

Whitepaper:

Aged Care Providers are avoiding penalties by switching to e-Records Management

Aged care Your documents need the right care.



Abstract

Over the past two decades, Australia's aged care sector has begun to shift from paper documents to electronic documents. This switch is the result of both a society-wide shift towards digital technology and several fundamental shifts within Australia's healthcare sector, including:

- › The introduction of the Australian Government's Electronic Medical Records (EMS) system
- › The release of Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM) Systems
- › The widespread adoption of telehealth
- › The introduction of electronic prescriptions

While electronic documents are part of a greener future for aged care, many aged care organisations struggle to manage them securely, efficiently, and cost-effectively. This is a pressing issue for many providers, as Australians live longer than ever before, and [over one million Australians](#) already access aged care services every year. Thus, organisations must successfully implement electronic documents into their daily operations to adapt to the demands of the growing [\\$25.8 billion aged care market](#).

This white paper explores the case for electronic documents within Australia's aged care industry, including three potential solutions organisations can implement for successful document transmission.

Inside Australia's Aged Care Industry

Aged care is a big business in Australia. According to the New South Wales government, the industry generates over [\\$25.8 billion in revenue](#) annually. This figure is expected to grow 4.7% annually over the next five years, and currently, the aged care sector [contributes 1.2%](#) to Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Over 1,820 aged care entities operate Australia-wide. These organisations provide three types of support services:

- › Residential Care for Australians who can no longer live independently at home
- › Home and Community Care (HACC) for Australians who can live independently with basic, regular assistance (the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) falls under the HACC umbrella)
- › Home Care for Australians who can live independently but require complex care (the Home Care Packages Program falls under the "Home Care" umbrella)

According to the latest data from the [Department of Health](#), Australia had 845 residential care providers, 1,452 CHSP providers and 920 Home Care providers in FY2019-20. This has changed from 873 residential care providers, 1,458 CHSP providers and 928 Home Care providers in FY2018-19.

NOTE: There is some crossover between care providers, as many providers offer multiple types of care

Industry Analysis

Australia’s aged care sector consists of government service providers, not-for-profit enterprises and for-profit enterprises. But though Australia has many for-profit and not-for-profit providers, government expenditure on aged care is growing quickly. In FY 2018-19, the Australian government [spent \\$19.9 billion](#) in the sector. This figure increased to \$21.2 billion in FY 2019-20 and is projected to further increase to \$27 billion by FY2023-24.

By FY 2023-24, 1.5 million people will access government subsidies for aged care, though many consumers will also purchase support independently or use fee-free charitable services. In FY 2019-20, consumers spent \$5.4 billion on aged care — up from \$5.1 billion in FY2018.19.

Who Uses Aged Care Services?

Aged care providers are serving more Australians every year. Here is a breakdown of aged-care consumers in [FY 2019-20](#), FY2018-19 and [FY 2013-14](#).

	Number of Consumers FY 2019-20	Number of Consumers FY 2018-19	Number of Consumers FY 2013-14
Residential Care	244,363	242,612	231,515
CHSP	839,373	840,984	775,959
Home Care	173,743	133,439	83,144
Total	1,257,479	1,217,035	1,090,618

As each type of aged care supports people with different care requirements, the “average” consumer in each type of care varies greatly.

