



Managing Client and Caregiver Retention During the COVID-19 Crisis

Home Care Pulse | Connor Kunz

Retention has always been important, but in a post-pandemic world, it's more important than ever for your business to turn inward to your clients and employees.

Let's be real: we're in a global health crisis the likes of which none of us have experienced at any point in our lives.

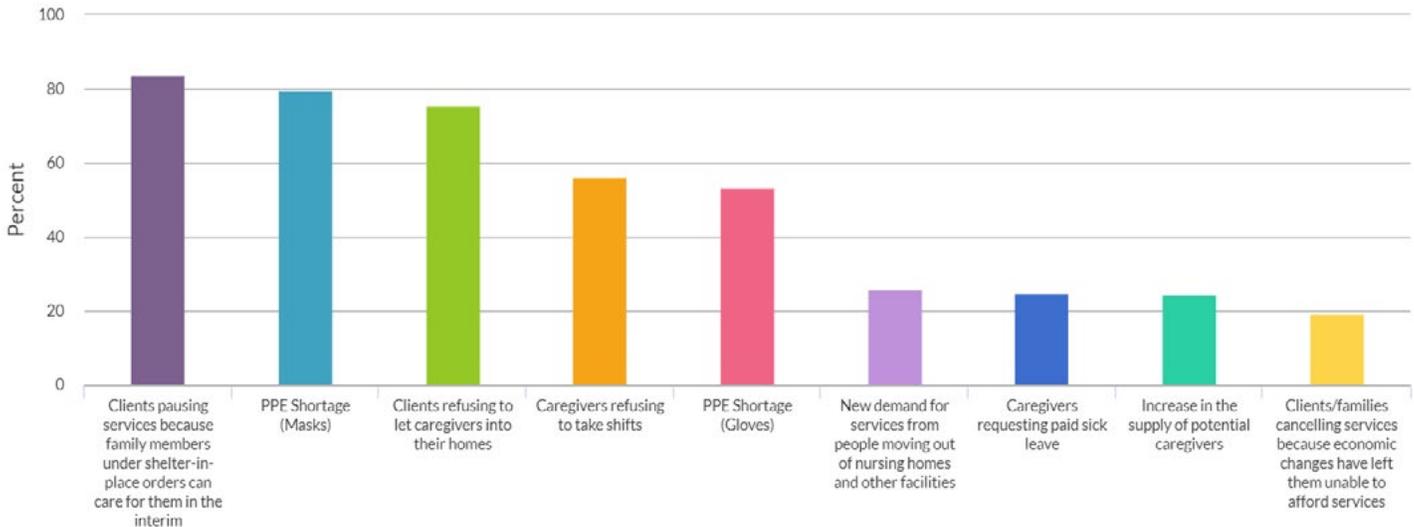
We don't know what's going to happen, and we don't know how long it will be until circumstances return to some kind of normal.

This is an interesting time for home care agencies in particular. Home care has traditionally been a counter-cyclical industry, meaning that it booms in times of economic recession; this is largely due to the fact that economic difficulties push many people to choose in-home care over care in a facilities due to the lower cost.

However, we don't know how long it will be until the only problem we're dealing with is a recession. For the foreseeable future, home care agencies (and society at large) have a host of pressing problems to face.

We recently surveyed over a thousand home care agencies around the United States to see what they're experiencing during the COVID-19 crisis. Here's the percentage of agencies who reported experiencing each of these common challenges, as of April 6th:

What Agencies Are Experiencing During COVID-19



It's also important to recognize that the situation is turning on a dime. What's true today may not be true tomorrow as the pandemic evolves, the economic disaster grows, and legislation changes.

Retention is More Important Now Than Ever

There is one pretty cut-and-dry problem: while the incoming recession will likely be beneficial to home care agencies in the long run, the number of clients pausing/canceling services and the number of caregivers on sick leave or unable to work signals major cashflow hurdles in the short-term.

What does this mean? Retention has always been important, but in a post-pandemic world, it's more important than ever for your business to turn inward to your clients and employees.

Short- and long-term, your business's success is going to be dependent on your ability to put an obsessive level of focus on the well-being of your clients and caregivers. The way you react to this crisis will define your brand for years to come.

