



TECHNOLOGY: ACCESS AND ASSISTANCE FOR OLDER ADULTS

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How many times in the last few days have you heard “Details on our website”, “Scan the QR Code”, “Apply online” and other similar phrases? Older adults are being pushed into the world of technology whether they like it or not. In this issue we will address some of the benefits of technology for older adults and some of the issues faced with access to technology.

Technology can be intimidating. It isn't just about connecting with all the gadgets but more about how technology enhances the quality of life for older adults. Older adults have [different needs](#) with technology than do younger generations. Understanding this, along with the training to use technology can be keys to enhancing the technology experience.

[Older adults span a wide range of age groups.](#) A 65 year old and her mother who is 85 are both older adults but their needs are different. If you divide the elderly into groups, the “Young Old” probably learned to use technology while they were working. The “Middle Old” (ages 75 to 84) were probably close to retirement when the internet was in its early days. They didn't have to learn how to use a computer to continue in their jobs. They are willing to learn new technology if it improves their lives and if they find it useful. For the “Oldest Old” (age 85 and over) technology products have to be very enticing and easy to use for this group to adopt technology. In order for older adults to embrace technology they must feel that the time and energy put into learning how to use technology and the value the technology brings to their lives is worth the investment.

Health care is one of the most rapidly growing areas for technology use among older adults. [AARP reports](#) that 70% of older Americans who manage chronic health conditions have seen a significant difference with the use of technology. The article reports that concerns over privacy, ease of use, cost, set-up and support and awareness are some of the greatest barriers to adopting technology. Unfortunately, [health care professionals](#) often equate older age with poor technology skills. As a result, they often do not implement digital health into their practices or treatments for older adults. Institutional barriers such as the design of patient portals deter older adults from accessing health information.

[Susan Nash](#), Visiting scholar at the Stanford Center on Longevity, reports that older adults will learn to use technology when they see a reason for it. In a recent [AARP study](#), two-thirds of respondents felt that “technology enriches their lives by making daily life easier.” They seem to use technology to manage finances, social lives and health and wellness. The study reports that 91% of older adults own a smart phone. Other popular devices include a smart TV, laptop computer, tablet, Bluetooth headset/ear buds, desktop computer, wearable devices and a home assistant. [Morgan Redding and Taylor Shuman](#), writers for *Senior Living*, indicate that the top reasons older adults choose to use technology include: access to transportation and food, monitoring health and wellness, staying safe, getting the latest news, entertainment, alerting caregivers and connecting with family, friends, and health care providers.

There are many resources available for older adults who are either currently using technology or who are interested in learning more about how technology can enhance their lives. [NCOA](#) has compiled a comprehensive technology resource guide for older adults and for those who provide services to older adults. Recognizing the benefits of technology will encourage more older adults to embrace technology.