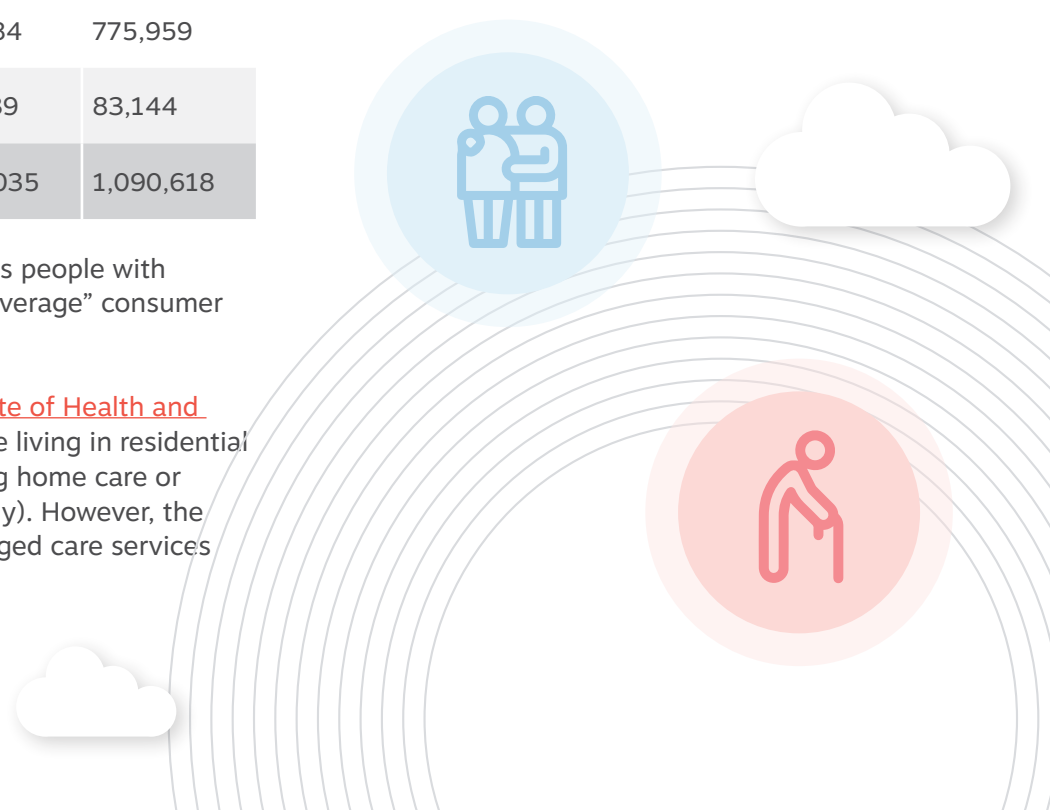
According to the [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#), the average age of people living in residential care was 85, while those accessing home care or HACC were 82 and 80 (respectively). However, the vast majority of those accessing aged care services are older than 65.

How Does Australia’s Aged Care Sector Compare To Other Countries

As the structure of each country’s aged care sector is different, comparing the nuances of each sector is difficult. However, we can start to understand how Australia compares by looking at our average life expectancy, the number of beds in residential care per 1,000 people aged 65+ and the percentage of people aged 80+ using residential care.

As of 2018, these figures were as follows for [Australia, Canada, and New Zealand](#).

Country	Average Life Expectancy In Years	Number Of Beds In Residential Care Per 1,000 People Aged 65+	Percentage Of People Aged 18+ Using Residential Care
Australia	82.8	51.2	18.9%
Canada	82.0	53.8	12.0%
New Zealand	81.8	53.7	14.3%



SWOT Analysis

To truly understand Australia’s current aged-care sector, you need to analyse the industry’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Although this isn’t an exhaustive list, the primary SWOT considerations for aged care in 2021 include:

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Many Australians have access to government-subsidised care › Australia’s aged care workforce is growing › Australia’s aged care workforce is increasingly skilled (as of 2012, 87% of the workforce have a post-secondary qualification) 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Many aged care workers experience burnout › Many aged care services struggle to find and retain highly skilled staff › Many entities are unprepared for cybersecurity attacks
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › The average life expectancy of Australians is increasing › Digital technology is becoming more affordable › New technology like telehealth and Remote Patient Monitoring Systems (RPMS) are increasingly accessible › Aged care organisations have better access to digital documents 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › COVID-19 lockdown restrictions have altered the daily operations of many aged care organisations › Many aged care entities struggle to adjust to new technology

Advances in Technology in Aged Care

Australia’s aged care sector (alongside the healthcare sector) has had three significant advances in technology in the past few years. These include:

The Introduction of Electronic Medical Records (EMR’s)

Electronic Medical Records (EMR’s) are a collection of digital documents and files that cover a person’s past and present medical history. They include:

- › Any tests or examinations the patient has had
- › Allergy information
- › Documents from nurses, doctors and specialists
- › Discharge summary reports from hospitals and other institutional care facilities

Currently, Australia accesses EMR’s through My Health Record. As of August 2021, My Health Record holds **23 million records**.

Telehealth Consultations

Telehealth Consultations are precisely what they sound like — consultations between a healthcare provider and patient over voice or video chat. Though telehealth predates the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown restrictions are partially responsible for the rise of telehealth. Between March 2020 and October 2021, **15.6 million patients** in Australia used telehealth services.

Remote Patient Monitoring Systems (RPMS)

Remote Patient Monitoring Systems (RPMS) allow healthcare providers to oversee a patient’s medical care without being physically present. Although RPMS’s fall under the “telehealth” umbrella, they are an essential technology in their own right — as they allow healthcare workers to collect real-time data on patients remotely, including survey responses, images and biometric data from wearable devices.

