

# AGING A

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By Sharon Jayson

It's called "aging in place" and it's a bit of a buzz phrase for aging boomers and senior citizens who want to stay in their homes, with their familiar surroundings, as long as possible. Smart technology is increasingly making it easier and safer to stay put.

"When you talk about the ability to live independently, home automation is going to be a huge factor in allowing them to do that," said Kermit Baker, a senior research fellow at the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University.

A report from that Harvard center on housing and older Americans highlights this growing importance of smart device apps, personal devices and other systems to help elders manage on their own or with minimal assistance from family and other caregivers.

"Technology in the home can remind older adults to take medicine as scheduled and alert family or doctors if a dosage is missed, while sensors can monitor those living alone for falls. Telehealth can facilitate communication between older adults and trained medical personnel. All of this technology can help bring services and goods to the home, potentially improving safety, convenience, and quality of life," said the report, released in late 2016.

Cedar Park geriatrician Mark Carlson is convinced that seniors can improve their quality of life if they're open to adding technology to their daily routines.

"A relatively well 85- or 90-year-old who may be isolated might benefit most from video monitoring or video conferencing, where another individual with multiple chronic medical diseases will benefit most from medical management tools," Carlson said. "These technologies have enormous power to allow individuals to stay in their own homes and age in place for a much longer period of time to avoid the need to move into some sort of facility."

There's a key element to these smart senior devices: Wi-Fi internet access, preferably broadband.

Without that as part of a senior citizen's home infrastructure, the smart tools cannot function.

Laura Mitchell, a digital health consultant in West Bend, Wis., has worked in the connected aging and telehealth industry for more than a decade.

"We've seen aging products have evolved into health products," she said. "They sort of became one and the same and it's hard to talk about aging without mentioning health care."

Both Carlson and Mitchell say acceptance of new technology among people 80 and older can be especially challenging.

"There's a lot of resistance from that demographic," he said.

"Ninety-something-year-old people say they're not ready (for

new technology) yet — maybe in a couple of years," she added.

Carlson expects the hesitancy cited by today's older adults will give way to aging baby boomers who have used smart, Wi-Fi enabled technology for years and increasingly adopt the latest innovations.

"With all the fitness trackers and health trackers becoming synonymous with aging, we all should be monitoring our bodies," Mitchell said. ■



# T HOME

Newest devices and systems help seniors to stay home & stay safe

## Smart way



### LIVELY MOBILE

The Lively Mobile is a medical alert device that can be worn around the neck, put in a purse or pocket, or on a belt. Its built-in technology confirms location quickly and accurately. **\$50, but requires a monthly fee. The basic plan's monthly fee is \$20. An**

**additional activation fee is \$35; greatcall.com**

### GRANDCARE

The GrandCare System is a remote monitoring and socialization platform with a large touchscreen. It provides activity and health monitoring, medication prompts and easy communication from reminders, a schedule, photos, videos, weather reports, games and other information. It also offers video chat with family and medical providers. Optional sensors can be added to alert caregivers. A caregiver can remotely access it with any smart device. **The system costs \$1,000, with a \$100 monthly fee; grandcare.com**



### LIVI AUTOMATED PILL DISPENSER

The Livi automated pill dispenser helps manage a complex medication schedule without hands-on help from a caregiver. Dispenses up to 15 pills of different sizes and shapes, multiple times a day. One press of the button releases the pills and the unit locks to prevent over-medicating. Text messages go out when Livi dispenses pills on time, or if a dose is missed. Saves time sorting pills — just pour in up to 90 days' worth of each pill, and Livi takes care of the rest. **\$80 a month basic plan, \$100 a month standard plan or buy the device outright for \$2,000; liviathome.com**

