

# Telecare and assistive technology evaluation

## Summary document

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This summary presents the main results and conclusions from an evaluation of the telecare and assistive technology initiatives implemented by the first four demonstration sites funded under the HSE & Genio Dementia Programme (2012-2015).

## Telecare

'Telecare' refers to remote provision of care and support to persons with dementia. This covers risk management and other supports provided by care services or informal carers who are not present in the home, as well as in-home arrangements enabling carers to provide care to a person with dementia from another room or part of the home and its environs.

The evaluation involved a total of 24 clients (persons with dementia and their family carers), each with a tailored mix of telecare sensors and devices. All 24 cases reported positive benefits from telecare, often major benefits. In some cases there were also some negative impacts, including nuisance factors because of noisy or over-sensitive technology and, sometimes, dilemmas about the trade-offs between invasion of privacy and benefits for the person with dementia. In all cases, carers felt that the positives outweighed the negatives, often substantially.

"Number one I can sleep in my own bed again, which is marvellous. I mean at 60, sleeping on the floor on an airbed is no joke... And I've got the added benefit that I can go out for a bit of fresh air and sit down on my bench with a cup of tea."

"We wouldn't have brought her home [from the nursing home] only for it."

"This gives her independence. You can monitor but she still feels she is doing her own thing... Otherwise I'd have to be going in and out of the room all the time and that would drive her cuckoo altogether."

Across the participants, there was a variety of tangible benefits and outcomes for persons with dementia and their family carers.

## Types of benefits and outcomes

- Alerted carers to emergency situations, such as falls.
- Gave some persons with dementia more independence.
- Helped delay need to move to nursing home in some cases.
- Supported a trial return home from nursing home for one person.
- Enabled carers to give better help to the person with dementia.
- Allowed carers to have more and better sleep.
- Discouraged wandering in some cases.
- Central to sustaining caring in a number of cases.
- Gave full-time carers some time for themselves, to have some life of their own.
- In one case, carer could monitor wellbeing of person with dementia from work.

## Assistive technology

This part of the research assessed client experiences with items of assistive technology (AT) that they had loaned from the Memory Technology Library set up by the South Tipperary site. The evaluation included a total of 20 cases and covered 27 items of AT. These included: clocks and calendar clocks, one button radios, medication reminders, motion sensor & pager, memo minder and wander reminder, and simple mobile phones. The results showed that the various types of assistive technology were very useful for many clients. In some cases they were just

a little useful, and sometimes they proved not to be useful even in situations where they might have been expected to be. Overall, AT was rated very useful in 15 cases, a little useful in 8 cases and not useful in 4 cases.

#### Often useful...

“I’d be in a bad way without it. I may think it was Monday, instead of Saturday...It would be a nuisance if I didn’t have the clock.”  
(Person with dementia)

“Helped her memory a little bit, at least getting the news of local things, hearing something different, not just me talking to her.” (Carer)

...but not always

“...didn’t associate it with being a clock. Habit of looking at normal clock. Didn’t register that it [calendar clock] was a clock.”  
(Carer)

“...she wanted to stick to the radio she has... likes familiar things...does not like anything new – wonders where it came from, who it belongs to. (Carer)

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## Summary and conclusions

- The 4 sites successfully established pilot telecare services; one site successfully established a Memory Technology Library and a programme to loan assistive technology for clients to try.
- Telecare and assistive technology provided significant benefits for many persons with dementia and family carers.
- When effectively targeted and meeting client needs, telecare can provide good value for money; it would typically represent only a small incremental addition to the costs of a home care package.
- Telecare and assistive technology should be more widely available; the implementation of the Dementia Strategy could give focused attention to this field.
- Person-centered approaches with individualised technology packages work best.
- Care services should aim to keep ‘in the loop’ after telecare installation, to monitor effectiveness and, where appropriate, to utilise telecare information for care planning.
- There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ technological solution for the wide-ranging circumstances and needs of persons with dementia living in the community, nor is technology a panacea or a substitute for human care.
- Dementia services should discuss with persons with dementia and their families whether telecare and assistive technology may be helpful in their circumstances. They may have great value in some cases, but be less relevant or not appropriate in others.
- As in other areas of dementia care, ethical issues are important. Involve the person with dementia, to the greatest extent possible, in the selection and implementation of technologies. Achieving best outcomes, both for them and for family carers, should be the aim.