

WHITE PAPER JUNE 2021

EMPOWERING ELDERS WITH & THROUGH DIGITAL SKILLS



DR. VANDANA NADIG NAIR
ELDERAID WELLNESS PVT. LTD.

WWW.ELDERAID.IN | VANDANA@ELDERAID.IN



ElderAid

ELDERS, DIGITAL LITERACY & THE PANDEMIC

The Internet is a powerful medium of information, commerce, engagement, education, health and a myriad other areas. The benefits that it offers the elderly are enormous, especially in these pandemic times. And yet, one of the biggest barriers is digital literacy and helping elders overcome their anxiety around it.

The pandemic has thrown into sharp focus elderly issues as well as the need for digitally upskilling them – elders are lonely; they are anxious about their own and their families' welfare and health; there has been significant disruption in their social lives due to being house bound for their own safety; accessing a whole host of support and services is possible if they are digitally savvy (ranging from banking to socializing to entertainment to groceries and other shopping to name just a few).

Multiple studies have demonstrated the immense positive impact that social engagement via the internet has had on elder mental and emotional well being (Zhang & Kaufman, 2015). At the other end, WHO is launching a new initiative, Digital and Assistive Technologies for Ageing (DATA) which is at the frontline of home-based, assistive solutions for elder health and wellbeing. This will call for a significant level of comfort with technology in general and the internet in specific amongst elders to enable them to leverage these solutions.

The starting point clearly for all this is digital literacy for elders. A 2019 study by Agewell Foundation showed that ~85% of the elders who were polled were digitally illiterate. While the pandemic has forced many elders to 'go online' (an interesting study by KPMG and ET Tech in October 2020 points out that the share of internet users from the 55+ age group has gone up from 8% pre pandemic to a staggering 30% 6 months later!), the opportunity and need to enhance their skills and comfort remains large and currently unaddressed.



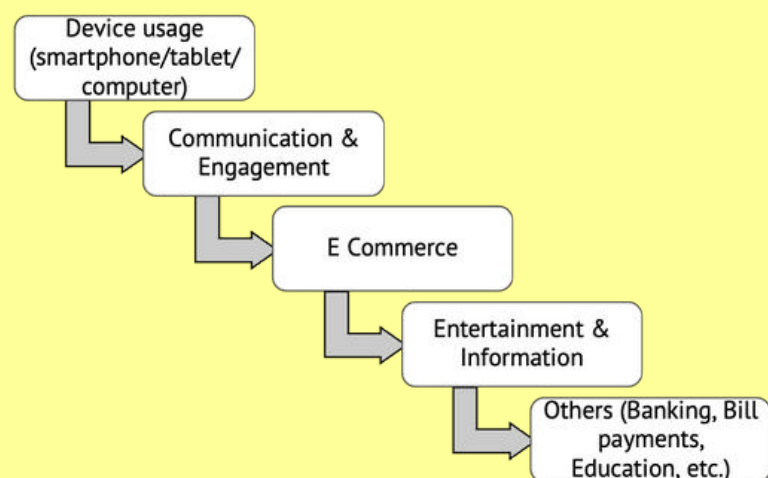
PILOT RESULTS

ElderAid conducted a series of wellness-focused pilots and primary research in the areas of wellness and digital awareness and usage. Pertinent findings are shared here:

ONLINE WELLNESS SERIES – In this series, over 50 elders were engaged over a 2-week period in a range of online activities including a seminar on the importance of holistic wellbeing, a book reading, a quiz, an art session, yoga and easy cooking. The elders in the cohort unanimously agreed that they looked forward to the ongoing engagement and would like the organization to add sessions on how to get comfortable with their smartphones and tablets to shop online, get on OTTs and access critical information.

DIGITAL LITERACY – Five elders were supported during the pilot to enhance their comfort with and proficiency in internet usage. The training was one on one and began with a simple needs assessment to understand the elders' wishlist with regard to internet use and their current comfort and proficiency levels. The training spanned simple settings on their phone (how to use the torch) to whatsapp (how to record a voice note) to online shopping and browsing and signing up on OTT platforms. The elders valued the one on one interaction, the ability to call their volunteer-mentor when needed for subsequent trouble shooting and the delivery of this training in manageable, bite-size nuggets.

Primary research with 25 elders also reveals a hierarchy (Figure 1) of how they are prioritising digital training. They would like to first get comfortable with their devices before moving onto communication, then e-commerce, followed by entertainment, information and so on.



KEY ELEMENTS OF THE UPSKILLING PROGRAM

Key elements that a digital literacy program for elders would need to address include:

1. Start from where they are – in terms of their own needs, their device(s), current comfort levels, etc.
2. Ensure one on one support – ideally in person but online / digitally can work too, provided it is individualised
3. Bite-size information – One needs to keep in mind that the internet is potentially intimidating for elders so information in small nuggets is ideal
4. Practice! – The elder needs to be given ample opportunity to keep practicing and testing their new skills to ensure they remember it and gain confidence
5. Supporting, simple, written user guide / notes – Elders like to go back to what they learned in the way they are most comfortable, which is hard copies of notes / directions with large easy visuals
6. Cover safety and privacy issues – Care must be taken to address issues such as safety and fraud

About ElderAid Wellness Pvt. Ltd.

ElderAid (www.elderaid.in) is a Bangalore-based social enterprise with a mission to helping elders live healthy, happy, secure and independent lives by providing them with a host of healthcare, wellness and concierge services, delivered / facilitated by a dedicated Care Manager. The organization has served over a 1000 elders and is rapidly growing to other cities with a footprint now in Chennai, Pune, Navi Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Jaipur and Mysore. Elder wellness is a large focus area for them and they are currently creating an innovative elder digital literacy program called 'Tech goes Retro'.

