

January's independent living technology news

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

Public policy, legislation and campaigns

Government publishes guidance on inclusive communication

The government has published [guidance on how to produce communications](#) that include, accurately portray, and are accessible to disabled people, including advice about accessible formats such as Braille, subtitles and Easy Read.

NIHR looks at older people's assistive technology use at home

The National Institute for Health Research has published a [report reviewing the latest research](#) relating to the use of assistive technology to support older people at home. It concludes that little is known about technology usage among older people and its impact on their lives, despite the growing market of products aimed at them.

Independent review presses for a more joined up Disabled Facilities Grant

The University of the West of England has [published an independent review of Disabled Facilities Grants](#) in England. The report calls for an overhaul of the home adaptations scheme that would see health, housing and social care agencies form new local integrated services.

The WHO shines a light on digital exclusion in developing countries

The World Health Organisation's recently published [Flagship Report on Disability and Development 2018](#) highlights the digital divide in developing countries between disabled and non-disabled people. The report finds that disabled people are significantly less likely to have access to the internet and more than a third of government websites do not have adequate accessibility features.

Technological developments and innovations

VEST allows wearers to hear through their skin

A Californian technology firm that specialises in building devices that substitute one sense for another is developing the first hearing assistive technology that enables people to listen through their skin. Neosensory's [VEST \(Versatile Extra-Sensory Transducer\)](#) translates sound into vibratory patterns on the wearer's body which they can learn to recognise subconsciously after a period of practice.

AI-powered wheelchair system propelled by facial expressions

Intel has applied artificial intelligence to electric wheelchairs in order to allow quadraplegics to propel themselves with simple facial expressions. The [Wheelie 7 kit](#) is designed to be plugged into the control system of the user's wheelchair, allowing facial expressions such as a raised eyebrow or a kiss to be assigned to different types of maneuvers.

Bionic 3D printed arm enables young amputees

A Bristol based robotics company, Open Bionics, has developed the world's first medically certified 3D-printed artificial arm for amputees. [The Hero Arm](#) can be manufactured for

children aged nine years old and upwards and provides an artificial hand controlled by muscles on the residual limb.

3D printer makes graphics and charts for people with visual impairments

A US-based electrical engineer has invented a [3D printer](#) that makes touchable and talking graphs, charts and maps for blind and visually impaired people. The printer works by translating text or images from a Microsoft Word or Excel into a pattern of dots which are then embossed on a piece of paper, allowing their contents to be read by touch and sound.

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.](#)