

99 year old Skyper shows why aged care facilities should offer internet access

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Internet access should be mandatory in all aged care facilities, according to a University of Melbourne expert.

Currently, only a handful of facilities offer internet access to residents. However, Dr John Murnane from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education said this wasn't enough.

“Internet access provides an important opportunity for mental stimulation, which is closely tied to older people’s health,” said Dr Murnane. “It is also a liberating outlet for those confined to a single building on a day-to-day basis. Everyone living in retirement facilities deserves to experience these benefits.”

Dr Murnane’s research in a low-care hostel in Melbourne has shown that, while there are many challenges, older people can learn to use computers and access email, and derive huge benefits from doing so.

“The residents I work with are all over the age of 85. I’ve been working with them since 2007, and now many of them can use email by themselves. The oldest participant, who is 99, is currently learning to Skype, to keep in touch with relatives in France,” he said.

“Email is the most popular activity among our participants, with its ability to send photographs particularly valued. However, some participants are also developing an interest in researching family histories online, and the group has a growing Facebook presence.”

Dr Murnane disputed widely-held beliefs that residents of aged care facilities and other elderly people were too old to learn to use the internet.

“The way we talk about the internet, for example by referring to digital natives and immigrants, helps to build a culture of fear among the non-computer literate. We need to stop thinking about the internet as the preserve of the young; indeed, the way the world wide web enables us to explore, learn and communicate might have been especially designed for the elderly or disabled.”

Dr Murnane said it was likely aged care facilities would face increasing pressure to introduce the internet in the next five to 10 years, as a growing number of computer-literate residents moved in.

“Although making internet access available can be costly and resource-intensive for aged [care facilities](#), I believe the benefits certainly outweigh the costs. They shouldn’t have to wait for residents to demand [internet access](#). Current residents deserve access now,” he said.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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