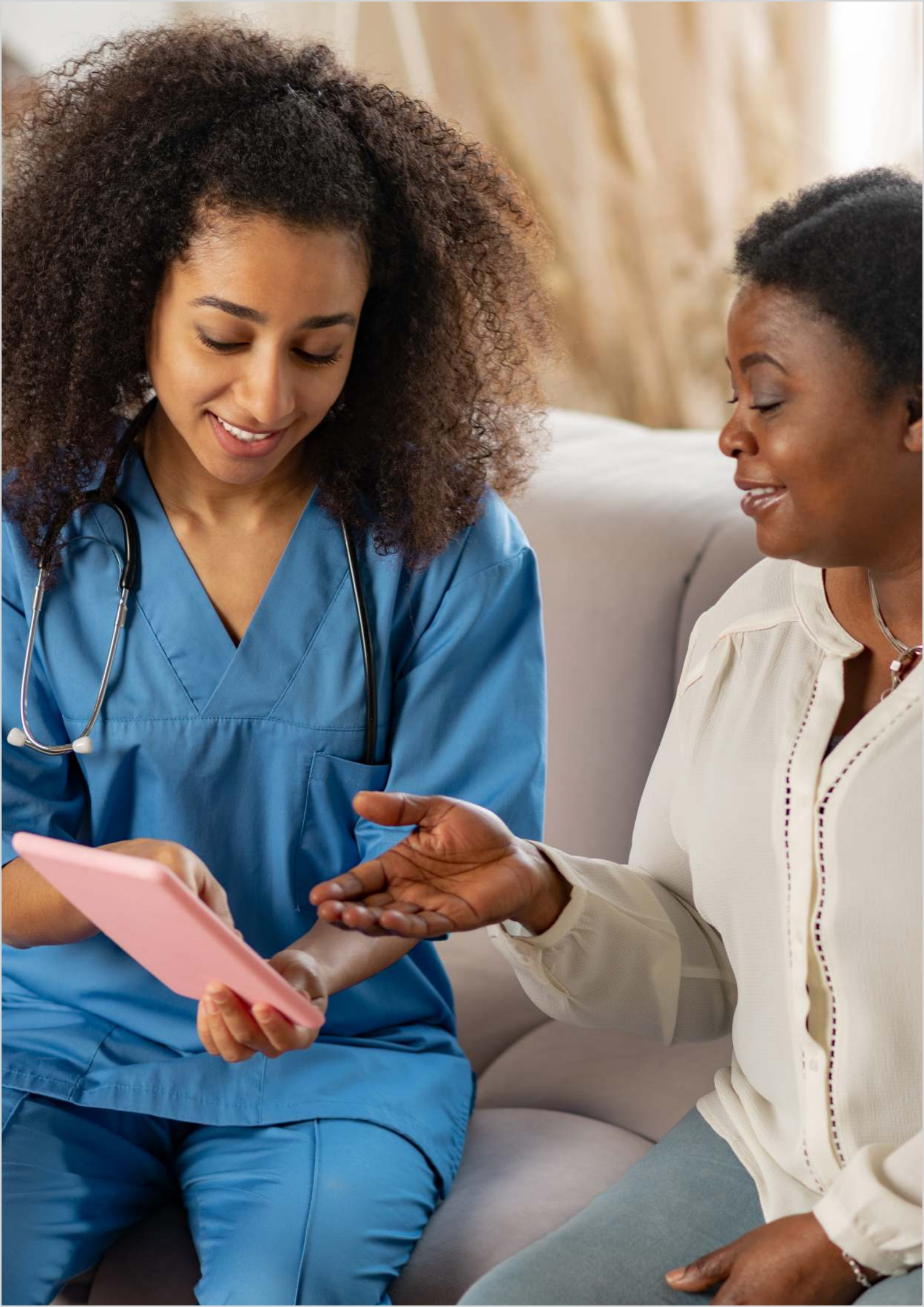


Innovative Care Delivery

Synzi's virtual care communication platform is designed to help agencies provide innovative care while optimizing staff productivity and current resources. With Synzi, a home health agency's staff will have more consistent contact with patients, leading to better adherence, reduced ER visits and readmissions, and enhanced patient satisfaction. Given the increased attention to achieving 5-star ratings, home health agencies recognize that patient improvement and satisfaction are critical components of being able to prove value. High-quality care and frequent touchpoints are essential to these ratings.

