

Ethical considerations for standards

The context

Supporting an active and healthy life for older people is imperative as it will increase the mental and physical wellbeing, social interaction, satisfaction and happiness of older people. **ICT based products and services can help** older people to: carry out daily activities, monitor their health, create social networks, increase participation in society, and improve their own safety and security.

The **PROGRESSIVE ethical framework** provides **guidance on ethical principles that should be observed and respected in the standardisation work around ICT for AHA**. This is to ensure that standards address the best interests, needs, wishes and challenges of older people, and do not just satisfy purely technical, economic or commercial goals.

Standards and the standardisation process have often overlooked the needs of older people. This situation cannot be justified at a time when the **demographic, social, political and ethical dynamics for the inclusion and empowerment of older people** are gaining momentum.

The PROGRESSIVE ethical principles

Accessibility and Usability

Accessibility relates to physical accessibility, usability and availability of products, services, environments and buildings. If products/services cannot be properly used or accessed by older people, they may fail in their intended purpose or become quickly obsolete.

Important: 'Non-digital options' should still be made available for services that are increasingly being offered via online platforms, at the risk of excluding those older users who do not have access to, or who do not use, the internet or mobile technologies.

Affordability

Affordability, in the sense of economic or financial accessibility, can help ensure greater equality of opportunity for all older people in accessing products or services that relate to their wishes and needs. The 'design for all' concept and standards can be seen as drivers for such scalability and sustainability with this possibly contributing to the increased affordability.

Autonomy and Empowerment

People should be empowered to make their own decisions, in every aspect of their daily lives. Autonomy - whereby people still have the space and the freedom to choose - is becoming increasingly important. It is just as important to give older persons the choice to accept or refuse the technological support proposed to them. This reflects the emerging rights agenda that can be linked with consumer choice.

Beneficence and Non-maleficence

Beneficence is about doing good. Non-maleficence is about doing no harm. Doing good and not doing harm to the individual are important cornerstones of any ethical framework. This means focusing on the benefit of products and services for the individual, and touching on issues of quality and risk avoidance, but also safety, security and privacy.



Care, Protection and Support

Some older people have significant health or support needs that emerge out of mobility and dexterity, sensory or cognitive impairments. Coping with these needs may require assistive products and services. These can be developed using 'design for all' principles or through specific design principles. Standards can play an important part in ensuring that quality benchmarks for care, protection and support are applied. Tensions may arise, however, between the aspirations of older people and the rules and regulations (around e.g. safety and protection) that underpin some service provision.

Equality, Equity, Justice

Justice is about making fair decisions regarding competing needs or claims. It is an access-related principle: it provides equal (the same) or equitable (fair) availability or access to products and services.

Justice is associated with aspects of affordability (availability and access may depend on a person's budget), inclusion, (non-)discrimination, and privacy.

Inclusion, Non-Discrimination, Social Impact

There can be a lack of understanding and awareness of new technologies among a part of the older population. They may lack the skills and resources to engage in opportunities that ICT can bring. Exercising their digital skills or eSkills could help people to alleviate a sense of isolation; offer them access to information, education, training and work opportunities; and open up to them the means of engaging socially with others in new ways. Inclusion also means involving the user/consumer (older person) in the development and design of products and services, and in the development of standards on which they are based (cf. the PROGRESSIVE Guide for User Co-production).

Interoperability

Interoperability, i.e. the ability of different ICT systems or software to communicate, exchange and make use of information, brings greater choice (thus accessibility) to users. 'Plug-and-play' technology, where the user does not need to worry about the correct functioning of, and interaction between, different devices or software when used together, can be important for safety and also care, protection and support. Interoperability is, furthermore, about user-friendliness (usability), choice and affordability.

Privacy, Safety, Security

Products and services need to be safe and secure to use or access while not causing physical or other harm to users. Older people will use ICT if they trust the reliability of the services, and the way in which - for some devices and related services - their personal data is held and used. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) provides important guidance on this aspect.

*People 'remain' with the technologies that they use either in their youth or in the prime of their lives. Hence, it is not necessarily evident that today's 40-60 year olds will favour the latest/emerging technologies once they get older, meaning **there will always be that need for adapted technologies that take into account the specific needs and wishes of older people.** Ethical standards, based on the PROGRESSIVE ethical principles are a step towards inclusive and effective ICT for AHA.*

For more information or to receive a copy of the PROGRESSIVE Ethical Framework, contact:



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