

ALCOVE CALLS FOR GOVERNMENT TO INVEST IN 'DIGITALLY DISADVANTAGED'

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Open Letter To Minister For Loneliness Calls For Tech Support To Tackle Isolation in Care

As new research from the Mental Health Foundation reveals that feelings of loneliness in UK adults has jumped from one in ten (10%) before the COVID-19 pandemic to one in four (24%) following lockdown, Alcove, a leading care technology provider, is calling on the government to urgently prioritise technology as part of the UK's social care provision, in an effort to tackle digital isolation and loneliness in vulnerable residents, and support the care system as it faces unprecedented demand.

Alcove, which works with local authorities and care providers across the country to deliver bespoke social care plans for vulnerable service users, has published an open letter to Baroness Barran, Minister for Loneliness, calling for the government to support local authorities in prioritising investment in technology rather than relying on the historic analogue solutions. The letter highlights the role technology can play in helping to tackle loneliness and digital isolation for many, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Data from the OECD shows that the UK is one of the lowest spenders on social care in Western Europe and continues to rely on outdated analogue systems – many of which will be out of date and not fit for purpose in a matter of years – for the basic elements of patients' care plans, rather than innovating and investing in technology. The Covid-19 pandemic has also highlighted the issues many vulnerable people are facing without access to technology, and the role technology can play in supporting stretched care services where carers are having to isolate, reduce contact with patients and observe social distancing measures.

Alcove is calling for the government to prioritise innovative, video-led technology as part of social care provision in the UK, to support the sector, staff and residents alike.

The impact loneliness has on mental health and wellbeing cannot be understated. According to the Metal Health Foundation, long-term loneliness is associated with an increased risk of certain mental health problems, including depression and anxiety, and the impact of long-term loneliness on mental health can be very difficult to manage.

Hellen Bowey, CEO and Co-Founder of Alcove said:

"Of the more than 850,000 people in the UK receiving state-funded social care, many are currently being forced to shield in a bid to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. While the majority of the nation has been able to rely on the internet for food shopping, banking, entertainment and keeping in touch with loved ones, many care residents will have no access to online services, and be forced to rely on outdated

analogue technology for their daily care needs.

“The pandemic has highlighted many of the inequalities in society and the very real need to protect the vulnerable people in our communities. By implementing a standard of care through video technology, authorities and providers can ensure lonely individuals can see and speak to real people they know and love, including carers and health workers, whilst delivering enhanced quality of life, significant savings in care provision and allowing peace of mind for friends and family.

“As the rules around shielding look to change, many in our society will feel anxious or nervous about getting back into the real world and feel they are making a choice between their mental and physical health. Providing access to video technology would provide an emotional lifeline for many of those who feel they should continue to shield to protect themselves from the virus.

“That is why local authorities and care providers need to start taking digital and video tech seriously, and this needs to be led by our Government. Our reliance on analogue panic buttons for elderly and disabled adults is outdated, regressive and costly – and we could and should be doing more. Care technology is already saving lives in our communities, so I am asking the Government to do more to support the rollout of technology across our social care system.”

-ENDS-

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Notes to editors:

- Alcove specialises in delivering personalised care monitoring systems for local authorities, the NHS, housing associations and sheltered accommodation providers across the country. Alcove’s intelligent care technology ecosystem was developed to enhance independent living for older and disabled adults and revolutionise the delivery of care and support services globally to provide the 21st-century replacement for telecare. It is the only assistive technology ecosystem provider in the marketplace to embed both one touch video calling and Alexa into its connected platform
- The Alcove Care Phone, in the form of a ‘one touch’ secure tablet-type device, is set up remotely and enables video-calling to an individual’s pre-identified support network. This allows support staff to monitor care needs, ensure that clients are safe, enables residents to conduct online activities such as ordering essential supplies and stay video connected with their loved ones. The use of this type of digital assistive technology can support long term independence and maximises opportunities for self-determined support. In turn, this can reduce demand on key services across both the local authority and provider network.
- Alcove is the only assistive technology ecosystem provider in the marketplace to embed both one touch video calling and Alexa into its connected platform
- Alcove is a Care Quality Commission commended intelligent care technology provider