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Electronic Documents

Over the past few years, organisations operating in Australia's aged care sector have increasingly embraced many digital technologies, including EMR's, telehealth and RPMS solutions. Naturally, the rise in digital technology solutions in aged care has caused organisations to generate more electronic documents.

Australia's aged care sector uses electronic documents for:

- > ePrescriptions
- > Memos
- > Referrals
- > Care plans
- > Test or exam results
- > Notes from healthcare professionals

Some of these electronic documents are stored locally within a patient's medical file, while others are stored in My Health Record. As of [August 2021](#), My Health Record holds 170 million clinical documents from healthcare providers, 278 million medicine documents uploaded by providers (like GPs) and 392,000 documents uploaded by consumers.

Electronic Documents Vs. EMR's

As electronic documents and EMR's have similar names, many people conflate the two. But they aren't the same. EMR's are digital files that hold a person's medical data, while electronic documents only contain data about a specific interaction someone has with the healthcare system.

EMR's include electronic documents.

Electronic Documents & The Law

Several critical pieces of legislation govern the way aged care organisations use electronic documents. This legislation includes:

- > The Privacy Act 1998
- > The Electronic Transactions Regulations 2000
- > My Health Records Act 2012
- > Healthcare Identifiers Act 2010

Aged care organisations are also bound by state and territory-specific legislation. This legislation includes:

State/ Territory	Additional Legislation Aged Care Organisations Must Adhere To
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014> Health Records Act 2001> Electronic Transactions Act 2000
NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002> Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998> Electronic Transactions Act 2000
Queensland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Information Privacy Act 2009> Invasion of Privacy Act 1971> Electronic Transactions Act 2001
Tasmania	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Personal Information Protection Act> Electronic Transactions Act 2000
ACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Information Privacy Act 2014> Workplace Privacy Act 2011> Electronic Transactions Act 2001
NT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Electronic Transactions Act 2000
South Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Electronic Communications Act 2000
WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Electronic Transactions Act 2011

Data Sovereignty

Aged care organisations must also consider data sovereignty. Data sovereignty is the notion that organisations must store, use, and share data under the laws of the country the data originates from.

For example, suppose a resident in an aged care facility is originally from Germany. In that case, any patient files from their German healthcare team are subject to the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Although this example may seem niche, it's increasingly common. As of June 2020, [29.8% of Australia's population](#) were born overseas, and over

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7.6 million migrants lived in Australia. Those people will have documented healthcare records in their home countries, so their data is subject to data sovereignty.

Electronic Documents: Benefits For Aged Care Organisations

There are many reasons aged care organisations embrace electronic documents in their daily operations, as they can:

› Increase Compliance

As workers in aged care handle documents with patients' personal and medical information, compliance is vital in maintaining patient privacy. That's where electronic documents come in. Workers don't need to hunt through filing cabinets and medical files to find an electronic document. Instead, patient data is stored digitally in compliance with an organisation's policy.

You can see the benefits of electronic documents in a study published by the International Journal of Medical Informatics. In the [study](#), researchers found that nurses and aged care workers from a residential aged care home in NSW increased their compliance with the facility's documentation requirements after using electronic medication records. Specifically, more workers signed documents correctly and remembered to include timestamps more frequently.

Additionally, the study found that electronic documents reduced patients' chances of missing medication doses, as workers kept better track of when they administered medications.

› Improve Organisational Cyber Security

Cyber security is an increasingly significant threat for Australia's aged care sector. And as aged care facilities handle personal information that criminals could use to steal a person's identity, it's a prime target for cyberattacks.

Switching paper documents for electronic documents can improve an organisation's cyber security, as:

- › Document transmission services like online faxing encrypt electronic documents when they transport them (so anyone that steals them won't be able to read them)
- › You can encrypt an electronic document's contents
- › Organisations can protect their documents by using a Virtual Private Network (VPN)

› Reduce Costs

As you access electronic documents digitally, switching to them allows organisations to reduce the cost of:

- › Paper consumption
- › Ink consumption
- › Printing
- › Scanning documents
- › Secure document storage

Though these costs may seem small on paper, they add up quickly. According to Victoria's Department of Health, the Royal Children's Hospital [reduced administration costs by 32%](#) by reducing reliance on paper forms. Brisbane's Princess Alexandra Hospital has similar results — reducing the cost associated with clinical forms by 81%.

› Improve Productivity

As electronic documents are stored digitally, using them reduces the amount of time aged care workers spend on administration tasks.

