# THE IALH UPDATE

## Aging in Place With Google and Amazon: Privacy and Surveillance Implications for Older Adults



Photo: Mati Mango, Pexels.com

*Submitted by IALH Affiliate Jessica Percy Campbell, who recently completed her PhD in Political Science*

My PhD dissertation explored the growing relationship between older adults and smart home technology. As a surveillance scholar, I am interested in the types of data that technology companies collect, how such data are used, and what users understand about these processes.

Smart home devices such as smart speakers (e.g., Alexa-enabled devices) are gaining in popularity. At the same time, big tech companies are scrutinized by academic researchers and the media for ongoing ethical issues related to privacy, autonomy, and security. My research explored the ways older adults use smart speakers for aging in place. I asked: How are smart speakers marketed to older adults, how are they used, and what are the subsequent privacy and surveillance implications?

First, an analysis of marketing materials showed that smart speakers are marketed towards older adults in unique ways. The collective claim by marketers and third-party affiliates is that smart speakers can be used for independent aging at home, allowing older adults to avoid or delay the need for residential care. They are also promoted as tools to give caregivers peace of mind in knowing older relatives are well taken care of in their smart homes.

Next, a focus group with older Amazon Alexa users indicated they loved Alexa for controlling appliances (smart lights, locks, etc.), conversations to alleviate loneliness (asking Alexa for jokes, games, or compliments), setting reminders and so on. However, when asked whether anyone had read the Terms of Use or had located their privacy settings, the answer was generally "no". As the result of having family members configure their smart home systems, most participants were generally unaware that: (1) their interactions with Alexa were recorded by default; (2) such recordings could be accessed, reviewed and deleted in the Settings; and (3) Alexa interactions are used for consumer profiling and targeted ads online. These results align with other recent studies where smart speaker users of all ages are unaware of what data are collected or how they are used. Consent (for data use, collection, or disclosure), one of the 10 internationally recognized privacy principles that Canadian privacy law relies on, must be meaningful in order to be considered valid.

Finally, smart home surveillance leads to related issues, including potentially discriminatory outcomes of

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consumer profiling, a known issue with targeted marketing. The types of targeted advertisements that older adults receive requires further research. Moreover, as artificial intelligence (AI) systems further infiltrate daily life, the extent to which prompts, nudges, or advertisements interfere with autonomy is an ongoing question, one that extends into the realm of smart homes.

Overall, alongside calling for the further inclusion of older adults in all phases of smart home design processes, my argument is that Linnet Taylor's conception of data justice should be applied to regulation in ways that benefit older adults. Technology should be leveraged to benefit users where it suits them while allowing for high levels of agency over how their data are used. Viable non-technological solutions to care should also be readily accessible. Lastly, data justice allows for challenging algorithmic or AI bias, which is likely to be a pressing issue in coming years.
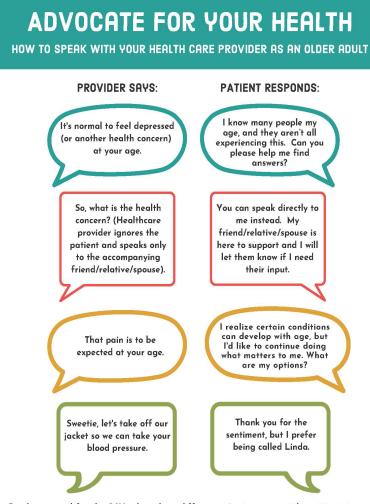
To read the full thesis, go to https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/15095.

# Resources

## Dementia Awareness Training Program

The term "dementia" refers to a set of symptoms that may include memory loss, difficulties with thinking, problem solving and language, and changes in mood. Dementia is not a normal part of aging. Many people are unaware that there are ways to reduce an individual's risk of developing dementia. A series of short, animated videos, produced by Cyber-Seniors in conjunction with experts from the University of Toronto's Institute for Life Course and Aging and the Faculties of Engineering and Information as well as the Université de Moncton and Centre de formation médicale du Nouveau-Brunswick, describe 14 modifiable risk factors that may decrease an individual's chances of developing Alzheimer's Disease or a related dementia. A wide range of topics are covered including social isolation, hearing loss, stress, depression, sleep, obesity, hypertension, diabetes, physical activity, smoking prevention and nutrition. The videos are available at https://cyberseniors.org/dementia/.

