As age-friendly technologies emerge, experts recommend policy changes

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From smart phones to smart cars, both public and private entities must consider the needs of older adults in order to help them optimize the use of new technologies, according to the latest issue of *Public Policy & Aging Report* (*PP&AR*), titled "Aging and Technology: The Promise and the Paradox." A total of eight articles all from authors affiliated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology AgeLab are featured.

"Remarkable technological advances are all around us, and leaders in the business and scientific communities are keenly aware of 'the aging of America' and the potential for their efforts in this domain to do well while also doing good," states *PP&AR* Editor Robert B. Hudson, PhD.

Author Joseph Coughlin, PhD, speaks to both the promise and prevailing shortcomings of linking high-tech devices to the needs and interests of older Americans. As his and other articles demonstrate, there are fascinating innovations coming out of labs around the world, but there is still a shortage of consumer-ready solutions. Coughlin calls for the training of a new generation of specialists knowledgeable about both tech and aging.

"Business, government, and nonprofits must collaborate to stimulate and speed the development of a next-generation technology-enabled aging services workforce," Coughlin writes.

Chaiwoo Lee, MS, discusses some of the challenges facing both designers of smart technology and older adults as actual or potential

users of that technology. She indicates that a mix of technological, individual, and social factors is at work. Thus, potential usefulness of a device is not enough to ensure success—evidenced by the slow adaptation of the personal emergency alarm, despite the presumed assurance it would provide elders and family alike, as well as endless late-night advertising. Lee enumerates a series of factors challenging adoption, such as usability, affordability, accessibility, confidence, independence, compatibility, reliability, and trust.

Using technology safely is the focus of the discussion by Bryan Reimer, PhD, which addresses the growing sophistication of driver-assisted technologies moving in the direction of highly automated vehicles. He writes that it is critical to recognize that increased automation in cars requires more, not less driver education.

"Although automated vehicle technologies will ultimately save lives, there may be unavoidable issues, and even loss of live, on the way to full automation," Reimer states. "It is essential to begin framing the issue of automation as a long-term investment in a safer, more convenient future that will revolutionize, in particular, the experience of old age."

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