This is evident by examining a study published by the International Journal of Medication Informatics in 2021. In the study, researchers found that nurses increased the mean amount of time they spent with patients on direct care tasks from [2.5 minutes to 3.9 minutes](#) after their facility started using EMR. Additionally, researchers noticed a "significant reduction" in the amount of time nurses spent in transit and on indirect care tasks.

Reducing administration tasks is key to keeping patients happy in aged care, as the less time aged care workers spend on administration, the more time they have for patients.



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Electronic Documents: Challenges For Aged Care Organisations

Although switching to electronic documents can reduce costs and increase the quality of care, there are some challenges aged care organisations need to overcome to make the switch smoothly. These challenges include:

› Adequate Staff Training

Although staff in aged care need to wear many hats, workers need training to use electronic documents compliantly and without making mistakes.

In a [2020 study](#) published in the International Journal of Medical Informatics, researchers examined the error rate before and after a Drug and Alcohol Service switched to EMR. The study showed that staff made the majority of errors eight months after the service had switched. At that time, the error rate was 44.6% — but it dropped to under 7.3% 1.5 years after the service implemented EMR. At this point, workers knew how to use the system, and thus, they did so correctly.

› The Implementation of Document Management Policies

To integrate electronic documents into an organisation's existing processes, aged care organisations need document management policies. Document management policies outline how staff handle documents, including:

- › How workers will name the documents for easy identification
- › How the organisation will prevent the filing of duplicate documents
- › What file types the organisation will use
- › How workers will transmit documents when necessary
- › How the organisation will store documents
- › How the organisation will protect private data within documents

If an organisation fails to design such a policy, documents may get lost — especially in services with high patient numbers.

Electronic Document Transmission And Management Solutions

In previous decades, aged care organisations in Australia have transmitted their documents using fax machines, person-to-person transfers, or mail. However, as these document sharing options are expensive, insecure and not electronic-document compatible, many organisations are now looking for a smarter solution.

This section will outline three of these solutions: email, online faxing, or Electronic Data Interchange (EDI).



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> Online Faxing

Online faxing is a digital form of faxing that transmits faxes via the internet. When you send a digital document with online faxing, you upload it to your online faxing service provider, and they transmit it to your recipient through protected servers.

You can send an online fax through smartphones, computers or tablets. Many online service providers like eFax also offer email faxing, a desktop app, a mobile app and a web portal you can fax through.

Cybersecurity Measures

Faxes sent via online faxing are encrypted with Transport Layer Security (TLS) encryption. Without getting too technical, TLS encryption alters your document's contents until it's illegible. As the document is unreadable without the decryption key, only you and your recipient can read your document.

Faxes sent through online faxing are also stored in secure cloud-based storage.

Benefits

- ✓ Built for transmitting electronic documents
- ✓ You can transfer files up to 3 GB
- ✓ In-built document storage
- ✓ Cyber secure
- ✓ Online faxing systems have inbuilt features like a PDF converter and address book
- ✓ Scalable for large organisations
- ✓ You can fax multiple electronic documents simultaneously
- ✓ You can send many file types (including PDF, MOV, MP3 and DOC files)
- ✓ You can fax internationally while following data sovereignty laws
- ✓ You can sign documents with electronic signatures
- ✓ No maintenance required
- ✓ Online fax providers like eFax are [accredited Business NBN Providers](#)
- ✓ Lower carbon footprint than traditional faxing (as it doesn't require paper or ink)

Challenges

- ✗ Requires internet connection
- ✗ Staff may require training to learn to use online faxing

Costs

Your organisation will need a device to fax through and a subscription to an online faxing provider like eFax to get started with online faxing. Currently, eFax offers:



eFax Plus

Which costs \$169.50 per year or \$14.13 per month. This plan lets you send 150 faxes and receive 150 faxes a month.



eFax Pro

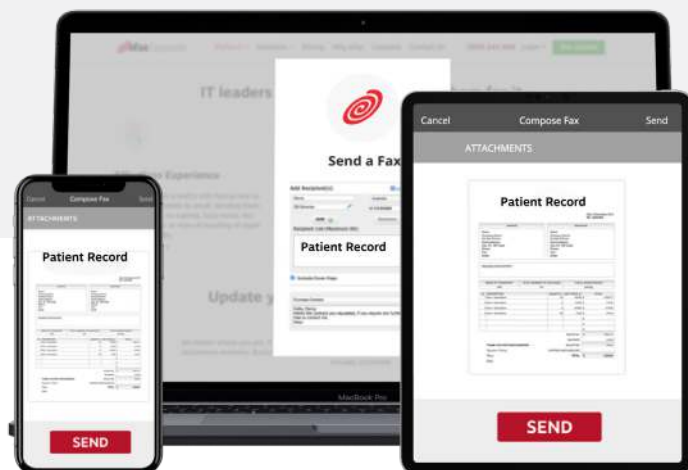
Which costs \$170.55 per year or \$14.21 per month. This plan lets you send 200 faxes and receive 200 pages a month.



eFax Premium

Which costs \$215.55 per year or \$17.96 per month. This plan lets you send 300 faxes and receive 300 faxes a month.