## Addressing Ageism

**ADVOCATE FOR YOUR HEALTH**

HOW TO SPEAK WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER AS AN OLDER ADULT

Changing the Narrative, Ending Ageism Together has created a number of resources to help individuals identify and address ageism. This graphic is designed to assist individuals to address ageism in healthcare.

For more information on related resources, go to https://changingthenarrativeco.org/.

PROVIDER SAYS:

It's normal to feel depressed (or another health concern) at your age.

So, what is the health concern? (Healthcare provider ignores the patient and speaks only to the accompanying friend/relative/spouse).

That pain is to be expected at your age.

Sweetie, let's take off our jacket so we can take your blood pressure.

PATIENT RESPONDS:

I know many people my age, and they aren't all experiencing this.  Can you please help me find answers?

You can speak directly to me instead.  My friend/relative/spouse is here to support and I will let them know if I need their input.

I realize certain conditions can develop with age, but I'd like to continue doing what matters to me. What are my options?

Thank you for the sentiment, but I prefer being called Linda.

Do these sound familiar? Words make a difference. Ageism, even with positive intent, diminishes our health and wellbeing, taking years off our lives.

Learn more about age-friendly healthcare at:
changingthenarrativeco.org/age-friendly-healthcare/

ENDING AGEISM TOGETHER
**CHANGING THE NARRATIVE**

# Research Opportunities

## Allies in Health Study

Are you over 18 with social ties to someone who is over 60? IALH Postdoctoral Fellow Nathan Lewis is conducting a study with colleagues from the University of British Columbia entitled *Allies in Health Study*. The aim of the study is to understand how social support plays a role in the everyday life of older adults from all backgrounds.

The research team is looking for individuals aged 60+ to participate with a study partner (e.g., family member, friend, neighbour) who is aged 18+. The researchers are especially interested in having participants from all cultural, ethnic and social/economic backgrounds.

Participants will be asked to attend two meetings via Zoom, complete short questionnaires, and wear a physical activity monitor for 10 days. Some participants may opt to participate in an additional blood draw at LifeLabs.

For more information on this study, please contact allies@psych.ubc.ca or 604-822-3549. Information can also be found at https://psych.ubc.ca/research-participation/allies-in-health/.

## Using Digital Calendars for Prescription Mangement

Maybins Lengwe, a doctoral student in Computer Science and IALH Student Affiliate, is recruiting participants for a study exploring the usability of calendars for managing prescriptions.

To be eligible, particpants must be:
* between 19 and 65 years of age;
* either taking medications alongside a busy schedule or aiding someone in managing medications; and
* comfortable working with a digital calendar

Participants will be asked to join a remote study session on Zoom (via laptop/desktop computer or large-screen tablet). This session will be centered around the process of being able to manage prescriptions using a digital calendar. Participants will be presented with a calendar that reflects an individual's schedule with multiple activities and one or more medication schedules. They will be asked to read, add, edit, and delete entries in a calendar. The study session will last about 1 hour, and participants will be rewarded with a CAD $20 Amazon gift card.

This study is taking place under the supervision of Dr. Jens Weber and IALH Research Fellow Dr. Charles Perin. To participate, please contact Maybins at mlengwe@uvic.ca.

# Upcoming Events

## Canadian Summit on Geroscience
October 26, 2023 (in-person in Toronto, and live-streamed)

The Canadian Frailty Network and CIHR's Institute on Aging will be hosting a Geroscience Summit this fall as a pre-conference event associated with the Canadian Association on Gerontology's (CAG) Annual Meeting. People do not need to register for CAG to attend the Summit. The overall goal of the event is to help identify the future of translational gerosicence in Canada. Summit objectives include: a) convening national and international leading translational geroscience researchers and clinicians; b) discussing opportunities and avenues to build capacity in Canadian geroscience research; c) investigating the creation of a Canadian geroscience community and clinical trials network; and d) investigating the social and ethical implications of translational geroscience.

For more information, go to https://www.cfn-nce.ca/events/canadian-summit-on-geroscience/.