



Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Federal Budget

By: AGE-WELL NCE Inc.

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Alex Mihailidis
Scientific Director and CEO
alex.mihailidis@utoronto.ca

Recommendation 1: Invest \$2.25 million in AGE-WELL to implement accessible and scalable technology-based solutions into the current and post-pandemic environment.

Recommendation 2: Establish a \$2 million start-up fund to accelerate AgeTech solutions that are contributing to the COVID-19 pandemic response by addressing the increase in risk and social isolation experienced by seniors.

Recommendation 3: Provide existing AGE-WELL innovation hubs with \$800,000 to rapidly validate policy and technology solutions that address the challenges of modernizing care for older adults in diverse communities across Canada.

Recommendation 4: Develop and fund a national assistive technology strategy and device formulary to enhance equitable access to technologies that improve the lives of older Canadians.

CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for technology-based solutions to support older people and those who care for them, now and post-pandemic. Problems such as social isolation and loneliness have become more pronounced as the crisis continues.

We know that technology can make a difference, and that older Canadians are embracing it. In a poll conducted last year with Environics Research, AGE-WELL found that Canadians over the age of 50 have a strong interest in using technologies to stay healthy, engaged and living independently for as long as possible.

Technology can help older adults stay connected, stimulated and supported at home and in the community. Communications platforms, smart homes, telehealth and remote care—these are just some of AGE-WELL’s areas of activity.

In these challenging times, Canada’s AgeTech sector is well placed to offer solutions. From in-home rehab apps to social platforms, AGE-WELL partners and startups are delivering needed technologies and services.

1. Immediate Ways to Engage AGE-WELL in COVID-19 Economic Recovery

For older Canadians and their caregivers, the impact of COVID-19 has been especially dire given the high risk of hospitalization and death. The pandemic has led to an increase in social isolation, depression and elder abuse experienced by seniors. AGE-WELL researchers and startups are pivoting in order to address these issues.

Recommendation 1: Invest \$2.25 million in AGE-WELL to implement accessible and scalable technology-based solutions into the current and post-pandemic environment.

AGE-WELL has 20 research projects that are pivoting their work to include a COVID-19 lens where technology-based solutions are being co-created with older adults and caregivers in order to safeguard seniors from social isolation, lack of access to care and support services. Enacting this recommendation would leverage the \$56 million investment in Canada’s technology and aging network to ensure innovations address seniors’ specific needs in the current and post-COVID environment, and are sustainable for future generations of older adults.

Recommendation 2: Establish a \$2 million start-up fund to accelerate AgeTech solutions that are contributing to the COVID-19 pandemic response by addressing the increase in risk and social isolation experienced by seniors.

There are [15 startups](#) in our network working to mitigate the effects of this unprecedented crisis. For example, FamliNet is a new communications app offering older adults an easy way to connect with family and friends even for seniors with little to no computer experience or with sensory loss.

AGE-WELL is driving forward Canada's AgeTech sector, with three startups spun out of AGE-WELL research raising over \$19M in investments last year alone. Based on 21 respondents to our startup survey, we know that the median amount of funds raised is about \$600,000, 179 jobs have been created, and over 8,000 older Canadians and caregivers have benefited from their products.

The Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry office needs to increase engagement with the AgeTech sector to create digital and technology-driven transformation opportunities to improve the care of older adults, restart the Canadian economy and generate global impact. AGE-WELL is ready to deploy our partner network and internal resources for rapid development, assessment and implementation of technology-based solutions to create health, social and economic benefits.

Currently, AGE-WELL is coordinating the installation of promising technologies across more than a dozen home care and long-term care (LTC) sites in Canada. With support from the offices of the Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, these technologies can be scaled up for all older Canadians residing in home care and LTC environments.

2. Technology and Innovation are Critical for System Transformation

As Canada's population demographics shift and older adults outnumber youth, there is an evident need to innovate our public healthcare system now and post-pandemic. Technological advancements offer solutions to many of the obstacles we are currently facing in making our public healthcare systems more efficient and equitable, especially when it comes to older adults and remote communities. AGE-WELL is poised to build on the momentum of our first five years as a network.

8 in 10 Canadians over the age of 65 believe technological advances can help older adults stay safe, in their own homes longer and stay independent.

70% would pay out-of-pocket for technology to stay in their own home.



