



FROM THE CEO, DREW DYSON

## Technology and Older Adults: Combating Senior Isolation

Dear Friends,

Prior to 2020, my Aunt G was deeply critical of Facebook. “Why in the world would anyone,” she would regularly inquire, “want to know what I had for dinner last night?” This familiar retort was such a common refrain that I was shocked to receive a friend request in June 2020. Believing it was a hoax or clearly spam, I picked up the phone and called her. “I realized that Facebook wasn’t really about sharing what one had for dinner — but reconnecting with people from my past and present in a meaningful way, particularly in the midst of a pandemic!”

For Aunt G, Facebook was merely one of the technological tools that became an important lifeline for her that pulled her through an intensely isolating time and continues to aid her in remaining active and vital. As the world continues to evolve digitally, embracing technological advancements can provide invaluable opportunities for older adults to connect, engage, and lead fulfilling lives. I want to explore a few themes emerging from recent research regarding technology and older adults.



- 1) **Social Isolation is a Real Threat:** Social isolation among older adults has emerged as a significant public health concern, not introduced but certainly exacerbated by the global pandemic. More than one in three seniors self-report high or very high levels of social isolation. Social isolation in older adults correlates to increased risks of depression, cognitive decline, and even mortality. Recognizing these challenges, researchers have been investigating how technology can bridge the social gap and improve older adults’ quality of life.
- 2) **Connecting Generations:** One remarkable aspect of technology is its ability to connect people across generations. Research has shown that older adults who actively engage with digital platforms, such as social media, video calls, and messaging apps, experience lower levels of social isolation. These virtual connections enable us to maintain relationships with family and friends and even to, as in the case of my Aunt G, reconnect with long-lost acquaintances. Throughout the pandemic, PSRC’s “Seniors-for-Seniors” program has been deeply meaningful for the high school students and older adults alike.
- 3) **Virtual Support Networks:** Online communities and support networks tailored to seniors have emerged as a powerful resource to combat isolation. These resources can provide a safe and inclusive space for many to share experiences, seek advice, and build meaningful connections. Many of our PSRC support and conversation groups are either virtual or hybrid — enabling participation in person or online — so that all can participate.
- 4) **Digital Skill Training:** One of the barriers to technology adoption among seniors is the lack of familiarity and confidence. Recognizing this barrier, PSRC’s technology lab continues to offer digital skill training programs specifically designed with you in mind. Through skills-based courses or one-on-one consultations, our tech team empowers older adults to navigate smartphones, tablets, computers, and relevant applications, enabling them to access a wide range of online resources and stay connected. You can request assistance at [princetonsenior.link/tech-assist](https://princetonsenior.link/tech-assist) or you may choose to sign up for a course such as this month’s iPad introduction course.

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- 5) Technological Innovations: Developing technologies have brought forth a plethora of devices and applications tailored to meet the unique needs of older adults. From easy-to-use smartphones to wearable health monitors and home automation systems, these innovations can enhance safety, communication, and overall well-being. Research and development in this field will continue to drive solutions for the unique challenges of aging — and older adults must remain technologically savvy in order to take advantage of these innovations.
- 6) Breaking Barriers to Access: While technology holds immense potential, it is crucial to acknowledge the digital divide and ensure equitable access for all seniors. Programs like the Affordable Connectivity Program which provides free home internet access for qualifying seniors or free/affordable training and assistance programs such as PSRC's Donald and Nancy Light Technology Literacy Lab are helping to address these challenges. Qualifying participants in this month's iPad class, for instance, will have their course fee waived and will receive a free iPad upon completion of the course.

As we move forward in an increasingly interconnected world, embracing technology can empower older adults, break down social barriers, and combat the pervasive issue of senior isolation. Now is the time for us to come together to promote digital inclusion, support one another on the technological journey, and create a vibrant and connected community of older adults. Technology, when used as an enhancement and not a replacement for meaningful connection, is a beautiful gift. And it begins with a single click...or post...or tweet! Stay connected, stay engaged!

All the Best,  
*Drew A. Dyson, PhD*  
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