Implementing virtual care can help your organization better utilize your current staff while being able to provide better – meaning, more timely and higher quality – care to your patients. Synzi enhances the experience for the patient and the home health agency as all stakeholders can stay in better and more frequent communication during the episode of care.

- Instead of spending most of the day behind the wheel, nursing staff can increase their productivity by using the platform to engage patients in virtual visits and conduct more frequent check-in's on their patients' progress. The reduction in weekly travel time (along with a corresponding decrease in related expenses and liabilities) also positively impacts an agency's bottom line and ability to optimize the use of their current staff.
- Administrators use the Synzi platform to send out timely messages suited to the patient's condition and care. Ongoing communications include appointment reminders, adherence triggers, and diet/exercise recommendations.
- Patients can also safely use the Synzi app – and its HIPAA-compliant secure message, email, and text functionality – to reach their home health clinicians regarding questions or issues.



Maximizing the Reach of In-demand Specialists

Many home health agencies do not have condition-specific specialists on-staff and/or readily available for in-home patient visits. As a result, an agency may not be able to take on new patients with conditions needing specialized care, limiting the agency's ability to increase revenue. Moreover, the worsening of patient conditions and patient dissatisfaction can lower an agency's [ratings](#), negatively impacting the agency's relationship with referral sources.

Wound Care Management

Given the aging population and rise in chronic conditions, the growing incidence of acute and chronic wounds has placed a great burden of care on home health agencies. Chronic wounds are a common problem in elderly patients and they require frequent, regular monitoring to maximize wound healing. In situations where wounds do not heal properly or in a timely manner, Nurses, LPNs, and Clinical Supervisors may need to make more visits per episode of care and wound care specialists may be needed on-hand. Making more home visits can have a negative impact on an agency's bottom line:

- This reduces an agency's ability to grow revenue by taking on more patients.
- Non-healing wounds can lower an agency's quality ratings and lead to penalties levied by regulatory agencies.
- Penalties can thwart new patient sign-ups and referrals, ultimately affecting the bottom line.

Unfortunately, many home health agencies do not always have a wound care specialist readily available – or even on staff. Some home health agencies might not accept a wound care case as a result. And, many agencies lack in-house wound knowledge—the result of a shortage of wound experts across all categories of health care providers. In the United States, there is only 1 wound nurse for every 500 patients diagnosed with acute or chronic wounds.

Home health agencies are using Synzi to engage wound care specialists in order to immediately provide remote advice to those in the field during a visit. Virtual care and telehealth can provide clinically efficient and effective wound care post-surgery or post-hospital discharge by preventing infections, unnecessary emergency room visits, and hospital readmissions according to a study published by [HIMSS](#). The Synzi platform helps patients (with or without a home health nurse) connect with a specialist (such as a wound certified nurse) who can provide more timely care and guidance in wound management.

- During chronic wound consultations, specialists use Synzi's HIPAA-compliant video and secure messaging functionality to support home health nurses and patients with proper diagnoses and evaluations. This allows wound care specialists to immediately provide remote advice to those in the field.
- The virtual visits also enable field staff to enhance their wound care skills and knowledge of wound care management. Effective wound care management workflows can be established and ensure agency compliance with wound care best practices.

Costs associated with the specialists' transportation – or even the patient's transfer and/or readmission – are minimized. Productivity is maximized as one wound care specialist can provide guidance virtually without dedicating a significant portion of available time to driving to/from patients' home. This is especially important in rural areas where staff and specialists can spend a lot of time driving between a few appointments instead of seeing and treating more patients. Moreover, connecting a home health nurse with a wound certified nurse is beneficial in bridging the gap between education and wound assessment.

With Synzi, home health agencies are helping their patients receive more expedient evaluation and assessment by in-demand clinicians with specialized wound care training.



As Dr. Greg Sheff, AccentCare's Chief Medical Officer, pointed out, using Synzi to facilitate virtual visits resulted in better outcomes and a better bottom line:



“A successful start of care and initial assessment between the RN at patient’s home and the WCN... and virtual visits aid in the reduction of secondary and tertiary visits by the WCN.”



