

Board Assurance Prompt – supporting vulnerable adults

The application of assistive living technology to support independence

November 2012

What is this guide and who is it for?

Many providers of social housing have within their range of provision, accommodation offered to adults, or households with a vulnerable person, who may be experiencing a range of vulnerabilities, including people living with mental health issues, learning disabilities, those recovering from alcohol or substance misuse, and people fleeing domestic violence. These notes are intended to assist the leaders of organisations offering this sort of provision, providing prompts by which they may ensure that their organisation is taking full benefit of the opportunities presented by telecare and telehealth. They build on two earlier Board Assurance Prompts that examine the application of Assistive Living Technologies to support older people in general needs housing and specialist housing for older people.

Drawing on examples of good practice, this guide suggests how these technologies may support and enhance the offer that their organisation is able to make, ensuring tenants are receiving the most appropriate assistance to support their recovery or rehabilitation, enhancing their capacity to live independently and move along a pathway toward reintegration within the wider community.

Whatever the baseline set by past investment and current practice, these notes provide the means by which the Board and senior executive team can develop a programme for improvement.

Housing vulnerable adults

Housing is recognised as a key factor in creating pathways in which people who may be vulnerable can feel safe and secure, enhance their life skills, strengthen their capacity for independent living, build their social networks and achieve integration into the wider community. Many people who might previously have been supported in long-stay institutional settings are now being supported within the community.

For those with mental health issues, housing with support may delay or prevent acute episodes which necessitate in-patient treatment, facilitate early discharge and support progression along a pathway leading to high levels of independence, sustained wellbeing and integration with the wider community.

For people living with learning disabilities, the aspiration is that they should be supported in housing settings that maximise their capacity for independent living in sustainable, mainstream solutions, in shared houses and group living depending on the capacity of the individual.

The care pathway for people recovering from alcohol and substance abuse will also be distinguished by different forms of accommodation

and housing related support; from 'step-down' accommodation, rehabilitation and reablement, to reintegration with the wider community. The objectives for this provision are self-evidently to assist the individual to break the cycle of addiction, to achieve a stable state of wellbeing and to regain an independent and sustainable lifestyle.

The ways in which Assistive Living Technology may enhance ability, mitigate risk and facilitate independence varies according to the needs of individuals and the nature of their vulnerability. For each individual needs and circumstances may change and Assistive Living Technology has the flexibility to respond to such changing situation.

For Senior Managers and Board Members, considering the range of accommodation and housing related services they provide to vulnerable adults, Assistive Living Technology offers a range of tools that enhance the offer, mitigate risks and strengthen the ability to provide relevant accommodation and support.

Beneficial outcomes

In making provision for the various needs of adults who may be categorised as vulnerable, an up-to-date system of technology to support independence offers flexible, unobtrusive and cost effective support to respond to the needs of residents, carers and management organisation alike.

For tenants who are vulnerable:

- For those for whom changes in patterns or behaviour and lifestyles may give an indication that they are becoming unwell, the systems can recognise unusual behaviour patterns and alert relevant health and social care staff, or informal carers, to the need for intervention.
- Concerns about safety and security arising as a consequence of chaotic lifestyle can be mitigated through the devices and systems that make up the technology to support independence.
- It provides support in key areas that can otherwise undermine confidence and erode the capacity for independent living, providing the means of summoning assistance in an emergency and using a range of devices to raise an alert automatically.
- For those who need frequent monitoring of their health status, the system offers a means by which routine monitoring can happen in the home, only requiring attendance at the surgery, or a home visit by a health professional, if the system detects irregularities.

For the housing management organisation:

- The provision of a modern system can mitigate risks both to property and to people with consequent savings in housing management time and in repair and maintenance budgets.

The rest of this guide

Within this guide you will find more information about technology to support independence. We suggest five key assurance questions that Board Members and Senior Officers considering the adequacy of their offer to tenants who may be vulnerable might ask of their organisation, together with possible answers: both plausible and less adequate.

Alongside these you will find reference to existing examples of good practice and other key facts. On the back page of the guide you will find a maturity matrix to support development and improvement in implementing Assistive Living Technology systems.

- The costs associated with the termination of a tenancy and a re-let are considerable: extending the capacity of tenants to remain in their existing home carries direct savings for the housing management organisation.
- Successfully supporting vulnerable adults in a housing setting builds confidence in the relationship between the housing provider and relevant health and social care authorities.

For Health and Social Care partners:

- It can provide mitigation of risks that might otherwise require increased levels of formal care provision or health interventions.
- Offers a means of unobtrusive monitoring that can prompt proactive interventions that may avoid acute episodes and mitigate the need for in-patient treatment or move to residential care.
- The opportunity for carers to be actively involved in the remote support of the vulnerable person (through Skype and movement monitoring systems for example) is increased.

What is technology to support independence?