For comparison, it costs an **average of \$1,259.76** to run a fax machine for a year. This includes the cost of the machine, line connection, paper, toner and maintenance. None of these costs apply to online faxing.



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> **Email**

Many organisations transmit documents by attaching them to emails.

Cybersecurity Measures

Each email provider protects emails with unique cybersecurity measures. However, most providers use email encryption that disguises an email's contents throughout the transmission process.

Email providers also store emails in the cloud (though not in a central location).

Benefits

- ✓ Compatible with electronic documents
- ✓ Staff already know how to use email
- ✓ Low carbon footprint
- ✓ You can send multiple documents simultaneously
- ✓ No maintenance required

Challenges

- ✗ Depending on your home state or territory, emailing confidential medical documents may violate data protection and data sovereignty laws
- ✗ Many email providers only allow you to email files up to 20 MB
- ✗ Some large documents (like medical records) are too big for email
- ✗ Organisations frequently get phished through email
- ✗ Email is vulnerable to malware (as many cybercriminals will attach malware to seemingly ordinary attachments)
- ✗ Requires separate document storage (as documents are stored with their host emails rather than a central location)

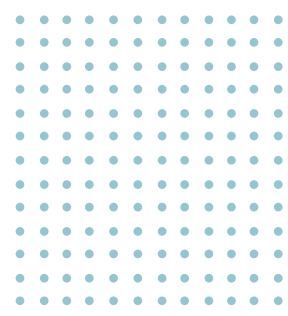
Costs

Email providers like Gmail and Yahoo offer free email services to individuals. The cost of email for businesses depends on the number of accounts needed and the scale of your email requirements.

For example, Google Workspace currently offers:

Business Starter	Which costs \$8.40 per user per month
Business Standard	Which costs \$16.80 per user per month
Business Plus	Which costs \$25.20 per user per month
Enterprise plans	Which are business-dependent

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› Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)

Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) is a computer-to-computer service that allows you to send and receive documents via the internet.

To use EDI, you need to establish an EDI connection with your document's recipient. Then, you upload your document to your EDI system and transmit it to their EDI system. As both parties require an EDI system (or EDI translator software), EDI only works for organisations that send documents to the same recipient regularly.

EDI also only works for documents that adhere to EDI standards (like ANSI, EDIFACT, ebXML and TRADACOMS) – as the EDI must decipher a document's contents to process it.

Cybersecurity Measures

Documents transferred through EDI are protected with encryption throughout transmission. However, as EDI stores documents in the recipient's internal system, your document's security will depend on your recipient's cybersecurity once it arrives.

Benefits

- ✓ Can transmit documents automatically
- ✓ Cheaper and faster than traditional faxing
- ✓ Safer than traditional faxing
- ✓ Low carbon footprint

Challenges

- ✗ Does not work with all documents
- ✗ You can only use EDI with recipient's you've connected your system to
- ✗ You cannot control the cybersecurity of your recipient
- ✗ Staff will require training to learn to use EDI
- ✗ Depending on your home state or territory, EDI may violate data protection and data sovereignty laws

Costs

The cost of EDI depends on your provider, as some providers charge as little as \$100 a month while others charge thousands.

Summary and Recommendations

Over the next few decades, demand for aged care services will increase dramatically – as Australians live longer on average. Naturally, organisations in the aged care industry need to adopt new digital strategies to adapt to the demands of the sector and changes in privacy and data sovereignty laws.

Electronic documents are one of those changes. As many organisations now use telehealth, EMRs and RPMS, the aged care sector relies more on electronic documents than ever before.

In light of the widespread adoption of electronic documents, we recommend that:

- › Aged care organisations that use paper-based systems switch to electronic documents to reduce costs, increase compliance and improve productivity
- › Organisations that switch to electronic documents invest in training staff to use new solutions
- › Organisations that switch to electronic documents implement document management policies
- › Aged care organisations strongly consider cyber security when selecting a document transmission solution
- › Organisations consider data sovereignty and privacy laws

We also recommend that organisations test potential document transmission solutions through a free trial. To try eFax, [click here](#) or call 1800 283 361.