“By removing travel time ... [specialists can] broadly share their experience across the geography more efficiently... Otherwise you get into these forced decisions for the clinicians in the field: ‘Do I need a wound care nurse? Is it worth having a wound care nurse drive out?’ We don’t want them thinking that. If they have any questions, we want them reaching out.”



“In an office that’s running, in general, an 11% hospitalization rate, this population [with] this intervention had a 4% rate.”



Therapy Services

Under PDGM, agencies will be more inclined to prioritizing better outcomes while containing costs for therapy visits. With a virtual care communication platform, therapists will be able to help injured or ill people improve their movement and manage their pain more efficiently via HIPAA-compliant video and messaging.

According to the APTA (American Physical Therapy Association), applications of virtual care and telehealth in physical therapy already have roots that expand throughout patient/client care and consultation, allowing PTs to better communicate with patients/clients and provide more flexible care. Virtual sessions help home health agencies better leverage available staffing resources and enable their PTs and PTAs (and other therapy specialists) to provide services in a greater capacity.

Providing more flexibility will be more important as the demand for physical therapy increases with the aging of the baby boomers. According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), employment of physical therapists is projected to grow 28 percent from 2016 to 2026, much faster than the average for all occupations.

The increased demand for PT services is due to aging baby boomers who are more susceptible to health conditions, such as strokes, that may require physical therapy as well as patients suffering from chronic conditions, such as diabetes or obesity, who may have mobility issues.

Virtual care technology such as Synzi's platform enables agencies to maximize the productivity of their PTs and PTAs and support therapy patients with high-quality individualized care while improving agency profitability:

- By converting “drive time” to “patient time”, PTs and PTAs will be able to see and treat more patients on a daily basis vs. spending the majority of their time en route to and from a patient's home.
- The virtual care model also helps home health agencies if a therapist is unavailable due to an unexpected change in his/her schedule. In the past, the gap in available care would mean an agency may have to reschedule the specialist's caseload or immediately try to find another therapist who can quickly drive to the patient's home for the appointment. With virtual care, an agency administrator has more flexibility in using available therapists for short-term coverage via video and the patients will not need to wait days or weeks for the appointment to be rescheduled.
- Plus, agencies can intersperse telerehab sessions with in-person appointments to ensure that patients do not become too dependent upon the therapists when patients need to “be up and moving” on a more consistent basis.

Synzi is actively helping agencies become more cost-effective with the advent of the new payment model. The technology help agencies supplement in-person therapy with virtual visits and ongoing messaging that can address the gaps between visits. As a result, patients are more engaged in their treatment and their own role in self-care and therapists are more satisfied with their ability to better manage their patients, treat more patients, and even provide treatment during evenings or weekends.

A portrait of Ronnie Cosse, a young man with short brown hair and a friendly smile, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. He is positioned on the left side of the image against a solid brown background. To his right, the company logo for 'Concierge HOME CARE' is displayed. The word 'Concierge' is in a green script font with a leaf icon, while 'HOME CARE' is in a blue sans-serif font.

Concierge
HOME CARE

Ronnie Cosse, DPT
Physical Therapist

“With Synzi, we’ve been able to add visits and add quality of care because we get to reinforce everything that we’re doing in the home by following up virtually. It’s a nice added benefit that we can do this in a cost-responsible way. We’ve seen that our care has been elevated by this process and by utilizing Synzi’s technology... We’re not seeing patients regress; we don’t have redo our work. It’s a constant upward progression towards functional healing.”



“As we switch into to a new payment model for home health, I think a big fear is that we’re going to lose visits and we’re going to lose quality of care. But, we’ve seen the exact opposite. With Synzi, we’ve been able to add visits and add quality of care because we get to reinforce everything that we’re doing in the home by following up virtually. It’s a nice added benefit that we can do this in a cost-responsible way. We’ve seen that our care has been elevated by this process and by utilizing Synzi’s technology.”



