



Rethinking safety for home healthcare, hospice and social services workers

Alert. Locate. Communicate. Respond



How home healthcare, hospice, and social services workforces are changing

All working people have the right to a safe workplace—whether that workplace is a facility or someone’s home. But how do you protect a home healthcare, hospice or social services worker who’s left a controlled workplace from threats such as:

- accidents and health issues
- workplace violence
- bad weather
- physical attacks
- natural disasters

To complicate their situations, mobile workers can be miles away from cities or towns, with limited access to assistance should something go wrong.

Rise in home healthcare workers

Payors are working to contain rising healthcare costs for all patient populations by moving care from the hospital to the home. In addition, aging adults are opting to receive quality medical care in the comfort of their home rather than in a healthcare or nursing facility. According to the U.S. 2020 Census, the 65 and older population hit 55.8 million people or 16.8% of the U.S. population in 2020.¹ Waiver expansion from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services are also increasing the demand for at-home care.²

As a result, the home healthcare market is predicted to grow 21% from 2021 to 2031, adding 711,700 jobs each year on average over the decade... a growth rate that is 300% higher than the average industry employment growth rate.³

Similarly, the value of the U.S. Home Healthcare market is expected to grow from \$94.17 billion in 2022 to \$153.19 billion in 2029, according to. As the market grows, it will continue to create new challenges for home healthcare, hospice and social services workers.

Nursing care segment will dominate market owing to rising demand for these services

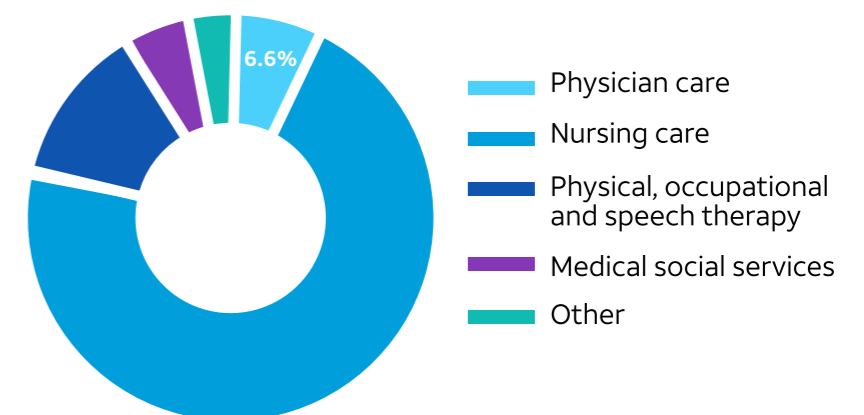
The nursing care segment is poised to hold a significant U.S. home healthcare services market share during the forecast period.⁴ The segment’s dominance is attributed to the increasing demand for skilled nursing care at home.⁴

The changing workforce

“There are nearly 4 million home healthcare workers who often work in isolation and without the typical protections and benefits that workers in traditional health care settings receive. It’s important that home health care workers have the knowledge and tools to protect themselves from the serious and even life-threatening hazards they may experience while at work.”

Director John Howard
NIOSH

U.S. Home healthcare services market share, by type, 2022



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New risks and challenges

Safety concerns among home healthcare providers

With growing demand for at-home care comes growing concern for worker safety. When workers operate outside of traditional health care settings it becomes difficult for organizations to manage the potential risks a worker may encounter, to know when a worker needs emergency assistance, and to ensure they get the necessary assistance in near real-time.

In a 2023 survey by Stericycle, respondents identified the top 3 risks to worker safety in at-home settings:

- Generally unhygienic conditions – 57%
- Entering and working in the residence alone – 57%
- In-home violence, such as hostile animals – 54%

Home healthcare providers also reported that at-home care results in substantial risks to their own overall physical and mental health and well-being, with 63% of home healthcare providers experiencing negative feelings.⁵

High-risk endeavor

Just going to work is a high-risk endeavor for most home healthcare and hospice workers. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Healthcare workers accounted for 73% of all nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses due to violence in 2018. The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing states healthcare workers are 4x more likely to take time off for workplace violence-related injuries than other injuries as 75% of the workplace assaults reported annually occurred in the healthcare and social services settings.⁶

Survey responses estimate that their organization loses more than \$350 million each year to workplace injuries. – Stericycle Global Data, 2022

Staffing and patient challenges

Staffing is now seen as the number one challenge in healthcare by both healthcare providers and administrators.

Staffing issues are not only caused by worker burnout, but high costs, supply chain issues, the increasing aging population needing more care and a competitive labor market. CNN has reported that there is a major concern in the U.S. around healthcare worker shortages and safety has a large influence on whether they want to stay in the field because there just aren't enough healthcare workers.⁷

Quality of patient care is a major byproduct of this trend, but also affecting how patients are acting – and in a more negative way. More than 25% of patients have been turned away due to staffing shortages.⁸

In turn, patients are also denying recommended care, being more confrontational and behaving negatively overall. As a result, almost two-thirds (63%) of home healthcare providers are concerned that they will be injured at work from a patient or another issue at the home.⁹



Rethinking and updating safety policies and procedures for home healthcare, hospice and social services workers

Traditional workplace safety solutions do not work for a mobile workforce

The Bureau of Labor Statistics states, “The home healthcare and social services industries experience the highest rates of injuries caused by workplace violence and are 5 times as likely to suffer a workplace violence injury than workers overall.”

OSHA’s Healthcare Guidelines¹⁰ acknowledge the elevated risk of workplace violence faced by home healthcare and social services workers and recommend specific steps be taken to protect them, including the provision of GPS tracking and alarm systems. Safety policies, procedures and equipment must address the unique needs of home healthcare, hospice and social services workers.