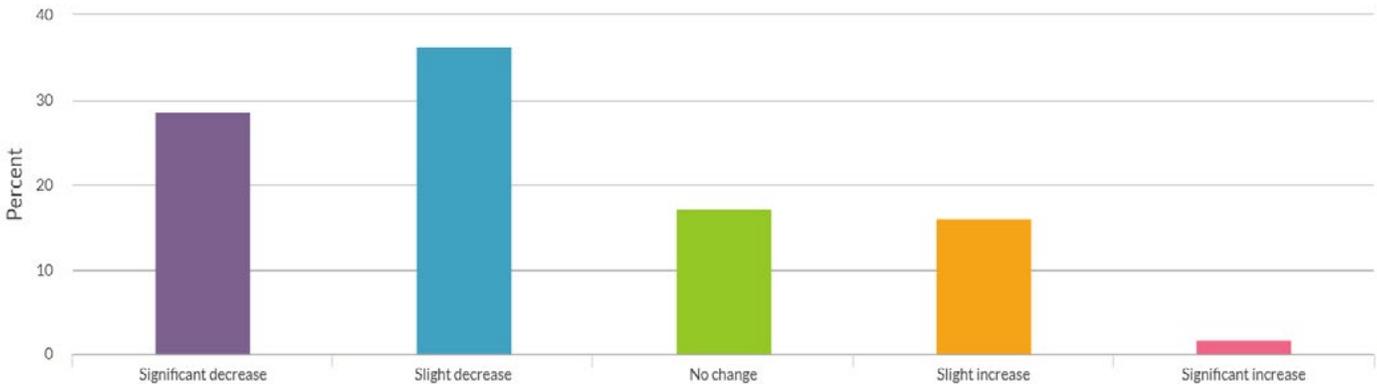
“Companies that put customer needs under the microscope, take a scalpel rather than a cleaver to the marketing budget, and nimbly adjust strategies, tactics, and product offerings in response to shifting demand are more likely than others to flourish both during and after a recession.”

– [Harvard Business Review](#)

Client Retention

While some agencies have seen an increase in demand for services, most are still seeing a decline in the number of potential new clients. Here's what the agencies in our survey had to say about the net increase or decrease in demand for home care in their service areas over the last few weeks:

Net Change in Demand For Home Care Services



Increasing client retention will be key to maintaining cashflow while demand is down. Let's talk about what you can do.

#1: Prioritize relationships and over-communicate.

Generally, what this means is a more organized and intensive focus on the good things you've already been doing.

Home care professionals excel at human relationships. This need to communicate thoroughly and develop relationships didn't begin with the COVID-19 crisis; however, the price of complacency has increased exponentially during the COVID-19 crisis.

There are many forms this can take, and no one is better qualified than you to decide what's best for the specific circumstances for your agency.

We're hearing stories of agencies making regular phone calls to check up on clients who have paused or cancelled services during the crisis just to look after their well-being.

This is exactly the kind of thing every agency should be doing. Not only because it speaks volumes about your brand, but because it's the right thing to do.

#2: Be adaptive to clients' needs.

As with communicating, there are many forms this can take; the key is to maximize the area of overlap between adapting to clients' needs during the crisis, and ensuring continued cashflow for your business.

We've seen agencies such as Family Resource Home Care in Washington State adapt by billing for 15-minute remote visits (to check in on medication and other urgent needs) in cases where clients don't want someone in the house but still need occasional support.

We've also seen agencies pivot to offering services like grocery delivery in lieu of visits, likewise in cases where clients don't want people in the house but still have unmet needs.

It's an important time to think long and hard about whether your clients have needs that aren't being filled (especially if they don't want to risk additional exposure by inviting anyone into their home), and considering whether there are out-of-the-box ways you can fill those needs.

#3: Prioritize feedback from clients and close the feedback loop vigorously.

While it's always been important to keep a voice-of-the-customer channel of communication open (and waiting for an angry phone call is NOT an ideal channel!), it's suddenly become more important than ever.

Knowing what your clients think and feel has never been more essential. Agencies are strapped for cash and need to retain every client possible; now is not the time to let any aspect of client experience slip through the cracks.

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Many home care agencies have made collecting client (and caregiver) feedback a priority long before the crisis, and we applaud those efforts. It's now important to start doing so if you haven't already, and to double down on ensuring that any and all problems that come up in the feedback are addressed rapidly.

For those who are actively tracking client satisfaction data, it's important to recognize that there are two types of data that are important to track:

Evergreen data—the same data you've already been tracking, showing client satisfaction/loyalty to your company.

Besides keeping a pulse on factors that would influence client retention, this will become a powerful marketing tool when the crisis is over and you can quantifiably demonstrate the impact you made on clients' daily life during the COVID-19 crisis.

Crisis-specific data—data tracking the overall well-being of your clients during COVID-19.

