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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Costly aged care needs a tech fix**

With the federal government and opposition set to announce a deal to help reduce the cost of aged care, a consortium of universities and aged care industry players believe they have their own solution – the use of sensors in the home to allow older Australians to stay at home for longer.

The group behind the Healthy at Home initiative are investigating the use of data collected by sensors to significantly increase people’s quality of life when ageing at home and keep them out of hospital and aged care.

The group’s move come with the government and opposition on the verge of a deal, set to be announced as early as this week which it’s been speculated to involve the increase of residential aged care fees. The deal on aged care reform comes with the government spending more than \$30 billion a year on aged care services.

Led by the NSW Smart Sensing Network, the consortium’s Healthy at Home initiative is working with older Australians to create a tech-driven care model to optimise the healthcare they receive at home: a model which is less expensive than hospital care or aged care.

“Sensors can capture lifestyle and biometric data such as body position, movement and activity, sleep quality, blood pressure, blood oxygen saturation, body temperature, heart rhythm and rate, blood oxygen, fatigue levels and respiration rate,” NSSN Human Health Theme Leader Catherine Oates Smith says. “It makes financial sense to send the data picked up by sensors to families, carers and telehealth operators to support an older Australian in their home, instead of them having to go to hospital or an aged care facility if they really don’t need to be there.

“For example, there are sensors that can predict if someone will soon have a fall. This information can trigger urgent, preventative alerts to family, carers and telehealth operators so that action can be taken to support the ageing person in their home, instead of them having to go to the hospital or an aged care facility.”

The consortium includes six NSW Universities (UTS, UNSW, University of Newcastle, Macquarie University, University of Sydney and the University of Wollongong), seven Australian innovation companies and three NSW Local Health Districts.

The group formed after the 2021 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, and the federal government’s Aged Care Taskforce emphasised that older Australians’



increasingly preferred to remain in their homes rather than move to residential care facilities. To accommodate this shift, the consortium suggests that current aged care infrastructure and government funded aged care packages must support financially sustainable home-based care solutions.

The group has three projects underway aimed at reducing aged care nursing home numbers and taking the strain off a heavily burdened system. One is a survey of over 1000 older Australians on their attitudes to aged care related sensor technology in their home. This project includes one-on-one interviews which will contribute to a better understanding of how technology can be effectively integrated into homes to support Australia's aging population.

“We want to know more about how older Australians feel about using sensors in their home to monitor their health. We’re asking them if they feel confident using the technology, how much they would be willing to pay for it, and if they are concerned about data security,” Professor Jason Prior from the UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures says. “Their responses will help inform industry and government about how to roll out these devices.”

Another project will identify a set of health measures for older citizens, like breathing and heart rate, that will trigger an alert for emergency help when needed. “There is a set of measures for when a person is in hospital called *Between the Flags*. But there are no such set of measures which could trigger an alert for ageing people being cared for in their home,” University of Newcastle FASTLab Founder and Director Professor Paul Egglestone says.

A third project is a 12 month-trial of hearing loss screening and education as part of routine wellbeing checks performed by Meals on Wheels (MoW) volunteers to older Australians in Sydney.

The consortium believes there are clear benefits to home-based care supported by technology such as sensors but says governments have been slow to adopt innovative solutions. “We know that we have a shortage of beds in hospitals and aged care facilities, and we also know people really just want to stay in their homes than go to a nursing home,” Ms Oates Smith says. “If technology can be deployed to help them do that, then this is what the Healthy at Home initiative is all about.”

## ENDS

**\* Catherine Oates Smith, Professor Jason Prior and Professor Paul Egglestone are available for interview \***

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### Declaration

The [NSW Smart Sensing Network](#), a consortium of [eight leading universities](#) across NSW and the ACT, is a not-for-profit innovation network that brings together universities, industry and government to translate world-class research into innovative smart sensing solutions that create value for NSW and beyond.