

A NEW APPROACH

ALEX FISHER, PRESIDENT AND CO-FOUNDER OF SHERPA, LOOKS AT HOW COVID-19 HAS CHANGED SALES FOR CARE HOMES AND COMMUNITIES



Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, media coverage has eroded public confidence in the safety of care homes. Sales teams have found that new enquiries are down, as are move-ins. Restrictions and social distancing measures have made tours and visits untenable. A traditional, product-centred selling method that focuses on care home itself—and not the person making the decision—hasn't worked in the current sales scenario. In fact, it's never been effective, especially for those prospective buyers who say they aren't ready yet.

Achieving consistent private pay sales and resident occupancy in the care home sector has always been challenging. A transactional approach, where discussions revolve around the property, services and costs, can lead to a sale, especially in cases of urgency or need. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic has shone a glaring light on the fragility of relying on high volumes and quick turnover of new enquiries, calls and tours to support occupancy growth.

The organisations we've seen succeed during the pandemic haven't focused their efforts on showing the building or matching amenities and services. Instead, they've spent more time engaged in getting to know their prospective residents. They've asked questions not directly related to the sale. They've taken time to plan and journal their interactions with older adults and their families.

Sherpa data shows that care home sales professionals who spent two-and-a-half hours engaged in these activities doubled their tour-to-move-in conversions compared to those who spent one hour or less. These top performers cultivated a relationship of trust and empathy and understand prospects' motivators and resistance to change. They explained costs and features of their property leading up to the sale, but only after spending the time to connect with and provide support to those making the decision.

Having a dedicated sales team and allowing time for relationship-building between sales professionals and prospective residents is key to growth. Sian Hammer, our Senior Business Development Director, has more than 12 years' experience in senior living sales and operations. She understands the material difference investing in sales can make: "Prospect-centred selling, as opposed to product-centred selling, delivers demonstrable improvements in revenue performance," she said.

"By investing time to understand the concerns and desires of potential residents, sales teams can develop a genuine rapport while establishing a detailed awareness of the barriers they face to achieving a successful conversion. This approach to sales is needed more than ever, with care organisations looking to recover their financial positions from the pandemic."

Fears around COVID-19 have been just one of many barriers to a prospective resident making a decision. Top performers have been using the same techniques since before the pandemic. They make it clear that their intention is to help rather than sell. Then they investigate objections and connect on a deeper level through conversation. Most importantly, sales interactions that were most successful reflected their organisation's ethos, that residents should be seen, heard and valued. When sales professionals connect with a prospective resident through empathy and with the right motivations, they will help more older adults and their families be ready for change. [CTIP](#)