



**Think ahead.**

**Hygiene expectations have increased –  
what does this mean for your aged care facility?**





## Impacts of the Pandemic and Increase in Hygiene Expectations

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian aged care industry has witnessed many regulatory changes. New federal government regulations were introduced such as the necessity for [infection prevention and control](#) (IPC) leads on site for each residential aged care facility.

The awareness around the importance of hygiene has also seen an increase across the globe since the onset of the pandemic. Google released a list of the most-searched terms for the first six months of 2020 and the results were unsurprising.

The top 20 search terms between January and June 2020 included words relating to new health phrases people have learned, social distancing and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and the effects of being told to stay at home — quarantine and social isolation.<sup>1</sup>

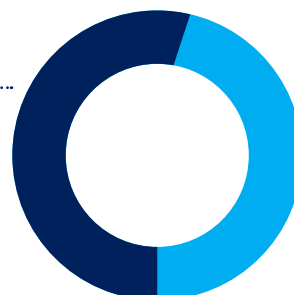
According to the same list, hand sanitisers topped three separate search categories in Australia. These search patterns reveal a clear rise in concerns around health and hygiene post the onset of the pandemic.

Society's expectations regarding standards of hygiene have also changed. Research conducted on the implications of COVID-19 has shown that nearly 60% of people have higher expectations of hygiene in aged homes post the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

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### Expectation to increase hygiene standards in aged care homes

Nearly  
**60%**



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<sup>1</sup> Here's What Australians Googled in the First Half of 2020 - Sarah Basford Canales, July 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Essentials Initiative Survey 2020 – 2021 on the Implications of COVID-19.



**7 in 10**

PEOPLE USE SOAP MORE FREQUENTLY SINCE THE SPREAD OF COVID-19.<sup>3</sup>

**62%**

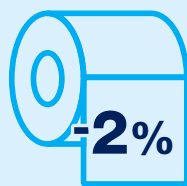
OF PEOPLE HAVE STARTED USING SANITISERS MORE FREQUENTLY.<sup>4</sup>

The use of hygiene products has also seen a marked increase owing to the pandemic. Research shows that 7 in 10 people use soap more frequently since the spread of COVID-19.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, 62% of people have started using sanitisers more frequently.<sup>4</sup> These findings are in line with sales data from Tork, which revealed that the sales of sanitisers and soaps were up by 15% in Australia and New Zealand. On the other hand, the sales of toilet paper have actually gone down by 2% due to reduced traffic in out of home bathrooms. With the elderly at high-risk for infections, elderly care has become a matter of concern now more than ever, and carers in all aged care facilities are determined to do all they can to ensure residents as well as their families feel safe, secure and satisfied with the hygiene practices at their facilities.

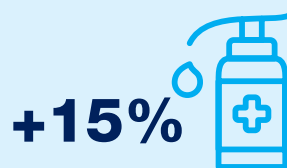
### Tork Australia/New Zealand sales volume Jan–July 2021 vs 2019



Hand towel



Toilet paper



Sanitisers and soap



Of people have changed the way they wash their hands.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Evolution of Hygiene Preferences Post COVID-19, Tork Survey 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Evolution of Hygiene Preferences Post COVID-19, Tork Survey 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Essentials Initiative Global Survey 2020-2021.

The risk of suicide in residential aged care has also increased,<sup>6</sup> which can consequently prompt residents to leave facilities.



## Reductions in Occupancy Rates with the onset of COVID-19

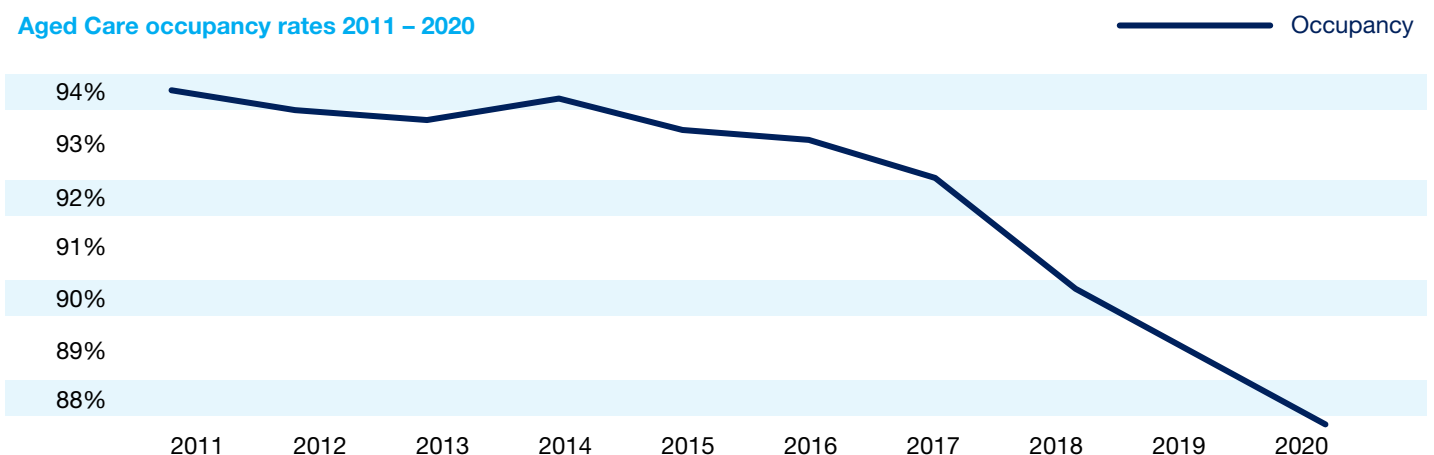
In addition to increased regulations and requirements, the aged care industry has unfortunately also witnessed negative impacts of the pandemic on profitability and occupancy rates.

