

# Top 3 Reasons Home Health Care Agencies Outsource IT and How to Do It



## Home Health Care by the Numbers

The home health care industry continues to morph and grow at an increasingly rapid rate. And UnityBPO stays on top of the latest Information Technology trends impacting home health. Did you know...

- One of the top 3 reasons nurses leave their agency is frustration with technology
- 8 out of 10 agencies hire “friends” to run their technology instead of IT professionals
- Home health executives do not embrace outsourcing at the same speed as hospital networks and integrated health systems
- 45% of hospitals outsource their coding services and 75% of hospitals outsource their IT services.
- 29% of HHA’s outsource their medical coding.
- HHA IT departments do not align technology purchases with the agency’s goals.

Covid and baby boomers dramatically affect Home Health Care and how gets delivered. Agencies with the highest growth rate are thinking differently about the value of IT. When viewed strategically, IT can be competitive benefit for Home Health Care agencies in recruiting/retaining staff, lowering costs, and delivering patient care efficiently.

Here's why some of the most profitable Home Health Care agencies are outsourcing IT functions:

**ONBOARDING** – a large home health and hospice agency took 5-7 days for a clinician's tablet to reach their new hire. Once received, the tablet failed 25% of the time. And set up took 75 minutes. The IT Support firm reduced tablet delivery time to 2 days, with a 1% defect rate, and a 15-minute setup time.

**ASSET MANAGEMENT** – during an IT outsourcing evaluation, a mid-sized home health agency could not account for networking equipment, monitoring tool licenses, reconciliation of Microsoft licenses to users, or inventory of leased servers, laptops, tablets. They also discovered a closet of new, unboxed mobile phones with active data plans.

Bringing these assets under a full lifecycle management plan from purchase to tagging to deployment to disposal yielded ~\$180,000 in cost savings in the first year.

**EHR SUPPORT SERVICES** – a large home health and hospice agency experienced a 62% turnover among their clinicians with a trend in the exit interviews revealing they were unhappy with the support for HCHB issues. Clinicians experienced 56-minute hold times, 30% first level resolve rates, and 29% satisfaction scores. The outsourced clinical service desk delivered 1–2-minute hold times, 80% first level resolve rates, and 92% satisfaction scores.

When done right, outsourcing IT propels home health care and hospice agencies to meet their cost goals, M&A targets, and productivity needs.

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## Thinking About Outsourcing to an HIT Partner? Here's How

Vetting vendors is vastly different than vetting new software: With no demos to review and complex factors impacting costs and returns needing evaluation. Choosing the right outsourcing partner for IT support services is essential to the unique needs of home health and hospice clinicians, back office, and patients.

Discover five major considerations if you are considering outsourcing home health care and hospice IT to an HIT partner organization. From standards and pricing to leadership buy-in and partnerships, we've got guidelines to help your agency outsource IT and dominate the home health care and hospice market.

Here are 5 things to look for in an HIT outsourcing partner specific for home health and hospice:

### 1. BEST PRACTICES

Determine if potential HIT partners apply best practices that result in high performance standards. Are they using frameworks to collaborate with you in developing a clear scope of work and strong SLAs? Look for vendors that proactively identify and report to you on service improvements and thought leadership to help improve your IT environment. Insist on SLAs and stringent reporting as part of the scope of work and the foundation of any final agreement. Ask vendors for sample SLA reports from other clients covering multiple time periods. Outsourcers who are committed to industry best practices like ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) standards and LEAN standards offer the best chance to meet quality results that your agency needs. Once the vendor has worked with you for a few months and is well-acquainted with your environment, revisit, update, and possibly expand SLAs. Your original contract agreement should provide for these types of revisions.

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## 2. TRANSACTION-BASED PRICING

Transaction-based pricing benefits you when the service gets categorized into a finite set of standard transactions, when the enterprise needs to scale rapidly, or when FTEs are a relatively small proportion of total costs. Your finance team should evaluate the costs of staffing your in-house IT team with FTEs including benefits and overhead.

## 3. RESEARCH THE PARTNER'S EXPERIENCE

Assign one knowledgeable staff member with good judgment to do a diligent job and report specifics back to your leadership. Ask the partner for references and write-ups of relevant engagements. Call the references and use your leadership's own network to garner information on the partner's performance. The riskiest scenario is outsourcing an IT function to company with little or no home health experience and has not kept up with the industry. With the industry moving more healthcare to the home, many companies are capitalizing on the digital health boom without understanding the challenges associated with home health staffing and processes. Knowledge of the interconnections between IT and point of care and business workflows is critical to the

outsourcing relationship. The best firms have both home health experience as well as hospital backgrounds because they understand the flow from discharge to home health intake as well as the episodic implications of home health. Qualified vendors understand the interfaces and system differences between the hospital's EHR and yours. As an added benefit, those with hospital experiences make agencies more credible with their hospital referrals/partners.

## 4. GET STAKEHOLDER BUY-IN

If you decide to outsource some of your IT functions, make sure you have buy-in from your agency's leadership and stakeholders. Discuss how the outsourcing plan and the favored vendor specifically benefit the organization. Do they work with your field staff and in-house clinical informatics team? What tactics help preserve service continuity? Articulate how the strategic partnership with IT leadership supports your agency's long-term objectives. Arrange in-person meetings between your executives and key vendor representatives. Your agency needs to be prepared and, ideally, enthusiastic about the plan before you move into contract negotiations.

## 5. CHOOSE A PARTNER, NOT JUST A VENDOR

Selecting the best outsourcing organization for your agency is difficult – particularly the first time. It's critical that both the outsourcer and the agency know they can work together amicably to address changes, resolve problems, and define how new factors will fit into the scope of the relationship. Use your in-person evaluations to select a firm that makes you feel comfortable, with leadership that you trust, and shared philosophies or approaches to healthcare support. These things must support your agency's culture and

values. Select a firm that can work with you, not just for you. What's the difference? A vendor provides basic service delivery like answering your service desk calls. A genuine partner commits to achieving much more — proactively helping you improve your IT operation and aligning with your agency's goals for retention and performance. A partner looks for new and better ways to continuously improve your users' experience, overall quality of performance, and cost-effectiveness. The optimal partner commits to working with your IT and clinical leaders. And the best partners become a bridge between the two.

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