

4

Critical factors to
**meet your vision
for technology**
in supported
housing

Including insights from over
120 supported housing
professionals via research
undertaken in partnership
with Housing LIN.

Intro

4 critical factors to meet your vision for technology in supported housing:

Are your Technology Enabled Care Services (TECS) partners part of the evolution of change?

This guide is the second in a series from Appello highlighting the changing landscape for the delivery of Technology Enabled Care Services (TECS).

Interviews and independent research undertaken with the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) of 120 senior executives from providers of supported, sheltered and retirement housing has influenced the series of guides.

Advances in technology opens up new horizons in independent living. The emergence of COVID-19 further pushed technology to the top of the agenda for housing organisations as they sought new ways to operate in the 'new normal' with **85% of housing providers asserting that COVID-19 had highlighted the importance of the technology they provide to residents and customers.**

From technology that can manage wellbeing and health, to controlling a person's environment, IoT further enhanced the potential for TECS.

Alongside this, video technology has revolutionised the way that we communicate, and has opened up new ways for housing organisations to manage properties and keep connected to residents. The potential of cutting-edge technologies to support predictive, preventative and personalised care is huge.

Residents expect housing providers to offer technological solutions that are in line with their lifestyle and living aspirations. They want to be able to benefit from the latest consumer tech, that enables healthier, safer, independent living.

But realising your vision for technology in supported housing is not as easy as procuring the latest feature-rich device.

There are four key critical factors you need to consider when planning for, and delivering, your vision for technology in supported housing.

01

Release the shackles by embracing open standards.

Integrating consumer-led smart technology into supported housing comes from the aspiration to provide older people, with cost effective, life-enhancing support and control over their daily lives.

In a world living under the constraints of social distancing and shielding, these technologies become even more important in helping older people to remain safe and happy outside of formal care with more control over their daily lives.

In our survey of housing organisations, **66% said that they would expect to see more usage of technology for managing wellbeing such as tracking exercise or food intake, 77% said that they would see more usage of technology for managing health such as monitoring vital signs or conditions and 57% said that they would see more usage of technology for controlling their environment such as smart lighting, heating and blinds following COVID-19.**

The market for smart technology is now maturing to the level where there is a huge choice of devices for housing organisations to cherry-pick from. And we expect to see the market continue to grow, in line with the release of new technological solutions. The possibilities are potentially endless, if you adopt technologies with open standards.

Open standards are important to ensure that systems work and talk to each other and where data is collected by these devices, that data is not 'locked in' to provide analytics that can improve proactive and preventative care.

Crucially, an open protocol environment ensures innovation and means that you won't be locked in to a particular manufacturers' suite of solutions. This helps ensure that you are able to enjoy the freedom of taking a modular approach to new and emerging smart technologies to fit the needs of your residents and organisation, today and in years to come.

Recommendation

1. Review your requirements for choice. If you need freedom to choose between suppliers and manufacturers, and to integrate all your different devices together, choosing to work with an open protocol might be the best choice for you. If you only need to get a defined set of devices or systems to act as a closed loop for the life of the products then a proprietary protocol might offer that for you.

As a commissioner of technology, open standards also puts you in a stronger position as you are not constricted by the technology available to you. This ensures you are in more powerful position to negotiate the market and select technology based on design, features, service and cost.

An open protocol approach is important to us because we see the need for interoperability to be the way of the future. Not only for building better and more inclusive service offerings, but to drive costs down by allowing different products to communicate, to avoid potentially high proprietary costs with a single vendor, often in areas they may not be an expert in. With the IoT being the default position for technology in the future, the ability of a boiler to talk to an embedded sensor in an apartment, and seamlessly to an offsite office, the repairs service, and the supplier, will be as important as the ability to present a unified service offering to the resident, placing their access to their communication, payments, repairs, support, and care needs, into their own home. This is all underpinned by open protocol and the common-sense approach that is allowing differing technologies to communicate with each other.

Stuart Harper - Head of Innovation and Technology, C&C Housing Trust

02

Look to derive benefit from cloud computing.

While the housing and care sectors might have been slower than most to embrace cloud, adoption is growing at a pace with many now following a cloud-first approach.

Cloud-first sits at the heart of digital transformation as it enables organisations to treat compute, network, storage and power as utilities. This means they can spend more time on building services to meet evolving user needs. Additionally organisations can benefit from greater flexibility to trial new services or make changes, and reap the cost savings, scalability and security of cloud.

But for a true cloud-first approach, you need to look both inside and outside of your organisation. Are your suppliers on the same cloud journey? Can they support your cloud aspirations? Cloud will enable monitoring services to remain robust, and for housing providers to ensure they keep their data driven edge in a GDPR compliant manner.

Resilience

Cloud allows for flexibility. As an example in TECS, it meant that at the start of lock-down, those monitoring centres that were cloud-enabled could seamlessly have their operators working from home and still support end-customers. Our survey found that enabling staff to work from home, whilst maintaining visibility of property and customers was seen as an essential priority.

Going forwards, if a second wave of COVID-19 does come, cloud will support those staff to work from home again so that they can continue to respond to resident calls, quickly. In an uncertain world, agility cannot be underestimated.

Meeting unexpected demand

Usually telecare operators know when calls will peak – in the morning and before bed, on Mother's Day and at Easter. Monitoring centres can plan for these spikes in activity, ensuring that there are enough call operatives available to meet demand.