Home healthcare, hospice and social services workers need different safety tools

While proper training in safety procedures remains vital, providing home healthcare, hospice and social services workers with the right tools to request and receive help in an emergency is critical to avoid negative outcomes. AlertGPS’ safety wearable devices and mobile safety apps, combined with its mass communication and alerting platform, provide the quickest way to locate, communicate and get help to mobile workers, protecting them from hazards.



The Joint Commission: New Requirements

In acknowledgement of the unique safety risks faced by home healthcare field staff, the Joint Commission, the nation’s oldest and largest accrediting body in healthcare, recently established new workplace violence prevention requirements for home healthcare organizations, effective January 2025. They recognized that workplace violence poses a significant occupational hazard for home care workers. In its rationale for adoption of the new regulations, which apply to all Joint Commission-accredited home care organizations, they stated:

“The inclusion of safety and security incidents, particularly those related to workplace violence, in the home care organization’s monitoring and reporting process is crucial as it demonstrates a commitment to recognizing and mitigating the risks associate with workplace violence, proactively manages these risks, enables staff protection and support, aligns with regulatory compliance, emphasizes a culture of safety, informs data-driven decision-making, and contributes to the overall well-being of both staff and patients.”



When speed matters

It is easy to assume that a home healthcare worker who is experiencing a threat, violence or crisis may instantly launch into the “fight-or-flight” response.

Unfortunately, many workers simply freeze. In that frozen moment, they fumble for their phone; they forget the password that unlocks it; they forget their current location; and they may even forget the English language if it’s not their native tongue.

When time matters, being able to quickly isolate the precise location of a worker and accurately share critical data with emergency response personnel could mean the difference between life and death.

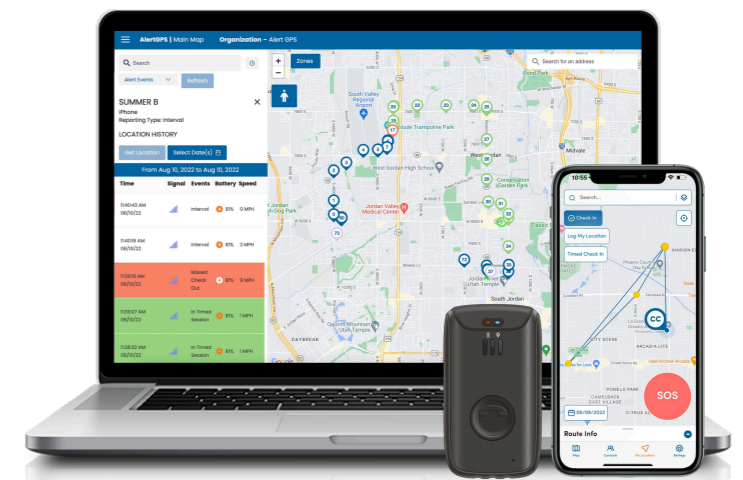
AlertGPS safety solutions are tailored to the needs of home healthcare, hospice, and social services workers

AlertGPS safety solutions allow workers to quickly and discreetly issue calls for help to trained response personnel who can take appropriate action. In emergency situations, AlertGPS provides response personnel with instant information on the worker’s name, location, their employer and other information, as requested.

When critical data matters

AlertGPS safety wearables and mobile safety apps are responsive to the worker’s unique environmental risks.

For example, an alert can be issued in near real-time when a mobile worker approaches a known hazardous area or the home of a registered sex offender, or a notification can be sent to the employer when a worker fails to check out when expected or when a fall is detected.



A home healthcare worker who receives safety alerts and notifications has an opportunity to mitigate and/or eliminate the risk and severity of an incident.

FirstNet

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FirstNet is the nation's only high-speed, broadband communications platform dedicated to and built for America's first responders and the extended public safety community. The FirstNet network features First Priority® that supports prioritized and efficient communications, as well as preemptive access to network resources for first responders during times of congestion.

FirstNet Trusted™ devices have met the standards for supporting the critical operational needs of public safety agencies and users who need tools that are highly secure, resilient, scalable, and available when needed. Subject to eligibility.

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Citations

¹ United States Census Bureau, 2020 Census: 1 in 6 People in the United States Were 65 and Over, 2023

² Stericycle Global Data, 2022

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics

⁴ Fortune Business Insights, U.S. Home Healthcare Services Market, 2022

⁵ Stericycle Global Data, 2022

⁶ <https://ojin.nursingworld.org/table-of-contents/volume-27-2022/number-3-september-2022/articles-on-previously-published-topics/are-healthcareprofessionals-optimistic-about-workplace-violence/>

⁷ CNN, Concern grows around US health-care workforce shortage: 'We don't have enough doctors', 2023

⁸ Bloomberg, The Health-Care Staffing Crisis Is Bad and Getting Worse, 2023

⁹ Stericycle Global Data, 2022

¹⁰ Guidelines for Preventing Workplace Violence for Healthcare and Social Service Workers (OSHA, 2015)

¹¹ The Joint Commission, Small, T. F., et al., Byon, H. D., et al., McPhaul, K. M., et al., London, M., & Lipscomb, J. A. (2024). Workplace violence prevention in home care settings. In R3 Report: Vol. Issue 45 (pp. 1–2) [Journal-article]. The Joint Commission. https://www.jointcommission.org/-/media/tjc/documents/standards/r3-reports/2024/r3-wpv-for-ome_accessible.pdf