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**January 2018:** Innovative software makes computer-generated speech more human, research highlights benefits of home adaptations for older people and public purse, Lazarillo GPS accesses online information to guide users to their destinations

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## Public policy, legislation and campaigns

### Report investigates the prospects for technology enabled care in Scotland

The Scottish government has [published a report on the use of technology enabled care](#) in health, social care and housing contexts and to support the country's workforce might need to take advantage of the technology in the future. It found that only 29% of care professionals use telecare on a daily basis.

### Hull Council showcases assistive technology in new show home

Hull City Council has [opened a show home](#) that demonstrates how assistive technology can enable people with learning disabilities to live independently. The home is fitted with fingerprint door entry screens, visitor cameras, automated controls appliances, windows and lights and other state of the art equipment.

### Research highlights benefits of home adaptations for older people and public purse

[Research published by the Centre for Ageing](#) suggests that making small changes to older people's homes could significantly reduce pressure on the care sector while greatly improving people's quality of life. Studies show simple adaptations such as installing handrails, ramps and level access showers can diminish people's difficulties with everyday activities by 75%.

### Welsh-language version of AskSARA goes online

The Disabled Living Foundation has launched a Welsh-language version of its online [AskSARA](#) advice tool which guides users to information and advice by asking a series of questions. The new website will help Welsh-speaking older and disabled people to discover services and equipment that can help them to live independently.

## Technological developments and innovations

### Innovative software makes computer-generated speech more human

Computer scientists from Princeton University have created software known as [VoCo](#) that makes it possible to edit an audio recording of a human voice by adding or replacing individual words from a transcript. The technology may one day help make communication devices for people with speech disorders sound more natural.

### One-handed keyboard aims to make typing easier

A technology entrepreneur has developed a ten-button handheld keyboard designed to be used by people who find it difficult to use traditional keyboards. The size of a deck of cards, [DecaTxt](#) consists of ten keys which are pressed in combination to produce all the characters available on a standard keyboard.

### Lazarillo GPS accesses online information to guide users to



## Training & events

### [Living Well in Older Age](#)



Trinity Centre, Bristol

### Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> January

An event exploring projects run in Bristol and elsewhere revolving around ageing and technology

### [The Occupational Therapy Adaptation conference](#)



The Belfry Hotel and Spa, Midlands

### Monday 29<sup>th</sup> January

A day of the latest equipment and adaptation guidance for occupational therapists

### [Moving and Handling People South 2017](#)

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visually impaired people to navigate their environment. The app exploits various information sources on the internet to guide the user to their destination as well as helping them locate banks, shops and other places of interest through a search function.

#### **Eyesynth smart glasses convert physical surroundings into sound for blind and visually impaired people**

A Spanish start-up company has built a pair of smart glasses that uses 3D imaging to generate sounds to help blind and visually impaired people perceive their surroundings. Users of [Eyesynth](#) smart glasses must learn to recognise sounds generated by an attached microcomputer which processes information about the physical environment captured by a pair of cameras mounted on the glasses' lenses.



Watford, Hertfordshire

**Wednesday 31st January  
- Thursday 1st February**

Workshops and topical seminars for health care professionals and carers

## Funding news

### **The Family Fund helps low income families with ill or disabled children**

[The Family Fund](#) provides grants to low income families who are raising a disabled or seriously ill child aged 17 and under across the UK. The Fund awards grants for a wide range of items and services from computers, tablets and specialist toys to bedding, white goods and holidays.

## Comment from Clive, author of dispATches

### **The assistive technology sector should stop patronising older people and start catering to their needs**

A variety of well-worn tropes dominate discussions about why the over-fifties are often slow to adopt assistive technology. Older people are charged with showing a luddite-like resistance to new ways of doing things, reluctant to accept that they now represent the primary market for products that they may have previously associated with disability and illness. After a lifetime of caring for others, it can feel self-indulgent to splash out on equipment that promises to make their own lives easier, especially when it comes with a hefty price tag.

As reported in [last month's dispATches](#), a new [white paper](#) confounds some of these assumptions and throws a spotlight onto the failures of the assistive technology sector to respond to the needs of their customers. A study commissioned by Accord Marketing that probed the behaviour of customers in the over fifties mobility market found that customers are savvier and more discriminating than many suppliers tend to assume.

### **Unfulfilled demand**

As with any other key purchase, respondents valued honesty from companies and were careful to make informed choices. The most cited reasons for buying from a company were excellent customer services, product quality and the use of discounted offers and fair prices. Shoppers were also heavily influenced by recommendations from family and friends and information available online, including on social media.

The findings resonate with other surveys that show the baby boomer generation has a great appetite for new technologies where their benefits have been clarified and are likely to consider the private purchase of assistive living equipment for themselves and their loved ones.

However, manufacturers, suppliers and retailers are ill-equipped to cater to everyday consumers. Most businesses only sell through business-to-business contracts with health and social care services. These privileged arrangements have produced a legacy of captive markets that are often commanded by a handful of major players with little incentive to look beyond their core clientele.

### **Know your customer**

In a study published in 2016, [Professor Gillian Ward of Coventry University and colleagues](#) found that businesses operating in the field of assisted living technology lacked a basic understanding of the needs of older consumers and the size and make-up of the market. The research also uncovered evidence that companies tended to overestimate the impact of other people's negative attitudes on consumers and did not pay enough attention to other concerns such as the reliability, design, safety and cost of running a product, its complexity and sensitivities around information disclosure.

The industry must stop blaming consumers for their apparent lack of enthusiasm and become better advocates for its products and services. It can start by establishing national standards for more products to reassure people that they can be confident of the quality of their purchases. Firms should also heed buyers' expectations of a robust retail experience with outstanding customer service, opportunities for hands-on demonstrations and try-before-you-buy offers and money-back guarantees.

Demand for assistive technology among older people is significant and growing. The sector should

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strive harder to meet it.

**If you have news or information that you would like included in the next issue, or if you have any comments about dispATches, please [email Clive](#).**

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