

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## Australia needs a healthcare “assistive technology” network

Australia needs to establish a network of people working in health care on “assistive technologies” – or emerging assistive and medical technologies (EAMTs) – to address the disconnect between assistive technology research and its translation into commercialisation and practice.

An EAMT network could help remove barriers to the effective adoption of EAMTs to enable healthy independent living, provide access to information and expertise, analyse and advise on regulations and standards and promote collaboration between researchers, industry, government and users.

Social networking tools could provide an important mechanism for identifying and engaging a wider audience for the potential of the application of EAMTs.

These were key recommendations to come from the *Enabling Assistive Technologies Network* Workshop organised in Sydney 25–26 October, by the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE), supported by the Federal Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) and the NSW Government’s Trade and Investment Division.

The workshop was part of a project driven by ATSE’s Health Technology Forum which seeks to bring to market and general use “assistive technologies” and address the disconnect between assistive technology research and its translation into commercialisation and practice. It confirmed the need for a network to facilitate the adoption of innovative approaches, including new technology-enabled capabilities and more effective provision of aged and disabled care and independent living.

The Academy says EAMTs can reduce healthcare costs and maintain healthcare standards in Australia by, for example, allowing the elderly to stay at home longer rather than using more expensive forms of care, such as hospitalisation.

The Forum’s campaign is driven by its belief that as Australia’s population grows and ages, the nation will face increased healthcare costs and a risk of lower standards of healthcare – unless EAMTs are developed.

Professor Greg Tegart, Chair of the ATSE Health and Technology Forum, says to address the challenges associated with an ageing population there is a need for an increased focus on research and development, commercialisation and implementation of these assistive technologies.

“This will need to engage a wide range of stakeholders – including researchers, investors, the medical sector, community organisations, governments, carers and consumers,” he says.

“Currently, there are only very limited structures for bringing together these stakeholders to work together on the development and deployment of smart technologies that are needed by the nation.

“The multidisciplinary nature of aged care services across ICT, health and medical care, housing and other services means that many stakeholders and agencies need to work together to fully implement the vision for aged care in the future.”

ATSE’s work on assistive technologies in aged care has also confirmed the strong interest amongst a wide range of players for the establishment of a multidisciplinary network facilitating research, innovation, technology and its translation into practice and commercialisation in Australia.

The workshop agreed a network would have to be self-sustaining model which enabled the network to operate as an independent and authoritative body.

ATSE undertook to develop a value proposition and draft Business Plan for such a network before the end of the year with the aim of launching an EAMT Network early in 2013.

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