

## **Blog title: August's independent living technology news**

Here's what's new in the world of independent living technology this month.

### **Public policy, legislation and campaigns**

#### **Designability celebrates 50th anniversary**

[Designability](#) (or Bath Institute of Medical Engineering - BIME as it was called) was launched on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1968 so celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year. Original key objectives remain concurrent with those set at conception, but recent work has focused on the development of assistive technology to support an ageing population and people with special needs. In 2013 the charity changed its name to Designability, to better represent a broader focus and national reach.

[Designability](#) held two special events to mark their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: a House of Lords reception on 1st May, hosted by President, The Right Honorable Lord Foster of Bath and a celebration on 11<sup>th</sup> July, the actual Anniversary date, at the Hilton Hotel in Bath, attended by HRH The Earl of Wessex. Chief Executive, Nigel Harris highlighted some milestones over the last fifty years and shared ambitious plans for future work. He also announced plans for an exciting partnership with the ACT Foundation to provide a new home for Designability, with new design studios and workshops, which will enable Designability to help even more people over the next 50 years. Nigel also launched the Designability 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Appeal which seeks to raise £750,000 to fit out a new building for Designability and to employ new engineers and designers to ensure that the new home operates at capacity from the outset.

#### **ATscale programme to ease access to assistive technology around the globe**

The Department for International Development has signed up to be one of the partners involved in [delivering the ATscale programme](#) which will aim to help 50 million people around the world access assistive technology. Announced during the Global Disability Summit held last month in London, programme is a cross sector initiative involving governments, the United Nations, universities and disability NGOs.

#### **Government promises £300 million for fully inclusive transport network**

The government has [pledged £300 million](#) to make the UK's transport network fully accessible by 2030. The Department for Transport's recently published Inclusive Transport Strategy outlines new funding for accessible infrastructure in railways as well as to improve Changing Places toilets at motorway service stations, and announces plans to produce league tables highlighting the operators that provide the best service for disabled people.

#### **Dementia stakeholders should help design assistive technology**

The Institution of Mechanical Engineers has called for the [involvement of dementia sufferers and other stakeholders](#) in the development of new intelligent assistive technologies designed to help people to stay in their own homes for longer. In a new study, the Institution argues that a new regulatory framework should be created to improve the robustness of research and accelerate clinical testing of such technologies.

### **Technological developments and innovations**

#### **Attitude-changing wheelchair arrives in Europe**

An award-winning power chair design that seeks to change people's perceptions of electric wheelchairs and scooters is to be marketed in the UK and Italy. [The WHILL Model C](#) boasts sleek aesthetics, precision handling and two powerful motors to help drivers ease through rough terrain. Following success in Japan, the United States and Canada, the Model C is being unrolled throughout Europe.

### **Smartbox launches next generation of Grid Pad**

Assistive technology company Smartbox has introduced a new generation of the [Grid Pad](#), a tablet-based device for people with complex access and communication needs. The Grid Pad is built for everyday communication with a high-spec computer, an all-day battery, multiple access options and a remote power button designed to provide users with greater independence.

### **E-dermis aims to provide amputees with a sense of touch and pain**

A team of engineers at the Johns Hopkins University has created an electronic skin that can be grafted onto a prosthetic hand to enable amputees to recreate a sense of touch. The [e-dermis](#) is composed of fabric and rubber which is laced with sensors that are designed to mimic nerve endings by relaying impulses back to the peripheral nerves. The prototype is designed to detect the curvature of objects and sharpness to provide touch and pain perception.

### **Hook+ provides switch interface for iOS devices**

The United States based assistive technology provider AbleNet have released the second version of its [Hook+](#) switch interface which provides a reliable wired connection to the iPad and iPhone. The Hook+ allows Apple devices to be controlled with up to four switches using an autoscanning or dual switch set-up.

*These stories were originally published in the dispATches newsletter – a free monthly e-mail about assistive technologies that empower disabled and older people to live more independently. [Click here to sign up for dispATches.](#)*