For all groups of vulnerable adults the ability to summon assistance when circumstances arise that they cannot deal with is a fundamental requirement: whether seeking medical assistance for the person whose recovery from substance abuse has relapsed, taking advice and reassurance for coping with a domestic emergency for the person with learning disability, or the person fleeing domestic violence with an urgent need for protection.

The advent of telecare systems allows this basic function to be integrated and extended. Telecare devices fall into two categories: those that detect risks arising from the environment and those that detect risks arising from personal circumstances.

Key risks for vulnerable adults that can be managed by Assistive Living Technology

Poor or decreased judgement: For example cooking accidents, lack of nutrition, insecurity/fear of crime, bogus caller/bullying.

Loss of Memory: For example forgetting the cooker is on, explosion due to gas left on unlit, forgetting to turn off taps, medication non-compliance.

Disorientation to time and place: For example walking about, reduced sense of balance or coordination and falls.

Managing health conditions

Telehealth systems carry support further, offering prompts to medication compliance and a range of monitoring devices: blood pressure, pulse, temperature, blood glucose and coagulation meters, together with weighing scales and peakflow monitor/spirometer. Configured as a system to match the needs of an individual resident and remotely monitored by health professionals through a dedicated interface within the home, telehealthcare can extend the parameters of independent living for older and vulnerable people with a wide range of common chronic conditions, for example, strokes, dementia, diabetes.

Benefits of a holistic system

Configured together these systems provide benefits to vulnerable adults, housing managers, relatives and informal carers, social care providers and healthcare providers. They support independence, mitigate risk, extend tenancies, enable the better co-ordination of services and offer cost savings in housing, health and social care economies.

Creating social networks

Technology can also enhance lifestyle choices and facilitate social inclusion by providing a real-time, easy-to-use, low-cost link to the outside world. Systems are now available which use light-weight touchscreen tablets enabled with wi-fi and broadband to allow users to send and receive email and text messages, share photos and video conference with family, friends, care providers and health professionals via a universal messaging system. Bulletin board messaging encourages users to get involved, helping to create a social community network within their supported living home and carers can broadcast messages, improving the ease and efficiency with which they can communicate with everyone. Online content and applications provide easy access to events, local news, weather forecasts, television guides, shopping, local authority services, appointment requests and contacts, encouraging users to take an active part in their local community.

Such innovations require good governance to support and safeguard the provision of timely care interventions, increasing the privacy and independence of residents and driving operational efficiencies.

Key facts

People aged between 18 and 64 years of age predicted to have a Mental Health problem in 2012: 5,285,457

Adult psychiatric morbidity in England, 2007: Results of a household survey, published by the Health and Social Care Information Centre in 2009.

An estimated 69% of rough sleepers suffer from both mental ill health and a substance misuse problem.

Down and out? The final report of St Mungo's call for evidence: mental health and homelessness, St Mungo's, 2009.

People aged between 18 and 64 in 2012 predicted to have alcohol dependence: 1,972,605

People aged between 18 and 64 in 2012 predicted to be dependent on drugs: 1,117,504

Adult psychiatric morbidity in England, 2007: Results of a household survey, published by the Health and Social Care Information Centre in 2009.

1.5 million people in the UK have a learning disability.

Less than a third of people with a learning disability have some choice of who they live with, and less than half have some choice over where they live.
www.mencap.org.uk