The mental health of the residents is also adversely affected by the restrictions placed due to the spread of COVID-19. The pandemic has caused restrictions and limitations on visitors, which can leave residents feeling isolated and dejected. According to a report, COVID-19 has seen a large increase in depression, anxiety and confusion in residents.

The risk of suicide in residential aged care has also increased,<sup>6</sup> which can consequently prompt residents and their families to withdraw from facilities. According to a government report, occupancy rates for residential aged care in 2020 dropped to the lowest rate in a decade.<sup>7</sup> This report by the Productivity Commission about the performance of the aged care sector reveals that as of 30 June 2020, the occupancy rate for residential aged care was 88.3 per cent — the lowest rate recorded in the decade the data has been collected.<sup>8</sup> According to consumer advocates, fears around COVID-19 have caused people to leave or stay in their homes longer contributing to these low rates.

Upholding high standards of hygiene has always been pivotal for aged care providers, however, as a result of the pandemic this has become even more crucial because people are more aware and scrutinous, as clearly demonstrated by the increasing expectations and increased usage of hygiene products.

Aged Care occupancy rates 2011 – 2020



<sup>6</sup> Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety – Aged care and COVID-19: a special report.

<sup>7</sup> Inside Ageing, Lowest aged care occupancy rates in a decade, January 2021.

<sup>8</sup> HelloCare, Older Australians opt out of residential aged care as occupancy rates fall to decade lows, January 2021.



## Lessons from the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented and therefore the magnitude of challenges it brought in its wake were unforeseen. Providers and carers have had many insights to future proof their facilities.<sup>9</sup>

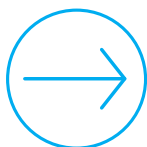


### Several lessons have been learnt including:

- The importance of stress testing and practising outbreak management planning to strengthen readiness and enable staff to act quickly if and when an outbreak occurs.
- The benefits of utilising a command and control structure that can help provide clear reporting lines in conjunction with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Workforce planning and being able to source surge staff if and when the need arises (especially if carers are infected and have to go into isolation, and subsequently close contacts are instructed to stand down).
- The pivotal nature of upholding hygiene standards and educating all carers and management on best practice to prevent the spread of germs and bacteria.

**Providers and carers have been pushed to their limits and remain as resilient as can be given the circumstances, even as the battle against the pandemic continues to pose new challenges, the aim is to be as prepared as possible.**

<sup>9</sup> Australian Government Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, Lessons learned by aged care providers experiencing outbreaks of COVID-19 in Victoria, Australia.



## The next steps towards making facilities a safe home for residents

One of the main agendas for all carers, facility managers, and clinical managers alike, is to help restore the **confidence** that hygiene is being taken care of, and that residents and visitors will be **safe and secure** at their facilities. Successfully reinstating confidence can help ensure the safe return of residents and visitors, as well as help secure new admissions.

In order to achieve this, the following steps can be undertaken:

### Identify the gaps within the current health and hygiene provisions:

- Conduct internal audits to identify the areas where improvements and solutions are required.
- Implement changes based on the results of the audit.
- Notify both - the residents as well as their families - to communicate the steps you have undertaken to improve the hygiene standards at your facility.



# 60%

of people would feel more secure if they had more details about the hygiene practices in public spaces.<sup>10</sup>

### Implement immediate solutions for hygiene provisions that aren't functioning well:

- Fix any broken dispensers that are identified.
- Increase dispenser capacities, where required, to ensure products don't run out. This also saves staff time refilling dispensers and travelling to store rooms when products run out.
- If you find that toilets are being blocked with hand towels, make a switch to flushable paper hand towels.
- Ensure inclusivity by installing dispensers that are easy to use for all residents, carers, and visitors. In order to do so, look for dispensers with an "Easy to use" certification from companies that are working with the new [Design for All EN 17161 standards](#).

<sup>10</sup> Essentials Initiative Global Survey 2020-2021.



**Install new dispensers that are touch free to ensure good hygiene.**

**Introduce measures to improve overall hygiene:**

- Use quality products for maximum compliance
  - Use soft hand towels that aren't abrasive on the skin.
  - Use premium soaps that are unscented to maintain skin health.
- Ensure that you have the right products in the right places.
- Ensure the dispensers you install are easy to clean with no traps for build-up. Look for HACCP certified dispensers that have been tested for hygiene.
- Use hand sanitisers with a minimum 70% alcohol content because the effectiveness of an alcohol-based sanitiser depends on the amount of alcohol in the formulation.<sup>11</sup>
- Use bins that house the bag inside to prevent bacteria and viruses collecting on the bags, and ensure bins are easy to clean and wipe down.
- Avoid hand dryers, dry hands with paper towels as per Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare.<sup>12</sup>
- Conduct regular staff training on hand hygiene and surface hygiene.

**Implement noticeable changes at your facility:**

- Install new dispensers that are touch free to ensure good hygiene.
- Place hygiene equipment in visible and accessible areas where there's a natural flow of traffic so that staff, residents and visitors are prompted to maintain good hygiene.
- Introduce or update hand hygiene related signage at strategic places.
- Communicate the increased levels of sanitation undertaken to give people confidence in your hygiene standards.

**These measures can help create a  
safe environment  
for staff, residents and visitors.**

<sup>11</sup> Australian Government Department of Health, Hand sanitisers: Information for consumers, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare, 2019, v11.9.



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