Richard Ratcliffe and daughter Steph Gagne with the FamliNet communications tool. "It opened up a whole new world," he says. "I'd be lost without it."

We can see how COVID-19 is accelerating the spread and adoption of technology in many domains with the potential to transform care for Canadians. This sector has enormous potential to not only improve the quality of our lives as we age, but to create good jobs and spark economic growth. Four AGE-WELL Innovation Hubs in the areas of digital technology; mobility and memory; AgeTech policy; and technology adoption in the north, have been established to foster more efficient development, testing and delivery to

market of products and services that will benefit older people and caregivers across Canada.

Recommendation 3: Provide existing AGE-WELL innovation hubs with \$800,000 to rapidly validate policy and technology solutions that address the challenges of modernizing care for older adults in diverse communities across Canada.

Leveraging AGE-WELL resources to achieve system transformation will ensure a responsive and proactive approach to caring for older adults today and in the future. Older adults are asking for these technologies now and AGE-WELL's work can help inform current and future policy initiatives to take a forward-thinking approach, which includes technology and innovation as part of the solution.

3. Enhance Equitable Access to Assistive Technologies

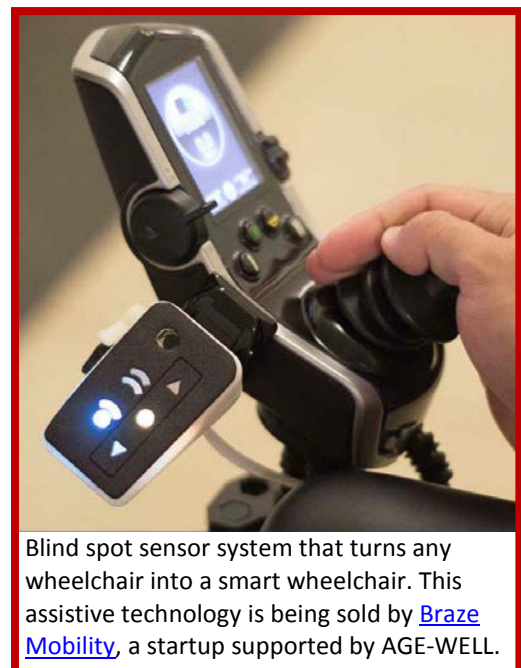
The need for assistive technologies (AT) among older adults is increasing, yet they face challenges when it comes to equitable access to these devices across Canada. AT allows older Canadians experiencing physical limitations or mobility challenges to remain independent longer and continue to engage in activities of daily living in community and home care settings. There are several reasons for this, including: i) different definitions for AT depending on the jurisdiction, leading to confusion about what is covered and by whom, ii) inconsistent access to AT, leading to unmet needs, and iii) system-level factors including governance, financial and delivery arrangements. Technology such as for low vision, hearing, cognition and social inclusion, which are critically important for seniors, are not well addressed across Canada.

Recommendation 4: Develop and fund a national assistive technology strategy and device formulary to enhance equitable access to technologies that improve the lives of older Canadians.

The market for assistive technologies in the medical technologies sector globally is anticipated to grow, with a market size valued at over \$23 million in 2018 to almost \$36 million by 2026. The Canadian government must seize this opportunity as part of the COVID-19 economic recovery plan.

The Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion needs to include equitable access to AT in the implementation of the *Accessible Canada Act*.

AGE-WELL can help this sector to adopt a common language, including a standard definition for AT, with the aim of developing government policy on coverage and the regulatory



Blind spot sensor system that turns any wheelchair into a smart wheelchair. This assistive technology is being sold by [Braze Mobility](#), a startup supported by AGE-WELL.

requirements for these technologies. Standardized definitions in legislation, policies, and programs across Canada will facilitate the recognition of assistive technologies as an important aspect of many Canadians' lives and encourage greater investment in AT.

Individualized assessments for AT have the potential to reduce downstream costs by ensuring people receive what they need and working towards manageable per capita costs. This aligns with the spirit and implementation of priorities in the *Accessible Canada Act*. Ensuring that older adults in Canada have equitable access to AT is important to promoting healthy aging as well as to aging in place, as AT can improve health outcomes and reduce total costs to the healthcare system by helping older adults remain at home.

