Contents

What is INDEPENDENT about?

INDEPENDENT is a Europe-wide pilot project that brings together twenty partner organisations across six European Member States. Jointly, they have set up an ambitious work programme which aims at better capitalising on information and communications technology (ICT) when it comes to supporting older people in their communities. The ultimate goal is to empower older people to maintain their independence.

A particular focus is on enabling, with help of technology, a better joining-up of social and health care services as they currently exist. There is also emphasis on strengthening the participation of the so called "third sector", e.g. family carers and the voluntary/community sector who would otherwise not be in the usual information sharing loop.

The pilot project has started in January 2010 and will end in December 2012. It is part-funded by the European Union's Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme.

Why has the project been set up?

Utilising telecommunications, with a view to supporting provision of social and health care services in the community, is not a new development in itself. Telecare and telehealth services have for instance been around for quite some time in many countries. Also, the quest for more integrated care is not new. When it comes to supporting older people living in the community, today's reality is however still characterised by fragmentation and bureaucracy in current service provision. This has resulted in disjointed and patchy medical care and social support.

The vast potential that innovative ICT solutions do generally hold for supporting older people in living independently has therefore remained largely unexploited, with negative impacts on the quality of life of those who are in need of support. At the same time, this situation has negative impacts on the economic sustainability of welfare and healthcare systems. It is widely acknowledged that models of formal support provision for the elderly population need to change to reflect budgetary pressures and demographic changes, including different ways of accessing formal carers and co-ordination of informal care. This creates obvious needs for integrated means of communication and the supporting technology. It also highlights the potential of family members and home technology in performing a role within the supporting network.

More recently, more possibilities for responding to these needs have emerged. In particular, the appropriate application of advanced ICT can make a major contribution to this goal.

How does INDEPENDENT pursue its goals?

Against this background, the INDEPENDENT project has set out to develop and pilot an integrated set of ICT- enabled services to deal with a range of threats to independent living common among older people. By means of innovative usage of technology, current "silos" in service delivery are broken down to allow for cooperation across the usual boundaries of existing care and support services.

To this end, INDEPENDENT is pursuing a dedicated programme of service process innovation complemented by adapting existing technology, thereby following a number of guiding principles:

- ✓ Use appropriate existing technology to provide as many older people as possible with digital access to the support services they need.
- ✓ Enable older people to be reached appropriately by means of digital techniques by those who can support them.
- ✓ Augment and open sectoral telecare and telehealth platforms to enable coordinated cross-sector support delivery.
- ✓ Develop care coordination applications to run on informal care platforms.
- ✓ Adopt a clearly demand-driven, inclusive approach and avoid all technology 'push'.

Based on these principles, an integrated set of support services combating a range of threats commonly faced by older people will be piloted at six sites across Europe, comprising Dublin (IE), Hull (UK), Milton Keynes (UK), Malaga (ES), Trikala (GR) and Geldrop (NL).

What has been achieved so far and what happens next?

Each pilot follows a step by step process which is divided into three phases, as shown below.
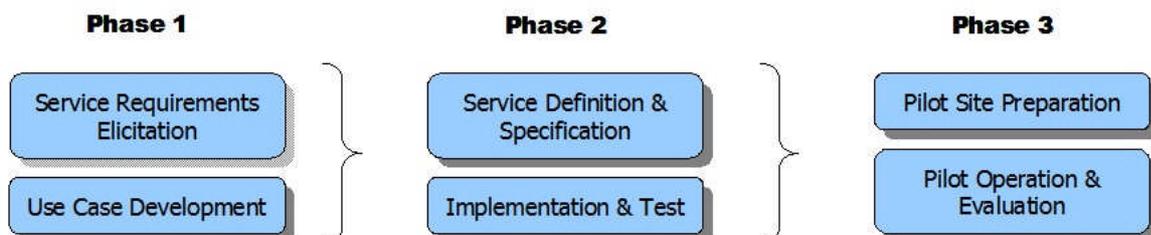
The first phase – which is about to be completed - focuses on analysing and documenting user and service provider requirements for all INDEPENDENT services, followed by the generation of a set of appropriate use cases, examples of how the services will be used, for each.

The INDEPENDENT services are adapted to the specific circumstances prevailing at the individual pilot sites, e.g. respecting differences in legal and regulatory frameworks and provision of health and care services. To adequately cater for the particular circumstances prevailing at each site, each site has identified a clear initial focus on one or more of the relevant issues to be addressed when developing their digital support infrastructure. This is done in line with the INDEPENDENT approach and thus improves support service delivery.

The second phase focuses on iterative service modelling and technical specification work, including prototype testing. Finally, a third phase will move on to onsite testing of all INDEPENDENT services i.e. after completion of pilot site preparation, delivery of pilot operation and the evaluation finalises project activity.

Throughout the entire project duration, INDEPENDENT draws on the expertise of two advisory boards, the Public Policy & Ethics Advisory Board (PPEAB) and a User Advisory Board (UAB). Whereas the UAB advises the project and provides input on user related aspects in particular, the PPEAB oversees project delivery in dealing with aspects of exploitation and ethical issues.

Where can you get further information on the project and its outcomes?

Further information can be found on the project's web site: www.INDEPENDENT-project.eu. Queries can also be addressed directly to the project coordinator.

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