



Is digital the new black? Technology-enabled housing with care – why aren't we further ahead?

Written by Ali Rogan, External Affairs Director at Tunstall Healthcare, and Author of a new paper, 'Unleashing the power of digital communications'.

We're all different, but as we grow older most of us want similar things. To remain independent and live somewhere safely and with dignity. To have the care and support we need and feel connected to our families and community. However, when we look at the journey for people as they age or come into crisis, there is a limited choice of pathways and types of accommodation to meet their needs.

Housing providers continue to face some major challenges. Be it funding, increasing demand/limited supply (there is currently a 25% gap between demand for specialist housing or care, and the supply), the need to integrate services, and increasing customer expectations.

Having worked with the housing sector for 50 years or so, Tunstall has learnt a lot about the technological infrastructures required to support a great deal of diverse services – from basic warden call services and lone working, to supporting people with domestic violence, dementia, learning or physical disability, mental health or complex needs. But, more importantly, and an area that we learn more about every day, the needs and aspirations of the people who live in your homes.

Technology is fast moving

Technically we can't stand still. Because we live in a fast moving world, we are determined to get the journey from analogue to digital right. Communications technology and connectivity is constantly progressing and currently there is a significant shift towards ubiquitous Internet Protocols (IP) across Europe. IP and mobile technology is creating an entirely new environment in the home where connectivity will rule. Importantly, it will enable the delivery of more flexible and integrated models of housing with care.

Findings from “unleashing the power of digital communications”

I'm pleased to share with you a new white paper produced in conjunction with the Housing LIN. This short paper summarises the results from an online survey and lively workshop held with the South West Housing LIN leadership set last month entitled, 'Revolutionising housing with care with life enhancing technologies'.¹

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You told us that the biggest barrier to moving forward with technology was **culture** – with silo working, fear of change, safeguarding worries and a lack of leadership/oversight. But other barriers include:

- **Awareness** - if you don't know what's out there, how can you change
- **Commissioning** and procurement / leadership - Trying to move to outcome focused care planning and individualised commissioning is a big challenge. There is also confused ownership of housing, support and care functions
- **Budgets** - there is underinvestment in the development of new or redevelopment of existing specialised housing and uncertainty of revenue funding

So how do we break down the barriers?

- **Staged approach** - You need a phased introduction and roll out of new ways of working. Gradually staff become more aware, managing care needs differently.
- **Funding options** - Flexibility in options is key here – a mix of leasing, capital, revenue and self-funders. In our experience, if the idea is strong enough and the evidence is there to back you up, the money is found.
- **Communication** - Engaging stakeholders at an early stage is imperative. It's about doing the right thing at the right time and at right price – it only works if embedded into practice. Passion and being tenacious is key.
- **Integrated approach** - Technology itself isn't the solution but needs to be part of an integrated approach. An exemplar service also works closely with multi-disciplinary teams across health, social care and the third sector.

Technology is a fantastic support to integrating housing with health and care delivery and providing a better quality of life to residents, but we understand that sometimes things get in the way.

So is digital the new black? Have a look at the white paper and tell me what you think - Alison.Rogan@tunstall.com

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