

Media Release

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‘Silvercare’ helps isolated Qld seniors connect online

Queensland trials using tablet mobile devices are helping seniors (65-85 years old) use technology to maintain and build social connections.

50 households in the Sunshine Coast area are participating in a project with important implications for aged care, involving the ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research (*CEPAR) and partners in Queensland. The project includes a similar trial in India with around 30 participants.

“We are looking at how older people living alone can use new tools for regular contact with friends and family who are concerned about their wellbeing,” says CEPAR Associate Investigator Professor Pradeep Ray.

Increasing social relationships can bring significant benefits to socially isolated people, including being healthier and living longer.

In Australia, 50% of people over 61 experience loneliness and almost 30% are chronically lonely. Loneliness is associated with higher stress ratings, increased risk of cardiac deaths, depression, reduced movement, psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia, and increased general medical expenses with lonely people reporting worse health than those who are not lonely.

“Wellbeing check systems exist, but are not well liked or used by older people, as they don’t allow for any emotional or human interaction. If a system is not used then it’s not effective so we are looking at the capacity of tablets for sharing rich information through two pre-loaded apps (SKYPE and DropBox) that people will really want to use and thus improve the frequency and quality of social interactions,” says Prof Ray.

Knowing how to use the tablets is key to successful participation. Older people need to be persuaded to overcome a lack of familiarity with new technologies, and local support is available and important in encouraging participation.

A highlight of the trials is ‘silver care’, based on a Japanese model of aged care, which involves younger retired people (coordinators) looking after several seniors each, to help them understand the technology and how to use the devices.

“This requires less support from us, and provides a local contact that users can go to for assistance,” says Prof Ray.

“Results so far show high numbers of people intend to keep using these applications beyond the trials, especially for communication with younger members of their families.”

*CEPAR is a unique, independent, ARC-funded research centre bringing together academia, government and industry to address one of the major social challenges of this century.

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