

# Canada and Europe fund intelligent senior homes

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Technology may soon be helping seniors to live longer, healthier lives. A trio of researchers, including Simon Fraser University's Andrew Sixsmith, is working to develop intelligent, interactive sensors to be embedded in seniors' homes and used to support independent living.

The sensors will do everything from encouraging seniors to engage in brain stimulating puzzles, to reminding them to take medication, wash their hands, turn off the stove, exercise and eat.

Sixsmith, SFU's Gerontology Research Centre director, Alex Mihailidis from the University of Toronto and Arlene Astell, University of St. Andrews/Louise Nygard Karolinska Institutet in Sweden are receiving \$730,000 through a joint federal and European [health research](#)-funding program to develop ambient assistive living technologies.

Their project—Ambient Assistive Living Technologies for Wellness, Engagement and Long Living—is one of six international projects receiving \$5 million to fund research collectively that helps keep seniors healthy and living independently.

The federal government has thrown \$1 million into the joint federal/European funding pot under a new initiative called the European Research Area on Ageing (ERA-AGE), Europe's first joint research program on aging. The Canadian contribution comes through the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, a federal health-research funding body.

The project undertaken by Sixsmith and his research partners targets seniors over the age of 65 with [mild cognitive impairment](#) (MCI). They represent 20 per cent of the over-65 population in Canada currently and that percentage is expected to grow with more people living to the age of 100 and older.

MCI means at least one aspect of a person's cognitive function, such as memory, is impaired but not enough to significantly disrupt daily functioning. However, untreated, it is believed to lead to the development of [dementia](#), a debilitating [brain disease](#) that affects five per cent of people over the age of 65.

"Dementia isn't just hastened by brain changes," says Sixsmith. "It's brought on by increasingly damaging environmental challenges, like forgetting to eat, that deepen people's mental fragility to the point where they wind up in assisted living or long term care."

Economically, the research trio's project targets a vast untapped market for ambient assistive living technologies, turning frail seniors' homes into intelligent environments that will help them to live independently as long as possible.

They also create new industries, save governments billions of dollars and improve [seniors'](#) and their families' quality of life.

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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