

Japan's seniors to get tech-savvy with free iPads

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A trial programme announced by Japan Post, IBM and Apple, will see 1,000 seniors given iPads free-of-charge for six months starting from October

Millions of Japanese seniors could receive iPads under a programme to supply the elderly with specially equipped tablets that remind them when to take medicine and advise where to find community support services.

A trial programme announced by Japan Post, IBM and Apple, will see 1,000 seniors given iPads free-of-charge for six months starting from October, Japan Post said Friday.

If successful, that distribution could be increased to five million by 2020, according to Apple.

Currently Japan Post provides a \$1,000 yen (\$8) monthly service, dubbed "Watch Over", whereby postal workers check in on elderly customers and report back to relatives about their well-being.

"We will start a trial service with some 1,000 iPads custom-made for the elderly, using our existing Watch Over service," a Japan Post spokesman told AFP Friday.

It was unclear if users would later be charged for the devices.

On Thursday, Apple called the service "a first-of-its kind initiative aimed at improving the quality of life for millions of Japanese senior citizens".

"(The programme) will deliver iPads with IBM-developed apps and analytics to connect millions of seniors with services, healthcare, community and their families," the US tech giant said in a statement.

Around a quarter of Japan's 127-million population is aged 65 or over, a result of low birth rates over the last few decades and no significant immigration.

The proportion is expected to grow to around 40 percent in a few decades and products targeting [seniors](#) are seen as a significant growth market.

Japan's vast postal system, little known abroad, sits on assets worth up to 14 trillion yen and many of the country's swelling number of [elderly](#) rely on it to receive their pension payments.

The company—which is on track for multi-billion-dollar share listing in Tokyo later this year—has long served as an insurer and bank, in addition to delivering letters and parcels to even to the most remote villages.

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