	Assurance question	Plausible answer	Inadequate answer	Case studies
1	How do our current offers to vulnerable adults measure up to their needs and the requirements of commissioners?	We understand the pathways projected for the groups of tenants that we seek to support and are looking at ways in which we can re-shape our offer to support those expectations using Assistive Living Technologies.	We have a well established pattern of provision and feel no immediate pressure to change it.	<p>"I really enjoy having my own home and having more control. Having the back up from the telecare sensors and equipment has taken away my nervousness of being on my own. I get on really well with everyone here and having the epilepsy sensor means I can go to bed at night and not be disturbed by people checking on me."</p> <p>Anthony, 27, who lives at Broadacres' Rivendale Extra Care scheme</p>
2	Does our pattern of provision offer a pathway toward independence and wellbeing for those vulnerable adults we accommodate?	We have a range of styles of provision, beginning with step-down accommodation with high levels of support, with rehabilitation and reablement accommodation, both of these for limited term occupation, supplemented with move-on accommodation and support services for those living in our general stock.	We recognise our limitations and those who cannot be supported by our mainstream housing services will need to move on to a more specialised provider.	<p>"The use of telecare as part of a well-rounded service to support people with learning disabilities facilitates the balance between promoting independent living skills whilst providing the required elements of care, treatment and support. It also allows an individual's needs to be assessed and met using a more person-centred approach."</p> <p>Dave Newton, Social Worker / Practitioner, Fit for the Future Team, Lincolnshire County Council</p>
3	Have we considered how packages of Assistive Living Technology might be developed to support the independence of vulnerable adults among our tenants?	We have looked at the systems and devices currently available and are working with our provider, and our health and social care partners, to develop a menu of options that can be matched to the circumstances of individual tenants, whether in specialised accommodation or the general housing stock.	We can arrange for a dispersed alarm to be installed for tenants who request it.	<p>"Although we often think of telecare as providing essential support to older people, we have seen many examples of cases where the technology can be used to help younger people, and enable carers to live life to the full. Tracy is in her late twenties and cares for her mother and two siblings who are all deaf and non-speaking and have learning difficulties. Since the installation of telecare, Tracy feels able to leave the house to work for the first time."</p> <p>Beverly Baugh, Long Term Support Services Team Leader, Mansfield District Council</p>
4	Have we ensured that our initiatives are a good fit with those being developed by health and social care partners?	Telecare and telehealth are integral components in the way we work in partnership. We have worked in collaboration with health and social care partners to ensure that the options we have developed are embedded in the assessment processes and service responses of health and social care for those vulnerable groups for whom we provide.	When difficulties arise in tenancies we will consult the health and social care professionals.	<p>"Since my injury I have mobility issues and occasional seizures. Telecare has changed my whole family's life not just mine, my kids have a better understanding of my illness and my wife has been able to return to full time work. It's given me and my family real peace of mind, knowing that there's always support on hand if ever I have any problems."</p> <p>Anthony Weaver, 35, who received a shrapnel injury while serving in the armed forces, is a WDH Care Link customer</p>
5	Do we offer health and social care partners means of reducing the rate of admission and re-admission to in patient care for vulnerable groups?	We are working with both health and social care partners to ensure that, through the use of Assistive Living Technology we are able to provide flexible and progressive solutions that help deliver care pathways.	We provide a sensitive and flexible housing management service and co-operate with health and social care authorities regarding individual cases when difficulties arise.	

The application of technology to support independence for vulnerable people

A maturity matrix to support development and improvement November 2012

To use the matrix: identify with a circle the level you believe your organisation has reached and then draw an arrow to the right to the level you intend to reach in the next 12 months.



Progress Levels	0	1	2	3	4	5
Key elements	No	Basic Level Understanding the need and the market	Early Progress Researching the potential	Laying Foundations Incorporating into the Business Plan	Maturity Implementing systems across our stock	Exemplar Review, enhance, disseminate
Understanding the needs and aspirations of current and potential vulnerable tenants		We are reviewing the offer we make to the variety of needs among vulnerable adults.	We have researched what Assistive Living Technology systems can provide and how packages may be configured to respond to individual needs.	Assistive Living Technology is a fundamental element in our Business Plan or Market Position Statement for all our housing.	We have rolled out hardware installation and training to implement technology to support independence.	We have surveyed our tenants, consulted with health and social care partners and independently evaluated our programme.
Using technology to enhance support and care delivery		We have established a joint study group with social care partners to explore the potential benefits of Assistive Living Technology to identified groups of tenants who are identified as vulnerable.	We are engaging with social care commissioners to develop appropriate housing and care pathways that include telecare, including the use of personal budgets.	We have developed integrated patterns of assessment that deliver telecare within the care and support plans for those of our tenant households that include a vulnerable adult.	All tenants identified as vulnerable are offered screening and assessment leading to the provision of a personalised telecare package, if appropriate.	We have surveyed our tenants, consulted with health and social care partners and independently evaluated our programme.
Using technology to enhance health status monitoring		We have established a joint study group with health/CCG partners to explore the potential benefits of Assistive Living Technology to identified groups of tenants who are identified as vulnerable.	With the CCGs we have identified priority patients among our tenants and are implementing a pilot scheme.	We are evaluating the pilot programme and modelling the cost and cost benefits of rolling out telehealth systems for all those vulnerable adults in tenant households who may benefit.	We have a programme to provide telehealth access for residents identified by their local CCG.	We are working with CCGs where we have successfully rolled out telehealth to promote the benefits to other health professionals, including specialist teams such as those working in Mental Health and Learning Disability services.
Embedding technology in our independent living offer for vulnerable adults		We have researched the impact of Assistive Living Technology on our ability to help tenants with a variety of needs arising from their health conditions or personal circumstances.	We are reviewing the contribution the introduction of Assistive Living Technology systems will make to other areas of our agenda to modernise our service and offer a menu of options for tenants and other potential customers.	We have revised our literature for applicants and for professionals who may influence decisions in relation to their housing options.	We have revised our housing management procedures and our promotional literature to reflect our greater resilience in supporting tenants who have vulnerabilities arising from their health conditions or personal circumstances.	We have a system in place for monitoring the use by our tenants of health and social care services and transfers to Registered Care settings and we publish that data as part of our governance reporting.