Hard-wiring digitally connected care and independent living

In this blog Jeremy Porteus, vice-chair of the Housing & Ageing Alliance and Chief Executive of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network, emphasises the need for connectivity to make the most use of telecare and telehealth services and highlights the opportunity created when digital inequality, digital inclusion and digital integration is addressed.

Unlike its French counterpart, people have different ideas about just when the Digital Revolution started. One thing is for sure though: Whether you mark it from the creation of the first computers, the invention of the World Wide Web in 1980 or the arrival of the i-pad in 2010, its potential impact on housing for older and other vulnerable people remains under-exploited

The sector and its partners in healthcare have certainly had cloud-based services and products at least since Apple unleashed a wave of excitement across Silicon Valley and the first millennials. However, as two recent reports have reminded us, we've failed to connect those housing, care and health tech advances.

The reports do also suggest, however, that those deficits present opportunities.

The TEC Services Association and Association of Directors of Adult Social Services established a commission to study how technology could be truly integrated into adult social care and published a White Paper in March. It highlighted the need for tec-enabled services to be co-produced with service users, their carers and families. As well as emphasising training and data ownership issues, the report emphasised that digital will only fully deliver if organisations collaborate in service delivery.

And as a technical briefing for the Centre for Better Ageing's 'Good Home Inquiry', published last month, said: *"Increasing use of technology within the home means that anyone left without a good internet connection or the skills to make use of it will be left at a disadvantage. Particularly with a shift to 'virtual' services in a post-COVID world, digital connectivity will be as much a part of what makes a good home as warmth, comfort and safety."*

The report itself noted that these technologies *"may also have the potential to directly improve housing quality and support more people to stay living independently in their homes for longer".*

Connectivity is crucial to make the most use of telecare and telehealth services. Yet some estimates suggest that 16% of older people in the UK have absolutely no digital interactions or access at all.

I would suggest that themes are emerging here that could produce a virtuous circle.

Underpinning any progress is the need to address **digital inequality** – we simply cannot transform care and support services in people's own homes if some older people are trapped on the wrong side of the digital divide. Secondly, **digital inclusion** - the housing with care, social care and healthcare sectors must work with industry to ensure that technology innovations are coproduced and customer-driven. They should meet the needs – and the design aspirations – of those we intend to use them.

And finally, service commissioners and providers have to focus on **digital integration**. This, in the tech jargon, is 'interoperability' but it also means the integration of housing, care and health systems and services that has, at times, seemed almost a chimera.

With everyone connected via high quality broadband, effective and attractive digital care technology and integrated delivery of both personal and digital services, the virtuous circle may well just kick in.

I'm pleased to say that, driven partly by the tech-enabled care industry's support for recognised standards, next month will see the launch of the first report by the 'TAPPI' Inquiry. Chaired by Professor Roy Sandbach and funded by the Dunhill Medical Trust, it will seek to cement that virtuous circle into place. A successor to the five HAPPI reports, it is another step towards maximising the impact that technology can have on older people's enjoyment of their homes and how they receive care and support.

Interestingly, 'adaptability and care ready design', is one of the ten core HAPPI principles that now form a benchmark for housing with care. Now, the Technology for our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation (TAPPI) seeks to put flesh on that bone by scoping out the potential and by setting out the ten principles for ensuring technology is incorporated into housing for a range of purposes – including the delivery of telecare and telehealth.

The Inquiry's second phase will focus on creating a TAPPI Framework for Action that builds on these principles and provides a practical foundation for meaningful technology innovation in housing and care development. The framework could encourage us all to embrace technology and better understand its potential to support us to live independent, happy and healthy lives.

The revolution will be technologized.

To register for the online TAPPI Inquiry report launch on Tuesday, 26 October 2021 (4pm), visit:
https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Events/HAPPI-Hour-Tap-into-the-TAPPI-Inquiry-report-launch/

This Housing LIN blog is one of a series being produced by members of the Housing and Ageing Alliance*, a collective of local and national organisations working together to bring about improvements to the housing and living conditions of older people.*