

## **May's independent living technology news**

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

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

#### **Disabled Facilities Grant receives extra funding**

The government has announced that the budget for the [Disabled Facilities Grant](#) – which covers home adaptations - will increase by 8% to £505 million in 2019/20.

#### **New fund targets Changing Places toilets on motorways**

The Department for Transport has partnered with Muscular Dystrophy UK to fund Changing Places toilets at [motorway service stations](#) across England. The £2 million fund will be spent on providing more space and specialist equipment to make bathrooms easier to use.

#### **Disability Futures research project focuses on the impact of tech**

The Wellcome Trust has awarded £1.5 million to a new interdisciplinary research project entitled [Imagining Technologies for Disability Futures](#). The project will study the representation of disability in the digital age, and ways in which technology can enhance lives in the future.

#### **The Design Council supports projects to help people with dementia**

The Design Council is working with the Alzheimer's Society on this year's [Spark award programme](#), which supports innovators and entrepreneurs to develop their product ideas. Funding will be awarded to projects that make life easier for people affected by dementia.

### **Technological developments and innovations**

#### **New wheelchair control system uses eye-tracking**

A team of Microsoft employees have teamed up with former NFL player Steve Gleason to develop a new eye-controlled wheelchair system. [Independence Drive](#) allows people to move by looking at one of eight points on a tablet fitted with an eye-tracking camera.

#### **Tagging technology integrates non-electronic objects into internet of things**

Engineers based at the University of Michigan have created a [low-cost tagging technology](#) that allows non-electronic objects to become part of connected care systems. The system uses radio frequency readers to scan smart labels encoded that can be to almost any object and used in a variety of applications.

#### **Virtual reality computer access software empowers physically disabled users**

A start-up has built hands-free computer access software that allows people with physical disabilities to operate their computer in a virtual reality environment. [Eyeflite's Ava](#) software uses head-tracking or voice recognition to engage in everyday computer-based tasks.

## **Smart prosthetic ankle deigned for challenging terrain**

Vanderbilt University's Mechanical Engineering Laboratory has designed a [new smart prosthetic ankle](#) which can adapt to whatever the wearer is doing. While most prosthetic ankles are static, Vanderbilt's mechanical ankle has onboard sensors and processing capacity that allow it to adjust to different footwear and terrains.

*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.](#)*