

# Caring for Older Australians

## Productivity Commission Report Submission

March 21 2011

### Background

The Medical Device Partnering Program (MDPP) is a collaboration between researchers, end-users and industry to assist with the development of medical devices with market potential. It is supported by the South Australian State Government through the Premier's Science and Research Fund.

The program provides a mechanism for the development of prototypes, proof of concept and/or commercialisation planning for potential medical device products. We have a particular focus on finding solutions for clinicians, the ageing and the disabled.

Our role is to initiate new product ideas and add value for further product development. Inventors from research, industry and clinical settings are invited to submit their product ideas for review and possible selection for assistance through the MDPP.

The MDPP has access to a diverse set of expertise from South Australia's three universities and other partners, including the South Australian Office for the Ageing, specialist research centres, business advisors, government agencies and local manufacturing companies.

As part of its role, the MDPP has been actively engaged in reviewing technology for aged care and assistive technology for the last three years.

### Key Points for Consideration.

International and local research into the use of assistive technology in the aged sector was reviewed in the report commissioned by the Department of Health and Ageing, "Comprehensive Scoping Study on the use of Assistive Technology by Frail Older People Living in the Community" 2008 (released in Feb 2011).

*"This report is a systematic review of existing published and unpublished literature relating to assistive technology for frail older people in the community care context.*

*In summary, the most effective assistive technologies identified in the literature include:*

- Aids, devices and equipment to improve ease of living, safety and physical function, where they are provided early and are supported by training, maintenance and follow-up support.*
- Environmental adaptations to the home, including adjusting benches, installing ramps and removing hazards to improve older people's functional mobility and safety.*
- Telecare and smart technologies to improve overall 'peace of mind' for older people and carers to improve safety and reduced hospitalisation and to improve quality of life and opportunities to remain at home, deferring the need to move into residential care.*

*There is also preliminary research available to support findings that providing computers and internet access to older people (accompanied by training and support) can improve social connection and communication. This research also suggests that computer and internet use can improve the mental and physical health of older people."*

The report identified several international research programs that have shown potential for productivity improvements that might be feasible in an Australian setting. It appears that Australia is well behind other developed economies, where a range of technologies have been trialed to support the rapidly ageing population and are improving health outcomes and resource allocations through technology adoption. The report also provided information regarding the barriers to use of these technologies.

The Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) report titled “Smart Technology for healthy Longevity” May 2010, concluded

*“The key finding of this report by is that a national thrust on the development and application of smart technology for healthy longevity is vital to ensure a healthy, safe, secure and fulfilling future for the increasing aged population in Australia and the maintenance of a healthy, harmonious and prosperous society.”*

The ATSE report identified similar issues as the DOHA report, and also identified the need for greater alliances between industry and research to improve the utilisation of various technologies in the aged care sector.

The MDPP consideration of technology in the aged care sector over the last three years is very much in line with both of these reports.

Several public submissions to the Productivity Commission “Caring for Older Australians Report” have highlighted the need for increased utilisation of a range of technologies to improve aged care outcomes and delivery.

The MDPP would like to summarise the key areas where greater emphasis of technologies in the aging sector should be considered.

- Research to identify and confirm potential productivity improvements (as seen in international studies) that might be applicable to Australian systems.
- Improve knowledge, access and design of assistive technology to encourage consumer driven uptake of suitable technologies.
- Consider barriers to adoption of assistive technology (per DOHA report) and take steps to break down those barriers.
- Review funding systems to encourage and accommodate uptake of appropriate assistive technologies.
- Improve relationships between industry and researchers to ensure that technologies aimed at the aged care sector are developed to meet a market need.

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