

Press Release

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ULSTER UNIVERSITY SECURES €3.7M FUNDING TO IMPROVE HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN RURAL LOCATIONS

Ulster University is to lead on two major international research projects with a focus on improving the lives of older people in remote and rural areas through improved access to technology and social connectedness.

Ulster University has been awarded two grants by The Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) 2014-2020 Programme worth €3.7m in total. Led by Ulster University, both projects will be delivered by a team of international partners and will run for three years.

Social exclusion and loneliness are increasingly prevalent in rural and remote regions of Europe and there is growing concern about the impact on mental health, independent living and patient rehabilitation after illness.

The first project - **Platforms for Ageing Community Engagement – Exchange and Enterprise (PLACE-EE)** – will seek to develop low cost, transnational solutions to improve the health and wellbeing of older isolated people in remote rural areas through innovative approaches to social inclusion.

This will include helping older citizens to understand and exploit digital technology for their health and social wellbeing and creating a range of digital solutions to the challenges identified by older people.

The second project - **Smart sENsor Devices fOr rehabilitation and Connected health (SENdoc)** - will assess the technical, clinical and social acceptability of early stage and market-ready wearable technologies and their impact on patients, on health and care delivery, and on rural communities.

While SENdoc is attempting to bring new technology to older people, PLACE-EE is attempting to bring older people to the technology.



Professor Gerry Leavey, director of the Bamford Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing, will lead PLACE-EE. Speaking of the project he said: **“With social exclusion and loneliness increasingly prevalent in rural and remote regions of Europe, there are damaging consequences for physical and mental health. This project will develop and implement locally derived, sustainable solutions to address the health and social needs of aging and isolated rural populations.**

“In doing so, it will identify and connect local, cultural knowledge and other resources with innovative ICT approaches that enable social inclusion, and timely, efficient advice, support and care. We want to foster intergenerational skills exchange between older and younger citizens and empower older people through creative and cultural activities.”

Dr. Joan Condell, senior lecturer in the School of Computing and Intelligent Systems in the Department of Computing and Engineering at Ulster University will lead SENDoc. She said: **“SENDoc will focus on changing existing rehabilitation programmes by introducing the use of wearable sensor systems in ageing communities in northern remote areas.**

“These sensors can measure mobility, strength, balance, and also wellbeing, exercise, and safety, and have the potential to support independent living. SENDoc will transfer research and development in wearable systems, put in place community networks and create platforms where data and experiences can be shared and supported.

“What is particularly exciting about both projects is that the partnerships will bring together technicians, clinicians, associated expert and service providers from around the world to engage with patients, citizens and communities to address these challenges.”

Welcoming the funding awards, Gina McIntyre Chief Executive Officer of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) said: **“We are delighted that our work in guiding Ulster University, over some 18 months, in the application requirements of the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme has resulted in these successful funding awards, and we wish them every success.”**

“Both of these inspiring projects will not only answer some of the challenges facing remote communities across the Northern Peripheral regions of Europe, but will help to cement and promote future collaborative partnerships between key organisations that are working to improve the health outcomes of older people in rural locations.”

For PLACE-EE the partner organisations are:

- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
- City of Skellefteå, Sweden
- Fjarðbyggð, Iceland
- Limerick County Council, Republic of Ireland
- Public Health Agency Northern Ireland
- Umea University, Sweden
- Ulster University

The associated partner organisations:

- Microelectronic Application Centre, Limerick
- Institute of Public Health in Ireland,
- Åsele Kommun Social Welfare Office, Sweden
- The Healthcare Institute of East Iceland,
- AN Solutions, Iceland
- Checkup, Malmo Sweden
- VA College, Iceland

For SENDoc the partner organisations are:

- Ulster University
- University College Cork, National University Of Ireland, Cork
- Karelia University of Applied Sciences Ltd.
- Västerbotten County Council



The associated partner organisations are:

- Siun Sote, North Karelia Joint Municipal Authority for Social and Healthcare Services, Finland
 - CoLab, Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT), Ireland
 - Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) Partnership, Ireland
 - Agency for Health and Prevention, Government of Greenland, Greenland
 - St Finbarrs Hospital, Cork, Ireland
- ENDS.

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