Agencies in our survey program can [customize their surveys for no additional charge](#) to gather crisis data in addition to their regular survey questions; we'll mention more about this at the end.

Many agencies and companies who were already consistently collecting client feedback, such as HomeWell Care Services, have started asking additional survey questions to track the well-being of their clients during this time.

(It's extremely important to measure data and collect feedback from your caregivers as well; we'll discuss that momentarily.)

Perhaps the best way to think about client retention during this time is that everything that was already important is now magnified in its importance.

Managing Caregiver Retention During COVID-19

One silver lining of an economic downturn is that the job market shifts in favor of employers, making it easier to source and retain solid employees.

It's very likely that we'll see this effect in home care soon, as many agencies are already reporting an increase in the supply of potential caregivers.

However, as we said in the beginning: as long as the crisis lasts, all bets are off as to what happens. We've received many reports of caregivers refusing to work due to COVID-19; impending legislation around unemployment benefits could also create challenges for home care agencies working to keep their cases staffed.

Caregiver retention during the COVID crisis is similar to client retention, albeit with extra dimensions such as unemployment/paid leave benefits and procuring PPE. While there's not a one-size-fits-all approach to addressing these challenges, there is a set of guiding principles that can help.

#1: Lead with Empathy.

True leadership shows in a crisis, and true leadership requires empathy.

While you're dealing with the challenges of running a business during this crisis, your caregivers have their own struggles; many are single parents, working multiple jobs, or simply struggling like the rest of us to keep their families safe from COVID-19.

Understand the challenges that your caregivers are facing, and show that you're doing everything you can to support them.

While it's much easier said than done, do what it takes to help them prioritize their own safety and families while completing their work.

Above all, listen to your employees. Take the time to understand their needs and situations as you make decisions for your agency. They'll return the favor with hard work and loyalty.

#2: Ensure thorough training and prioritize caregiver safety.

This goes without saying, but it's easy to neglect the role of caregiver safety in caregiver retention, and ultimately in the success or failure of your agency.

Caregiver safety has never been a bigger issue than it is currently. Sadly, this challenge has been exacerbated by PPE shortages; in our COVID-19 impact survey, more than 79% of agencies reported a shortage of masks, with another 53% reporting a shortage of gloves.

A partial list of reliable PPE vendors can be found on the [Home Care Association of America website](#). Our In the Know team has also created a free coronavirus training course for caregivers [accessible here](#). (We'll include links to all resources again at the end.)

#3: Prioritize voice-of-the-caregiver feedback and act quickly to close the loop on negative feedback.

Everything we've already said about client experience feedback applies to caregivers as well.

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We've already said it, but it's worth saying again: Now is not the time to let things slip through the cracks. As you seek feedback from your caregivers, take immediate action on any negative comments.

There will be things that can't be fixed immediately (as we mentioned before, PPE shortages are a constant struggle), but collecting insights from across your workforce will help you to get a big-picture view of the challenges facing your caregivers and help you pinpoint areas of improvement that could be the difference between keeping caregivers and putting out another desperate helped wanted ad.

#4: Help your caregivers keep perspective on their roles.

Finally, help your caregivers see the big picture by reminding them of the benefits of working in home care, leading with a positive attitude, and recognizing them for their efforts.

Across the board, caregivers are among the true heroes of the COVID-19 crisis. Don't let your team forget this.

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Out of the Ashes

At the end of the day, crises like this one create opportunities for great companies to shine through. Whether it's an existing company surviving a crisis or a new company being founded in times of crisis, times like these can refine and strengthen your business.

Many companies, from major tech pioneers like Instagram to home care providers like 24-Hr Home Care to yours truly Home Care Pulse, were founded amid some of the worst lows

of the 2008 financial crisis. In the end, tough times give rise to new thinking and turn good companies into great companies.

Remember: the way you respond to this crisis will be remembered long after this is over.

More Resources

-  As mentioned, agencies in our survey program can get four free custom questions (two for clients and two for caregivers) to help them tailor their feedback to the needs of this crisis. Home Care Pulse customers can [learn more about custom survey questions here](#). Agencies that aren't in our program yet but are interested in learning more can [request more information here](#).
-  [Useful Links to Coronavirus Resources for Home Care Agencies](#)
-  [Free coronavirus training course \(e-learning\)](#)
-  [Free coronavirus training for caregivers and instructors \(PDFs\)](#)
-  [What does home care look like during a state lockdown?](#)
-  [How to manage a remote home care office team](#)
-  [COVID-19 Impact Survey \(see the results when you submit your survey\)](#)



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