“We have our standard protocols that we go through with total hips and total knees after surgery. And, what we were able to do with the Synzi app was take that protocol and enhance it... and actually gather more contact with the patient. The Synzi platform gave me the opportunity to follow up the very next day to make sure that our patients tolerated what we did well and that they were still doing it correctly... and still doing it! We gain a little more contact and our patients become more compliant... We can just talk and really assess their tolerance to the previous session and see if we need to adjust anything for that day or if we need to adjust anything for our next session. So, it gives us good, real-time, live feedback.“



“I think the ease-of-use has been phenomenal. We have seen a total elevation in our quality of care. We’re having a lot fewer setbacks because we’re getting a lot more eyes on the patient, a lot more often. And, it’s been really nice to continue to reinforce everything that we’ve done in the home the very next day and going forward. We’re not seeing patients regress; we don’t have redo our work. It’s a constant upward progression towards functional healing.”

Hospice Care

Staffing is the key challenge facing hospice providers as these agencies struggle to meet the patient population needs. The United States has 13.35 hospice and palliative care specialists for every 100,000 adults 65 and older, according to an April 2018 study. [Studies](#) estimate that patient population will need 10,640 to 24,000 specialists by 2040. Yet, the expected supply falls short of the demand with a range between 8,100 and 19,000.

Home telehospice provides many of the hospice services delivered in patients' homes through video, email and secure messaging. By using virtual care technology, hospice agencies can expand their staff's reach with additional communications and greater contact with their patients and the patients' caregivers. Virtual care can deliver many benefits including a quicker assessment of patients, faster ability for timely interventions, and greater teaching opportunities for family caregivers.

With the Synzi virtual care communication platform, nurses have new opportunities to connect with patients and family caregivers. Timely instructions can be provided to family caregivers, helping them relieve a patient's discomfort and agency staff can avoid making a late-night or afterhours in-person visit. Family caregiver anxiety is also alleviated as they are virtually shown how to provide the right kind of care and support during a challenging time. Remote family members can also be incorporated in the video calls. Thus, compassionate care and comfort is delivered to both the patient and his/her loved ones through the virtual care platform.

As the [National Institute on Aging](#) highlights, hospice care brings together a team of people with special skills—among them nurses, doctors, social workers, spiritual advisors, and trained volunteers. Everyone works together with the person who is dying, the caregiver, and/or the family to provide the medical, emotional, and spiritual support needed. A virtual care platform can ensure that a member of the hospice team is readily available to provide verbal and visual support at all times for the patient and the family caregivers.

Competitive Advantage in Recruiting and Retaining Staff

Synzi's platform innovates the way an agency's clinicians operates, thus attracting interest from clinicians at competing agencies or those at a crossroads in their nursing careers. By enabling nurses to use Synzi's HIPAA-compliant video to augment or replace some of the in-person visits, an agency can relieve some of the driving stress experienced by visiting clinicians. Using Synzi's award-winning technology also helps an agency position itself as innovative and future-focused – which can attract high-performing clinicians who are seeking a better opportunity to deliver cutting-edge care to more patients.

In the shift towards value-based care, home health agency executives are also discussing an extra initiative – staff satisfaction – which evolves the Triple Aim into a Quadruple Aim. With Synzi's dynamic platform, staff will appreciate the flexibility in being able provide care from any location throughout the day, night, and geography they serve. Clinicians will also have greater access to an agency's educational sessions from anywhere, at any time, by using the video functionality for on-the-job training and coaching. By helping clinicians use a real-time communication platform to connect with patients and colleagues, an agency can quickly become the employer of choice in a highly competitive area. Given the immediacy and impact of virtual care, agencies can use the platform to achieve greater staff satisfaction, retention, and engagement – thus, helping a home healthcare organization achieve the Quadruple Aim in healthcare.



Get Started with Synzi

Reimbursement pressures under PDGM are forcing agencies to optimize their available staffing resources in order to boost their bottom line. Smaller and underperforming agencies are at risk for closing operations or being subject to unwanted consolidation or acquisitions by larger agencies.

With Synzi, your agency elevates the clinician-patient relationship by using HIPAA-compliant messaging, video, email and text to enhance care for all home health patients, including those with complex chronic needs and/or at-risk for readmission.

Speak to Synzi today and see how we can help address your staffing challenges and improve overall satisfaction and outcomes for your patients, your referral partners, and your employees.

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