

# Work, Leisure, and Social Participation

**Research priorities on aging and technology that matters most to older adults in rural and remote areas** A. W. Bye, M. C. Williams, L. M. Hung, S. Siriratne, K. Kasdorf, D. Guzek, C. Lai. *Gerontechnology* 25(s)

**Purpose** As Canada's aging population is rapidly shifting, older adults 65+ represent nearly 1/5 of the population, which is expected to grow substantially in the coming years [1]. Rural and remote regions, such as Northern Vancouver Island, face greater challenges as older adults encounter limited services, long travel distances, and constrained health-care capacity [2]. At the same time, digital tools such as virtual care and electronic health records are increasingly promoted as solutions [3]. Yet, many older adults still lack reliable internet access, digital skills, or confidence with using technology, leaving them unable to benefit from these innovations [4]. This widening digital divide risks reinforcing pre-existing inequities and exclusions [5]. Our research aims to establish a research agenda on aging and technology grounded in what matters most to older adults living in rural and remote communities. **Method** Taking a participatory community-based approach, we adopted James Lind Alliance tools in collaboration with an advisory group of community partners to establish research priorities on aging and technology, consisting of two steps. *Step 1:* we conducted a region-wide survey of older adults, caregivers, community partners, and community members to collect what they perceive as the most important questions (or concerns) on aging and technology in their communities. All submissions were compiled, coded, and synthesized into categories and sub-categories. *Step 2:* we gathered a group of 14 community partners across North Island regions (including older adults, caregivers, care providers, decision makers, and researchers) in work sessions to review the survey data. The community partners reviewed the synthesized categories and sub-categories, discussed community relevance, and collaboratively prioritized what they want future research and innovation to address. **Results and Discussion** We collected 503 questions (or concerns) from 196 survey participants from small cities and rural and remote areas across North Vancouver Island. All relevant unanswered questions were initially coded according to three broad categories and then further coded under sub-categories: 1) system challenges (e.g., transportation challenges, Internet as a human right, cost of technology); 2) community challenges (e.g., age-friendly communities, aging volunteers, supportive housing); and 3) people challenges (e.g., digital literacy/digital health literacy, keeping up with technology, continued access to services without technology). Each sub-category was refined as research questions before prioritization. Our research highlights an urgent need for digital and community innovations that are inclusive, adaptable, and grounded in lived experience. By centering the priorities of older adults in rural and remote settings, this work provides a community-driven roadmap for future research and policy supporting equitable aging.

## References

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