**The role of new technologies in the age friendly community of 2030**

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Technologies are part of our everyday life. From the humble pencil to the latest smartphone, we rely on a range of tools and systems to help us with our daily tasks. Yet, it is the potential for new technologies that generates excitement, especially those that promise to improve autonomy, mobility and independence for older people while also reducing the costs of providing aged care to growing numbers of people.

An age friendly community in Australia’s future has some specific requirements. Half of Australia’s population was either born overseas or has a parent born overseas and we have one of the highest rates of internal migration in the world. This means that many families are living at a distance and rely on social media and telephones to keep in touch. Yet, not everyone has good access to even these basic technologies, with grandparents in Melbourne often finding it easier to keep in touch with grandchildren living overseas than it is to talk with friends and relatives living in rural Australia.

Wifi is now like electricity and running water – an entry-level expectation, not a luxury. Access to the Internet allows people to access essential health, shopping and other online services and information. Digital inclusion is now essential for social inclusion, but many older people remain outsiders in online spaces. This will change.

Socialising in the future will be just as likely to happen in a virtual reality game online as with the person living next door. Meanwhile, communicating with the neighbour will also become easier, with google translate and memory devices allowing people to share their experiences across diverse languages, cultures and backgrounds.

It is not only the Internet and smartphone changing what it means to have an age friendly community. Other technologies are being adapted to support autonomy and independence for older people. In Smart Homes, everyday objects such as a kettle or fridge are linked to an advanced computing system, which analyses an individual’s typical behaviours. Carers are then alerted when a person’s activities shift, prompting them to check in that all is well.

In a similar style, Geofencing tools enable people with dementia to maintain independence, but within boundaries that have been identified as safe. Tracking devices alert carers when a wearer leaves a particular zone and pinpoints their location using radio transmitters or GPS.

Other developers recognise that ill health and getting lost are not the only concerns of older people. In the Bristol Tangible Memories project, designers and social scientists are co-designing tools that improve life from the perspective of older people themselves, rather than from the perspective of their care. One resulting prototype is an enhanced rocking chair. The headrest contains speakers that play recordings of songs, poems and sounds from nature, triggered by sitting in and rocking the chair. The dementia patients who have been testing the prototype seem happier, enjoying this new way to meditate and reminisce.

The search for new and better technologies should nevertheless be considered with caution.

New technologies do more than just address a specific problem: they also change how people live and how they relate to each other. Indeed, one of the biggest challenges in adopting new technologies for the future lies in making sure they improve relationships and social participation.

One of the negative side effects of many new technologies is a reduced need to actually spend time with other people. Tracking technologies, social media and memory tools all provide connection, but is online connection enough?

The big challenge for the future is not in designing new technologies, which seems to be the easy part. Rather, it lies in making sure that new technologies help to produce and support communities and families, which are also age friendly.

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