appello

4

Reasons housing providers must **revise their Telecare needs** post COVID-19

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

Housing LIN

Intro

4 reasons housing providers must revise their Telecare needs post COVID-19

This guide is the first 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.

Amongst many reports of outstanding people, frontline workers and communities, there have been stories of how technology has supported new ways of life. From video bingo within housing developments, to staff working remotely whilst continuing to support, communicate and monitor residents. These success stories have led to **85% housing providers claiming their perceptions on the use of technology have changed as a result of COVID-19.**

Technology and innovation have been positives in a challenging environment. However, the disparity between those with and without technology has been evident, and opportunities for technology to further support and improve health and wellbeing have been clearly visible. The housing sector appears ready to act though, and embrace technology, **74% feel that their requirements for telecare and wellbeing technologies have changed as a result of the pandemic**.

We are in a time of uncertainty, so as housing providers look to accelerate their plans, how do we ensure that technology and services commissioned today meet the needs of customers, staff and organisations, now and in the future?

01

Vulnerable communities need support to maintain their social connections.

Loneliness and isolation impact on physical and mental health. Which in turn increases the likelihood of medical intervention – at a time when it was crucial to limit the number of people going into clinical settings.

The uniquely challenging emergence of COVID-19 pushed forward the loneliness and social isolation agenda at a rate none of us could have predicted.

For vulnerable people confined to their homes, they found themselves with almost non-existent access to support and care staff, their neighbours, community groups, family and friends.

As we all get used to the 'new normal', wellbeing-led restrictions on vulnerable people are likely to remain in place for some time. So, it's absolutely critical that housing providers are moving forward at a pace with plans to provide residents with the means to maintain visual communication with their social networks.

During COVID-19 those with video communication capabilities within supported housing have been at a significant advantage. The ability to maintain communication with staff and loved ones has been embraced, and Appello saw a **192% increase in video calling amongst residents during the pandemic.**

With the right support, there is huge potential for housing providers to harness communication technologies to help connect older people and promote digital inclusion.

Recommendation

1. Introduce digital advocates within your organisation, and amongst residents. Residents who are more digitally savvy, will embrace the responsibility and be best placed to educate their peers. These individuals can then act as ambassadors for other digital solutions, helping to allay any fears of other residents as you introduce new technologies into your developments.

2. Where residents are unable to attend communal activities on site due to self-isolation, mobility or general sickness, continue to involve them by allowing them to video into the event from their apartment. This is great for morale and maintaining social connections.

82% of housing providers state: 'Enabling residents to communicate with carers, family and/or friends remotely' is a high or essential priority. following COVID-19.

"Residents who were required to self-isolate due to their vulnerability have been provided with a communication lifeline. Video has enabled them to maintain social and visual engagement with their friends and neighbours. Furthermore, staff have been able to maintain important visual contact with our vulnerable residents, whilst adhering to social distancing. This has played a vital role in supporting their wellbeing.

Jan Davis, Dementia Lead,
Grand Union Housing Group

02

Remote working will be here to stay.

A reduction in permanent site staff has been a growing trend within supported housing for the last decade and there has been a move towards staff managing multiple sites.

As the pandemic took hold, many housing providers took the decision for staff to work remotely. The challenge that quickly presented itself was how to maintain visibility and awareness of what was happening within developments? How do we ensure that our property and assets are functioning appropriately, and most importantly the wellbeing of our residents?

Some, with digital telecare services, were able to do this, but many were not, as a result housing provider have stated that '**enabling staff to work from home, whilst maintaining visibility of property and customers' is their top priority for technology post COVID-19.**

> "*We are in the process of introducing a work from home one day per week policy for our scheme-based teams, to provide a better work/home life balance. CV-19 has also shown us that remote working is not only doable but that it can still provide a good quality of support for residents."*

Tony Clark, Director of Independent Living, Orbit Group

Recommendation

1. As a stepping stone to remote working, trial video calls from the site office one day a week, as opposed to physical visits to understand the impact of slightly less physical contact.

2. Ensure that you have the ability to immediately access and update resident emergency information remotely.

80% of housing providers believe video communication between residents and staff is becoming more important to their organisation because of COVID-19.

03

How we access healthcare services will change.

It is essential that older people are supported to remain as healthy and independent as possible, for as long as possible, and that they receive the highest quality care when they need it.

As the UK went into lockdown, access to many healthcare services ground to a halt. Leaving the home to visit primary care was either not appropriate or not possible, at best a telephone conversation was often the only service available. When most of us are avidly using video calling with friends and family, why are we not able to do this with our healthcare sector?

There are services available, and online GP services reported less than a 1% decline in consultation rates in comparison to a reported 33% decline in GP practices during the same period[1]. It is likely that COVID-19 will be the catalyst for greater use of video appointments within the health sector. It is therefore unsurprising that **78% of housing professionals felt 'enabling residents to communicate with healthcare professionals remotely' was a high or essential priority following COVID-19.**

For housing providers, digital telecare can act as the enabler for the delivery of these service. Providing a platform to deliver remote healthcare services, and ensuring residents are equipped with video calling equipment to embrace these services when they become more prevalent.

"Having access to these services during these uncertain times is really important for key services to still operate effectively in a safe way but still meeting the needs of those most at risk of long-term health conditions. I believe these services would be more effective, appointments could be completed a lot quicker and waiting times would be reduced which ultimately improving the overall health and wellbeing of the community."

Denise Williams, Head of Support,
Blackpool Coastal Housing

Recommendation
Reports suggest those familiar with conducting appointments remotely were able to adapt quickly to the demands of COVID-19 so we recommend running a small trial with your TECS provider, and an online GP service to identify the benefits of a full-scale programme.

04 More services are being accessed online.

Access to the internet is an increasingly important way to connect older people to services and information. It can also be critical in the distribution of important updates, where many housing providers still rely of traditional forms of communication such as mail, it is unsurprising that in a fast changing news environment such as COVID-19, communication with residents was a significant challenge. As a result, **97% of housing providers feel that the use of technology to communicate with residents will increase.**

In an uncertain world, with shielding and social distancing it is becoming even more vital to help older and vulnerable people to access support, and services from paying bills online to accessing pensions and shopping from home while keeping safe.

"Trying to get regular updates to residents as often as things were changing was a real challenge for us. To communicate in this way is also costly and time consuming. Technology has to be the solution to this one. Whether that is via the warden call system or some other platform, the ability to communicate quickly and on mass has the potential to be a real game changer."

Tony Clark, Director of Independent Living, Orbit Group.

Just under half (40%) of those aged between 70 and 79 have used online sources of support and information during the pandemic. That figure was still 33% for those aged 80 and over.

Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Recommendation

1. Audit your organisation to understand what communications you currently provide to customers physically that you could deliver online, more cost effectively and efficiently.

2. Integrate your housing organisations online services such as maintenance portals or payment gateways with your telecare system, to provide all residents with simple access to these services directly in their apartment.

In group developments, residents might not have access to the internet and the WiFi provided in communal areas was great before the pandemic, but social distancing quickly made that obsolete. Internet connectivity must be provided to residents' personal living spaces.

Digital telecare can offer WiFi hotspot access in individual apartments. This means that it's now easier than ever to supply all residents at a residential property with internet as part of the telecare system.

[1] https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/charts-and-infographics/how-has-covid-19-affected-service-delivery-in-gp-practices