

New report calls for assistive technology to become mainstream in adult social care services

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- New report released today by the County Councils Network (CCN) calls for the greater integration of technology within social care services.
- Survey reveals that rurality, costs, and a lack of knowledge are significant barriers in embedding tech further into services.
- 75% of local authorities believe that the benefits of assistive technology are being partly realised within their council.
- Councils call for a new framework and funds to scale up AT across whole social care systems.

Assistive technology (AT) should be a key aspect in the Government's planned reforms for the social care sector to become mainstream in the delivery of adult social care services, according to a new report released by the **County Councils Network** (CCN).

"Employing Assistive Technology in Adult Social Care" published in partnership with Tunstall Healthcare, the global leading provider of software solutions, services and technology for the telecare and telehealth markets, closely examines the prevalence of assistive technology in county authorities, the support required to scale it up across the whole social care system, and includes recommendations on how to use AT to implement the proposed reforms of the adult social care sector.

Prepared by CCN, the report has drawn on a number of data and information sources including a survey of the CCN's 36 member authorities, an expert roundtable comprising representatives of CCN's member authorities involved in the strategic delivery of social care services, and a review of relevant literature.

The responses are show that three quarters (75%) of councils reporting that the benefits of assistive technology are being partially realised within their authorities, almost two thirds (65%) have an assistive technology strategy in place,

However, the report has found that whilst technology has been effectively used to improve care for vulnerable individuals, more can be done to place AT at the centre of local adult social care, from using data, to aligning health and care monitoring systems together, as part of closer integration between health and social care.

Gavin Bashar, UK Managing Director of Tunstall Healthcare, said: "During the pandemic, social care service providers and users saw a rapid expansion of new forms of care delivery which has led to a need to rethink the ambitions and plans for social care and the digital agenda. The imminent reform of social care will only be successful in its aims of accountability, integration, and interoperability if it ensures that digital innovation is central to care provision moving forward.

“AT is still sometimes viewed as an add-on or optional piece of care, but it must be mainstreamed and embedded into cultural change. Publication of case studies and good examples nationally, alongside national benchmarks, better training opportunities and an increased profile of the technology available would support more local authorities to invest.

“Galvanising the gains made during the pandemic will drive services towards digital-first care provision which sees significant benefits across the board. There has long been a missed opportunity to harness the potential of technology to transform the way we deliver care, and this has been clearly evidenced during the pandemic. In order to create a truly integrated health and care system, resourcing proven technologies and making their appropriate use standard practice is crucial to ensuring services are fit for the future.”

CCN member authorities have a unique geographical perspective with the report examining whether there’s a difference in the development of AT strategies between urban and rural communities. Two thirds (69%) of county authorities surveyed as part of the report answered that AT was more difficult to roll out in rural areas compared to urban locations, and with councils reliant on temporary grant funding in delivering social care, the report calls for the right settings so local authorities can ramp up their usage of AT. The majority of respondents also cited a lack of knowledge on the tech currently available.

The report also finds that substantive cultural and practice change is urgently needed to better integrate AT across the whole local social care system, and move towards digital-first care provision. This includes training staff so they feel comfortable using this technology.

Cllr Keith Glazier, Health and Social Care Spokesperson for the County Councils Network, said:

“For local authorities, the use of AT is not just about providing effective care for individuals, but is increasingly about developing and delivering innovation-led digital health and care solutions which provide new, more efficient, and effective models for health and care management in the community.

“The increasing potential for employing technology at scale and utilising data offers a tantalising possibility of having a significant impact on the way care is delivered; achieving better outcomes for vulnerable people of all ages, in a more cost effective way than more traditional models of care provision.

“But this can only be done with the right settings in place – and today’s report offers much food for thought as to how we can further embed AT in our local systems.”

Key recommendations of the report include:

Ensure that social care reform includes a commitment to a National Strategic Framework for integrating assistive technology into social care.

Ensure there is appropriate infrastructure in place to enable assistive technology to be used effectively in all parts of the country.

Facilitate improved education and training for social care professionals to ensure they are confident in utilising assistive technology within their role.

Encourage greater co-creation of solutions through adult social care professionals and technology developers working collaboratively.

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As part of adult social care reform, the Government should commit to a National Strategic Framework to make AT 'mainstreamed' as a key element of social care in the future, and make it clear how tech can be further embedded into councils' delivery of this service. CCN and Tunstall are also calling on the government to ensure that there is effective infrastructure for AT in rural areas, including broadband and improved mobile network speeds.

To read the report, please visit www.tunstall.co.uk/CCNATReport

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