A BMRC RESEARCH DIGEST
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Technology, Access and Support Services for Seniors Project (TASS)

BMRC IRMU

Source: Human Endeavour

What you need to know

Our research exposes the structural inequities restricting digital access and use. It reveals the increasingly important role of emerging technologies in reducing barriers for seniors and facilitating aging in place. Central to this field is the exposure of three senior digital divides to
1. access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
2. access to digital skills and how and identifies gradations of digital exclusion; and
3. expansion of those digital skills so that users can derive social, economic and health benefits from ICT use.

What is this research about?

This research evaluated the economic, social and cultural impact for seniors and senior serving organizations involved in the TASS project. In 2020, COVID-19 forced in-person programs offered by senior serving organizations to be cancelled. Many seniors lacked digital skills and many senior serving organizations lacked the resources to pivot to online program delivery. Human Endeavour and partners obtained grants to purchase, lend and distribute, at no cost, over 400 easy-to-use, senior friendly, integrated android tablets preloaded with apps, data and security to vulnerable seniors, and established a multilingual Helpline, with paid staff available to support seniors.

How was the research carried out?

This project centered on two data collection activities:

- an online survey with 105 seniors who had used the tablets for at least three months
- in-depth interviews with 29 seniors (drawn from the 105 surveyed) and with 13 program managers at 11 senior serving organizations and 2 key informants from funding organizations

What have we learned from the research?

TASS bridged digital divides for seniors. TASS revealed the importance of providing seniors with: user friendly, accessible devices; reliable access to affordable broadband internet tailored training and intergenerational learning and support opportunities; access to information, training and online support offered in multiple languages; and personal enjoyment.

TASS lessened social, economic, geographic and racial barriers experienced by disadvantaged seniors by reducing their digital exclusion. By providing digital services, TASS emerged as a social determinant of health, playing a crucial role in improving seniors' quality of life and helping to sustain their social, emotional and physical health and well-being.

TASS facilitated aging in place. TASS enhanced intergenerational learning and support by bringing generations together in learning and using technology.

TASS bridged digital divides for senior serving organizations by developing a step by step illustrated instruction booklet, managers were able to provide individual and group technical training and support to their staff and clients. Investments in training, lending equipment and building community infrastructure expands client services, improves efficiency of service delivery and accelerates technological innovations across the health care sector.

TASS innovations have revolutionized the senior service sector. By providing access to tablets with simplified and senior-friendly technology, built-in cyber security and data management and control, and access through remote log in and a multilingual helpline to troubleshoot technical issues, TASS demonstrates how new sociotechnical resources can be created in response to digital needs of vulnerable seniors. Future technology will play an expanded role in ensuring the health and well-being of seniors and in enhancing the efficiency of delivery to services to seniors.

How can you use this research?

Our research revealed the specific supports and resources required for both seniors and senior serving organizations in order to bridge individual and organizational digital divides. Research revealed the increasingly important role of emerging technologies in reducing barriers for seniors and facilitating aging in place. Insights gained from our study will be relevant for other sectors of the economy serving seniors.

Who is leading this research?

Noor Din, Human Endeavour, Nancy Mandell, Lois Kamenitz, Larry Lam, and Ben Zhang, York University. Partners; United Way Greater Toronto, York Region, Club Action 50+, The District Municipality of Muskoka, Community & Home Assistance to Seniors, Senior Persons Living Connected, Parkdale Golden Age Foundation, Punjabi Community Health Services, North Bay Golden Age Club, Rexdale CHC and Vaughan CHC

Learn more

The results of this project are currently being published. For more information, contact Noor Din at noor.din@humanendeavour.org

McDonough, Carol C. "The effect of ageism on the digital divide among older adults." Journal of Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine 2, no. 8 (2016): 1-7.