

EAN POSITION PAPER

Boosting the digital transition of elderly care in Europe

The European Ageing Network is an association of European aged care providers and strives for high quality care for older people in Europe. The EAN, with more than 12,000 member organisations from 27 European countries and servicing millions of older people, continuously shares experiences and best practices to make aged care more effective for older people and more satisfying for its staff.

What is Age-tech and why now?

- **The concept of Age-tech comprises a wide range of digital technologies**, products and solutions that particularly address the needs and expectations of the ageing population and can support aged care providers/staff and support older people to live a healthy, active, and independent life.
- **In order to bridge the digital transition gap in Europe**, The EAN identified a number of priorities for improving and accelerating the implementation and use Age-tech:
- **A vision (from all stakeholders, including authorities and care providers) is needed as to where digital care should go, as guidance.** It is proposed that a short and long-term vision be drawn up. There needs to be direction as to what must be worked towards as aged care organisations and guidance must be provided that leaves room for practice (not just supervisory or testing). For example, there is a need for agreements on various roles and preconditions surrounding digitalisation (including GDPR), the current health and aged care systems are too fragmented
- **More focus on the implementation**, safeguarding and upscaling of digital care that has shown benefits and added value (in terms of costs/benefits and effects). Care must be inclusive
- **Investment programs should be set up with a limited number of objectives and rewards for good behaviour.** Do not allow a system on the market that cannot communicate with other (information) systems. Do not allow products (including software) on the market without proper evidence. Stimulate care providers to cooperate digitally. View digitalisation of care as an investment, not just a cost factor. If you want to curb growth in expenses, you may have to first allow an increase in costs
- **Attention must be paid to transition costs, ongoing (re-)training**, and the costs relating to a lack of effective or incorrect implementation and loss of production. The costs and benefits need to be considered carefully.

In order to achieve this the European Ageing Network (EAN) calls on all stakeholders to rapidly unlock the potential of Age-tech.

1 Age-tech and a digital transition are not a 'nice to have', but an urgent need

The use of Age-tech and the digital transition of aged care is not just a hype, or a nice to have, but an absolute necessity in order to sustain high quality aged care. Older people and staff are calling for digital and technological assistance in their daily lives and work. In this sense, Age-tech is not the future, but today's reality already.

2 Age-tech and a digital transition find their added-value in a clear vision

In order to unlock the potential of Age-tech, there is a need for a holistic vision on the digital transition of aged care, including needs assessment, cost-effectiveness, implementation, and adoption. All of these elements are not just supplementing, but complementing and instrumental.

3 Age-tech and the digital transition are a multi-stakeholder issue

The uptake of Age-tech and the digital transition are not a matter of aged care providers alone. Success depends on the cooperation between all stakeholders: from staff to older people, from industry to governments, from investors to funders. Together, they should work on the creation of an electronic and personal health and wellbeing environment that goes beyond the walls of the institutions.

4 Age-tech and a digital transition must be seen as an investment, not as a cost-factor

Based on a holistic vision and a sound strategy to implement cooperation between all stakeholders, Age-tech and the transition process will turn out to be a profitable investment, providing return on investment that goes beyond financials. Especially in aged care, Age-tech can have a preventive effect and a laissez-faire attitude can turn out to be more costly.

5 Age-tech and the digital transition should look not only focus on the current generation of older people, but also on younger generations with other needs, expectations and skills

The potential of Age-tech and the digital transition will grow with the shift of age cohorts. Younger generations will be more used to, better skilled and more adaptive to new Age-tech solutions. Younger generations will not only be better prepared to use Age-tech, but will also expect to be better supported in their growing older and in old-age.

6 Age-tech and the digital transition empower and engage older people and caregivers

Age-tech plays an important role in the concept of Ageing in place and helps older people and caregivers (both formal and informal) to create a supportive and safe home environment for older people. Age-tech can improve living and working conditions, it can strengthen autonomy and should be person-centred. In this sense, Age-tech can also fit into the concept of positive health.

7 Age-tech and the digital transition tap into a source of valuable data

Age-tech opens a world of data collection, data mining and data analysis, if used correctly and done wisely. Wearables, sensors and other technical solutions provide useful data for primary and secondary use. Data availability and exchange, interoperability and research may be profitable for predictive application, preventative actions, benchmarking and process optimisation. There is a huge data hunger, as the recent Covid-19 crisis has clearly shown.

Age-tech has the potential to help older people live more independently, safely and comfortably, and to reduce the burden on informal caregivers and healthcare providers. It has the power to transform the future of ageing and aged and social care for the better.

The EAN is determined to take the driver's seat and take control of shaping future care for older people through a technological and digital transition of today's practice with the support of effective and efficient Age-tech.