

# People at the heart of technology - Giving people the power to choose how they want to live

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*Angus Honeysett, Head of Market Access at Tunstall Healthcare, summarises his recent presentation at Health + Care, 18-19 May, ExCeL London.*

Between now and 2040 it is predicted there will be an extra six million over 65s in the UK. Many of these citizens will need support from our already overstretched health, housing and social care services, so now is the time to consider how we can prepare these services for the future, and the role of technology in this.

Technology has become an accepted norm at home, especially during Covid when technology offered an invaluable way for vulnerable people isolating at home to remain connected to friends and family. Systems like telecare and telehealth also provided reassurance and, in some cases, life-saving support.

As we look to a more digital future, how can we best harness the power of the connected world and the value that can come from technology solutions both socially and financially to help us improve citizen's lives?

## Positive action

The importance of integrating health, housing and care has been recognised by policy makers, commissioners and providers for decades. The introduction of Integrated Care Systems is based upon the principle of the benefits being delivered through collaborative working. And despite the associated difficulties, we need to not just debate integration, but actually take practical steps to implement it. Working together is in everyone's interests; with such a large part of the population having health and care needs it makes sense to join them up – at home, where they want to be, and at the same time making care more effective.

Shared common goals is also important. It's about population health – health, housing and care working together to put the citizen at the heart of decisions made about them and their care. Of course, all three are dependent on each other – if we don't do a good job with care, citizens will need the health system and if we don't keep citizens well, it has an impact on housing. We need to have a truly joined up, integrated approach but most importantly, we need to listen to citizens, understand their everyday needs and work together to bridge gaps whether it be in health, housing or care.

## Citizen-led solutions

For me, the new approach relies upon putting the citizen is at the centre of everything we do, whether that is through early intervention, improving their well-being or increasing their independence. If we improve outcomes for citizens, it has a direct positive impact on Primary, Secondary and Social Care. For example, improved condition management and medication compliance has a clear impact on decreasing GP visits, clinicians are able to target patients that need support rather than those that just need to be monitored and early intervention can prevent future, often high cost, care and support being required. Using technology to support people at home is cost-effective, means citizens can stay at home

for longer and increases quality of life. Likewise, relatively low-cost telehealth or telecare systems can help to avoid hospital admission, delay and prevent the need for residential care and reduce carer burnout.

A study of Tunstall's work in Spain showed that the use of proactive telecare decreased entry into residential care by 8.6 months and decreased ambulance mobilisation by 33%. Get it right for the citizen and benefits flow through the system.

## **Challenges and opportunities**

But it's difficult. Technology has historically been seen as a barrier by some. Cultural change is required which in turn needs early engagement. We must lead from the top to ensure stakeholders have input at an early stage into how technology can help them and the citizens they support, and address any concerns. We need to go back a stage before solution building – if we understand what the problems are, we can help co-design the solution “Don't tell us what you want, tell us the problem you have and let's come up with the best answer together.” And this co-production must have the citizen at its heart – listening to how they would like to live, rather than offering them pre-designed solutions.

Despite the challenges, there are many opportunities; the move to a digital communications network, the chance to put predictive and preventative solutions in place and to work together collaboratively. Together, we can drive our sector in moving from being reactive, to delivering high quality proactive models, enhancing outcomes for citizens, improving efficiencies, and redesigning services around the user. The answer is not to be driven by contract delivery, but by achieving better lives for people.