AGE-WELL is working to develop an integrated approach to include assistive technologies as part of the solutions available in home and community care settings. The federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions need to adapt government procurement strategies to allow for larger buying power of AT. This will foster scale, spread of AT and reduce costs for home and community care. Approaches similar to the ones taken for the prescription drug sector can allow for coordinated purchasing power, which can decrease the financial and infrastructure costs for commonly-used AT on the market. Policy makers need to balance health technology innovation of new AT, which can pay off in the long-term, with the short-term cost savings of procuring existing assistive devices.

ABOUT AGE-WELL

AGE-WELL is Canada's technology and aging network. AGE-WELL is dedicated to the creation of technologies and services that benefit older adults and caregivers. Our aim is to help older Canadians maintain their independence, health and quality of life through technologies and services that increase their safety and security, support their independent living, and enhance their social participation.

AGE-WELL is developing practical technology-based solutions to address the challenges of an aging population including those who experience impairment, disability or illness, but AGE-WELL is more than just a technology research network. AGE-WELL shares ideas, concepts, and knowledge amongst all stakeholders—seniors, caregivers, industry, community, government, and researchers. AGE-WELL empowers individuals and groups to guide how social, economic, legal, and cultural issues related to digital technologies for seniors are addressed. By promoting diversity and equal opportunity, we are especially able to amplify the voices of vulnerable senior populations such as those with mild to severe cognitive impairment or dementia, as well as Indigenous communities across Canada.

Launched in 2015 through the federally-funded Networks of Centres of Excellence program, AGE-WELL addresses a wide range of complex issues in technology and aging through receptor-driven multidisciplinary research, training programs, partnerships, knowledge mobilization, implementation and the commercial development of technologies.

AGE-WELL'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

760+ Highly Qualified Personnel (trainees)

250+ Researchers

40 Startups

4 National Innovation Hubs

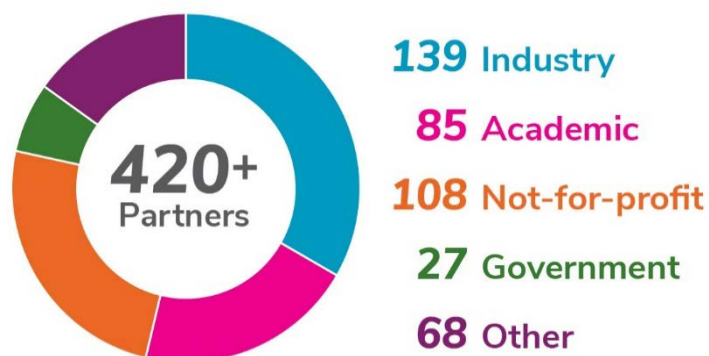


AGE-WELL has built a unique pan-Canadian network that brings together seniors, caregivers, industry, community, government, and researchers to develop and deliver technology-based solutions to support healthy aging. Through our partnerships, we have leveraged federal funds at a rate of 1.5 to exceed, in five years, all of our initial targets as a network.

There are 118 technologies, services and policies/practices in AGE-WELL's innovation pipeline. These are practical solutions that address real-world challenges to help older Canadians maintain their independence, health and quality of life, and to help their caregivers in achieving this. AGE-WELL supports 40 startups that are commercializing products, creating wealth and generating more than 170 jobs.

With more than 760 trainees, AGE-WELL is preparing the next generation of researchers and entrepreneurs in technology and aging. Many of our trainees are already securing jobs in industry, academia, community organizations, and government.

AGE-WELL is putting Canada at the forefront of the international AgeTech sector by leveraging over 420 partnerships



between seniors, caregivers, industry, community, government, and researchers. We are continuing our work by establishing an actionable roadmap for the AgeTech sector with our [eight challenge areas](#), which make up Canada's research and innovation agenda, as the foundation.

CONCLUSION

In order to continue making advancements in the AgeTech sector, we are asking the Government of Canada to invest in the implementation of technology solutions. Technology grants us with an unprecedented opportunity to improve the health of older adults and caregivers, create more sustainable healthcare solutions, and open up new possibilities for businesses and government in Canada and abroad. As an emerging sector that is quickly gaining traction, we hope that the federal government continues to stay committed to research and innovation in AgeTech, and that this commitment is adequately reflected in the 2021 budget.