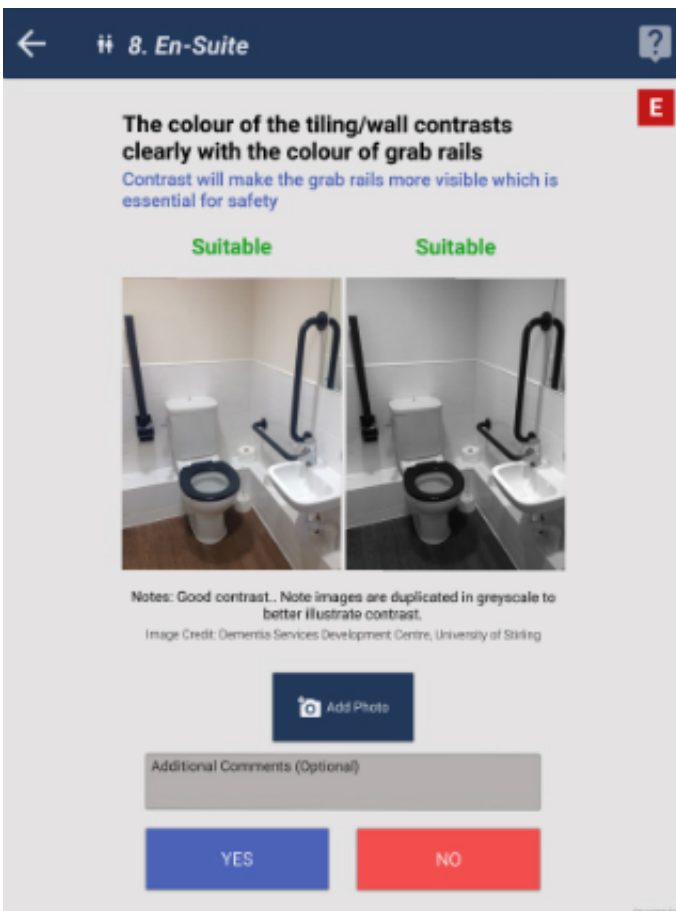


Pioneering app to transform the lives of people with dementia

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Available on smartphones and tablets, Iridis allows users to assess their living environment against dementia design principles. Credit: University of Stirling

An innovative new app could help enhance home and hospital environments for people with dementia – improving patient outcomes

and reducing the strain on health services, according to University of Stirling academics.

On World Alzheimer's Day, the University's Dementia Services Development Centre (DSDC), together with Space Architects, launches [Iridis](#) – the first app of its kind in the world to assess and provide feedback on how suitable a residence, care facility or other [environment](#) is for older [people](#), particularly those with the condition.

Lesley Palmer, Chief Architect at the DSDC, said: "Iridis revolutionises how we improve the day-to-day lives of older people and those living with [dementia](#) around the world.

"At the touch of a button, people with dementia, their families and health professionals will be able to assess how dementia-friendly their built environment is and how it can be improved."

It comes as new research from the University reveals that the [hospital environment](#) plays a key role in ensuring a positive outcome for patients. The Older Persons Routine Acute Assessment (OPRAA) study found a good hospital environment is safe and secure, quiet and calm and familiar and consistent, with clear wayfinding signage in place.

The survey aimed to explore the outcomes that are important to people with dementia or confusion who have experienced a hospital admission. Respondents reported that the hospital environment was important for ensuring a good outcome.

Improvements

Iridis allows users to use smartphones and tablets to assess environments – such as homes or hospitals – to ensure they comply with dementia design principles, which in turn, helps to reduce confusion and risk.

The technology asks users – including people with dementia, their family members and healthcare professionals – a series of questions about their surroundings and requests photographs of the environment. It then uses the data to highlight potential problems – such as issues with furniture, lighting, colour contrast and noise – before recommending changes that could enhance the environment for people with dementia.

Recommended improvements could be as simple as improving lighting to more complex enhancements, such as reconfiguring bathrooms.

The app is an updated, digital version of the DSDC's existing paper-based Dementia Design Audit Tool, used by thousands of people around the world. It simplifies and digitises the process, with the assessment of a two-bedroom home taking around 20 minutes to complete.

Experts say the app will allow people with dementia to live independently for longer and, in turn, could help ease pressure on hospitals. They also highlight further benefits to the health and care sectors, with hospital and care home environments vital in ensuring patients receive the best possible outcomes.

Ms Palmer explained: "There are around 50 million people living with dementia worldwide and we have already received significant international interest in Iridis, from the likes of Japan, India and China.

"We already know that improving the living environment can have a profound effect on the health and wellbeing of people living with dementia and latest research from the University of Stirling indicates that enhancing the hospital environment could lead to an increase in positive outcomes for patients.

"Iridis will advise and inform homeowners and health professionals of recommended changes to the built environment and, in turn, improve the

health, dignity and independence of our senior population.

"We are proud to have led the development of Iridis."

Stephen Brooks, Director of Space Architects, said: "In the UK, a wealth of housing stock is categorically unsuitable for elderly living, we are in an era where people are living longer and we have a duty of care to offer a better quality of life and improved living standards to allow people to remain independent for longer.

"What we're doing in association with DSDC is offering a service which will reduce the high cost of specialist care by creating and adapting living spaces for specific needs and future-proofing homes as individuals' needs change.

"Through the introduction of our new Iridis App, people can independently assess a building and take, often simple steps, to make them dementia-friendly."

He added: "By providing the right living environment we can help people to stay safe, physically active and maintain mental stimulation for longer.

"The information and data collated from app users will allow us to understand the needs of the elderly in even greater detail and with greater certainty, and we can apply this to future design and planning of our homes. The Iridis app will be a catalyst for improved design and the first of its kind that brings together intelligent data and residential design processes."

Quality of life

Richard Baker, Policy and Communications Manager at Age Scotland, who is speaking at the launch, said: "The living environment affects

older people in a great number of ways, particularly those living with dementia. Therefore, ensuring older people are living in an environment which meets their needs is very important for their quality of life and independence.

"Age Scotland welcomes the launch of Iridis as innovations like this make it easier to adapt the living environment – such as homes, workplaces and public buildings accordingly. This can make a huge difference to [older people](#), particularly those with dementia, and allows them to remain independent and living in their own homes for longer.

"We want to congratulate the University of Stirling and Space Architects on this exciting innovation."

Two versions of the app will be available for download via the Apple App Store and Google Play in the coming days – a free homeowners' app and a professional app, priced at £14.99 for a one-month subscription or £52.99 for six months.

Data collected from users of the app will allow its designers to continually update and improve the technology.

The OPRAA survey found that hospitals can ensure people living with dementia, and their families and carers, can have a positive experience in [hospital](#) by:

Ensuring the environment is safe and secure, putting the patient and family at ease

- Keeping the environment as familiar as possible, avoiding moving the patients multiple times and maintaining staff consistency
- Making the patient feel "at home" by providing some

recognisable items

- Ensuring the ward is as quiet and calm as possible
- Easy wayfinding signage for the patient, such as clear access to the bathroom
- Providing flexible visiting hours
- Improving facilities for carers within hospitals, such as rooms to retreat to when spending many hours on the ward

More information: www.stir.ac.uk/iridis-app/

Provided by University of Stirling

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