

# Population tipping point in the UK and EU as older people outnumber children

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The ageing population across the UK and the EU, combined with the widening gap between available carers and those who need care, has prompted researchers at The University of Manchester to conduct research on a range new technologies to encourage healthy and active ageing.

To mark International Older Person's Day (1 October 2016), the University has announced preliminary findings from two technology projects to promote active lifestyles among older people currently underway – a mobile app and a series of 'exergames' – video games incorporating exercise and movement.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is marking this year's International Day for Older People by asking people across the globe to 'take a stand against ageism' – and there isn't a stronger area of ageism than the perceived wisdom of technology use among the older population.

More than a third of [older people](#) use the internet on a regular basis, and a quarter of the population use online banking services as well as health information, news sites and other content providers. Therefore, the appetite for technology across all areas of our lives is strong and growing.

In one project PreventIT a [mobile app](#) measures activity levels of users and utilises unique motivational cues to ensure fitness and activity

regimes are maintained.

In another project, exergames involve interactive videogame technology; through playing the games users improve balance and strength – in the current trials the confidence levels of the gamers were vastly improved.

Dr Emma Stanmore, senior lecturer in The University of Manchester's School of Health Sciences and lead consultant on the exergames project, said confidence is the key to improved mental and physical health among the older community.

"Our current trial has shown an increased level of confidence among the gamers, and they seem to be happier and more fulfilled".

"For example, one 83 year old trial volunteer recorded significant improvement in her overall lifestyle. Over the 12 weeks in the trial her strength and balance improved and she felt this gave her the confidence to build up from six minutes to 14 minutes three times a week. This confidence spurred her on to start driving again after giving this up four years ago.

"She would often use her mobility scooter indoors at the sheltered accommodation where she lives. By the end of the trial she would very rarely use her scooter at all."

According to the University researchers, inactivity is the fourth leading cause of death worldwide; inactive lifestyles also lead to increased adverse health outcomes such as shortened life expectancy, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer. It has been well documented that physical activity improves health and function and reduces disability at old age.

Demographic change is undeniably affecting Europe; the EU population

aged 65+ increased from 13.7% in 1990 to 17.4% in 2010. Predictions are that by 2060 approximately 30% of the EU population will be aged 65+ and the rise of the 'oldest old' – those aged 80+ - is particularly significant.

Engaging with this growing aged community and encouraging them to adopt a more active lifestyle is a key part of the two research projects underway at the University of Manchester.

Professor Chris Todd, principal investigator on the [PreventIT project](#), a multi-site partnership project funded by the European Commission, said: "There is little use in developing novel technologies without the full engagement and contribution of those it is aimed at, we want to understand the motivational components as well as how long it takes for a new behaviour to become a daily habit for people trying to become more active".

"Investigating this will help ensure our mobile technology works together with the individual and is tailored to their preference and needs."

Professor Todd, who also leads the Healthy Ageing Research Group, concluded: "Our work with European partners delivers critical innovation and knowledge transfer in all areas of falls prevention and the promotion of active ageing, we are pleased to hear that the UK Treasury will continue to support this critical collaborative research work beyond the date the UK is set to leave EU."

Provided by University of Manchester

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