

Age-Friendly Public Health Systems

Older Adults and Technology

Communication and Information has been designated by the World Health Organization as a key to making a community livable and is fundamental for older adult well-being.

Many older adults are disadvantaged in communication options and many are challenged in social engagement due to a lack of digital access and technology literacy. Older adults with limited access to and/or proficiency with technology were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Technology plays a key role in a community's ability to meet basic needs, including social connection, stable housing, and mobility. Older adults and families with access to technology could seek out information, services, and social connections more quickly, while those lacking access to technology faced a significant barrier. As we see a push towards telehealth appointments for health care, social connection via video chat, and online applications for housing, benefits, employment and transportation, a lack of technology literacy and digital access among older adults may lead to decreased health outcomes, lower access to care, and decreased social connection. When properly utilized, digital health can be transformative.



Resources:

1. Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) - Aging Connected
2. Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative – Digital Equity Resources

Trust for America's Health's 6Cs Framework for Creating Age-Friendly Public Health Systems (AFPHS) organizes public health roles in aging. Public health can reduce technology disparities for older adults by:

- ✓ Creating changes in technology access, include affordable opportunities to engage with technology and increasing eligibility and enrollment in government benefit programs like the Affordable Connectivity Program
- ✓ Connecting older adults with multi-sector stakeholders like technology literacy services
- ✓ Collecting data on older adults with limited or unreliable internet access
- ✓ Coordinating existing technology education programs to improve screening, access, and delivery of services
- ✓ Communicating the importance of digital literacy in health outcomes
- ✓ Complementing existing technology literacy opportunities in low-income areas where digital access is challenging due to cost