But what if those peaks happen when it's not expected? Cloud allows monitoring centres to create elasticity in their service and utilise 'on call' staff to work from home and alleviate strain, so that the service can be maintained.

Research indicates that 72% of contact centres believe that some aspects of working from home will continue in the long term. The reality is, that those who can will probably move forward with a hybrid model where they are able to enjoy more flexibility.



02

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Disaster recovery (DR)

Cloud enables monitoring centres to provide better DR services, quickly switching to another DR site as opposed to physically travelling there. From a business continuity perspective, cloud enables staff to work remotely, while still supporting residents. This eradicates the need to employ expensive agency staff to cover for vulnerable staff members who are self-isolating or shielding at home.

Some degree of WFH will remain

For housing providers to effectively work from home, they need access to data remotely. Cloud capabilities mean TECS providers can provide access to live data remotely. From seeing onsite activity such as emergency incidences, to be able to obtain and edit data so that critical information is always accurate.

Communication

80% believe video communication between residents and staff is becoming more important to their organisation because of COVID-19 and cloud will be the enabler in utilising video calling further.

Cloud will allow far greater connectivity, enabling video calling between staff offsite and residents, and friends and family, and where appropriate even the monitoring centre.

Recommendation

1. Ensure that your Business Continuity Plan is aligned to that of your key suppliers. Workshop together how your services will perform under various scenarios. COVID-19 has taught us that even the most hard to believe situations can become reality.
2. Identify the information and services your staff will need to access to work effectively away from their development.

“We have been agile working for the past couple of years, and the ability to access our telecare information remotely, via AppelloSBR has enhanced this. It gives us access to all customer details on the go, enabling us to spend more time with our customers and less time in the office. It also allows us to ensure that data is updated in real time, meaning there isn't an update window during travel.

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the importance of this further, as we've had limited access to our offices. However, having access to critical data where and when we need it means that we have still been able to carry out essential services with our customers.”

Chris Birch, Older Persons Technology Lead, Plus Dane Housing

03

Expect innovation to come from outside.

Like in every other industry, research and development (R&D) provides a key means for future growth in our sector. However, many housing providers have limited resource to invest in innovation and to even maintain awareness of the constantly changing technology landscape.

Where this is the case, housing organisations should be looking at leveraging their supplier base and practising 'supplier-enabled innovation'.

In its simplest form, supplier-enabled innovation is created when the supplier and organisation work together collaboratively to develop products based on their combined knowledge, experience and expertise. This often results in more innovative new solutions or better refined or existing ones.

When was the last time your supplier partners showed their ability to innovate? Do you feel like your suppliers are moving forward with a similar vision for technology as your organisations? Perhaps your next best idea will come from outside of your own organisation. Or similarly, you might have some brilliant ideas internally that would drive innovation in a supplier product that would benefit your organisation and customers.

Supplier innovation can create entirely new business opportunities. In a digital, open environment many new services can be combined, and made available to housing customers. This presents a commercial opportunity for add-on services.

Recommendation

1. Regularly assess the innovation bought to you by your major suppliers in TECS and other service areas. Consider an innovation KPI for them where you don't already have them.
2. Rate the degree to which your key suppliers innovations have helped your organisation, and your customers, do better than they might otherwise have done during COVID-19. Use this as part of your performance reviews.
3. Identify the products, technology, or process areas you strategically need to collaborate on with suppliers and set mutual objectives to help progress these.

"We as organisations/customers need to determine what we want/need in order to approach the market with a well thought out proposition. Likewise, I think the market needs to anticipate what organisations need, possibly even before they know it themselves. If we don't work in this way, chances are you will buy the next shiny new thing but it won't perform as you thought/expected it would. I definitely think it is incumbent on suppliers to keep being innovative and to showcase this innovation on a regular basis."

Tony Clark, Director of Independent Living, Orbit

"The use of technology now plays a key part in that service provision, and in the support of both residents and staff, often in an ever more remote capacity. Choosing a forward-looking innovator is often vital in the ability to take advantages of these new cost and resource saving technologies."

Stuart Harper - Head of Innovation and Technology, C&C Housing Trust

04

Don't let partners create barriers.

Closed protocols are not the only barrier to embracing new technology. The TECS industry has, in the past, had a reputation for locking housing providers and local authorities into contracts that have stifled technology adoption.

The transformational benefits of digital telecare are now well understood. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, **9 out of 10 housing providers state that they are going to look to utilise technology more to support residents who may be self-isolating or shielding.** But do their suppliers share the same ambition and have the right capabilities? For example, are these housing providers going to be limited by the monitoring services they have available?

Housing providers need to be assured that they have a monitoring service that has the capabilities to monitor, embrace and reap the advantages of digital technology. Not at some stage in the future, but right now. A monitoring provider who is meeting the changing market needs and needs of customers.

A monitoring service without these capabilities will be a huge limitation to housing providers as they look to utilise technology in new areas, presenting a barrier to using the latest digital technologies that offer the maximum benefits to customer, staff and organisations.

Recommendation

1. Think about the experience you want your customers and colleagues to have over the months and years ahead. Decide how much of that is delivered by current or future digital services and make sure your suppliers are already proven at delivering those benefits.

"It is extremely important to us that our monitoring provider can monitor digital connections as we see it as providing the best technological solution to our customers, whilst also giving us enhanced data which we will be able to use to improve the service we provide."

Chris Birch, Older Persons Technology Lead, Plus Dane Housing

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For more on housing and digital technology generally, visit the Housing LIN's pages:
www.housinglin.org.uk/going-digital/