



# Maintaining Dignity

## TECHNOLOGY IN AGED CARE

This evidence theme on maintaining dignity is a summary of one of the key topics identified by a scoping review on human factors and technology in aged care.

### Key points

- Dignity refers to the value and sense of worth a person feels.
- For older people, dignity is often related to their independence and capacity to make decisions and control their own lives.
- Promoting dignity in aged care can help to create a more compassionate and respectful culture for care delivery.
- The use of technology in aged care has the potential to shift power away from the individual receiving care to the person delivering care, who can be seen as the technology expert. This has the potential to threaten the dignity of the care recipient.
- Service providers should work to ensure that all older people are respected and that technical solutions should improve their quality of care and not violate their dignity.

### What is dignity?

Dignity is a multifaceted concept that refers to the sense of worth, honour, and values of a person regardless of their age, gender, religion, or social status. [1] Dignity is closely related to the human rights of individuals and informs strict frameworks that aged care providers must follow. [2] For older people, dignity is often related to their independence and capacity to make decisions and control their own lives. For people who have not grown up with digital technologies, the use of technology in care delivery has the potential to threaten their sense of dignity. [3]

### Why is dignity important in aged care?

The Australian Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recommends that dignity should be a priority in the delivery of aged care to ensure that all older adults feel valued regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities. [4]

Maintaining dignity is important to enhance an individual's physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing and provide high-quality care. To support dignity, care should be delivered with respect, provide emotional support, and be sensitive of an individual's personal life experiences to build trust. [1] When people are not treated with dignity they may experience feelings of shame, humiliation, and powerlessness. [1] For some individuals, the use of new digital systems in care delivery can make them more dependent on others and they may experience feelings of helplessness. [3] Therefore, promoting dignity in aged care can help to create a more compassionate and respectful culture within care settings.

## Dignity concerns for technology use in aged care

When integrating technology into the delivery of aged care services, it is important to ensure that the dignity of those receiving care is maintained. This evidence theme summarises one of the key issues we identified as part of a scoping review of research on human factors and technology in aged care. If you need more information on this topic, try using the PubMed searches below.

We identified nine articles that discussed dignity concerns for older adults when using technology in aged care settings. [5-14] The articles suggested:

- Older adults can find the concept of digital companionship to be a threat to their sense of dignity, and the thought of having a robotic pet can be potentially confronting. [5]
- The use of surveillance cameras in aged care resident's rooms were considered to pose a risk to the dignity of older adults especially when receiving care on their beds. [6] Residents were concerned about whether recording such events was appropriate, and how older adults living with dementia would be able to provide consent for technology use. People were also concerned that family members might provide consent on their behalf which was often considered a violation of the individual's dignity. [7]
- The use of robots raised similar concerns for loss of dignity, as older people were concerned someone could be watching them via the robot. [8]
- The use of robotic pets with older people living with dementia raised the concern that individuals may be infantilised and feel their dignity as a human being was undermined due to their reduced cognitive capacity. [9]
- The use of technology in aged care was also considered to change power dynamics in the relationship between the caregiver and older person. As caregivers were often considered experts in technology by care recipients; they were deemed to hold the power. [10]
- Dignity is associated with personal privacy. It might therefore be compromised if robots with recording abilities are brought in to assist with personal care activities. [14]

## Maintaining dignity

Several recommendations were made in the included articles to assist in maintaining the dignity of older people in aged care. Service providers may want to consider:

- The appropriateness of using surveillance technologies that may reduce human interaction for aged care residents. [6] For more information see the 'Quality of human interaction' theme on the [ARIA website](#).
- Whether more careful consideration for the location of surveillance technologies could work to prevent any loss of dignity (i.e., not positioned directly in bathrooms or above resident's beds) and assist to balance the need for monitoring and preservation of dignity. [11]
- How existing procedures could be adapted to protect the dignity and privacy of residents, families, and staff to support the use of technology in improving older people's well-being, communication, and to reduce staff stress. [12]
- Exploring what technology means to older people and providing education for the role of technology in aged care. This may encourage an understanding that technology can support staff in delivery high-quality care, and potentially support older persons' integrity and dignity. [13]
- How everyone's dignity should be respected regardless of their level of cognitive function and awareness of their surrounding environment. [6] The use of technology should not threaten dignity. [10]

## Limitations

This evidence theme has been informed by the results of a rapid scoping review intended to map the current published research in this area. We acknowledge that our findings reflect on the evidence available and that this evidence varies in quality. This theme is closely related to 'Privacy and safety' which is reported as a separate theme on the [ARIA website](#).

## References

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