# **Research: Technology for Older People**

The purpose of this study was to develop and test a Universal Design Survey Tool for assessing older people’s use of everyday technologies in Ireland. The tool developed was applied in the homes of 30 older people in the Liberties Area in Dublin 8. The cohort chosen are users of a “pendant alarm” system: a button worn on a pendant that can be pressed to call for help in the event of an emergency or need for assistance. In each home visit, the Universal Design Survey Tool developed was used to assess the pendant alarm technology and one additional technology identified as difficult to use.

The project report includes a review of the relevant literature and other assessment tools, a full description of the methodology, data gathered, analysed and results and full description of the test tool designed and recommendations for how it could be used in other studies.

The project was conducted by St James hospital. Assistance was received from the SICCDA (South Inner City Community Development Association), a local community organisation.

## **Project outcomes**

### **Universal Design Survey Tool**

The primary deliverable from the project is the **Universal Design Survey Tool.**

### **Older peoples' experience of technology**

The Universal Design Survey Tool generated quantitative scoring of the relative difficulties the users had, and the qualitative data captured uncovered many design issues that the users struggled with – such as buttons being the same colour as the device casing. Contextual use of the device was found to be an issue for the older users; for example, where reduced mobility and dexterity made it difficult to reach down to and operate a DVD player placed at a low level relative to the ground.

One major finding from the pendant alarm technology was that the older people assessed were mostly unsure or unaware of what steps would occur after they had pressed the alarm button.

Many of the designs that older users struggled with in their “difficult technology” made no allowance for users lack of technical knowledge or exposure. Some of the designs were found to be extremely poor and it is likely that other user groups would also have had difficulty with the technology. For example, some devices lacked labelling or feedback which are violations to basic usability principles.

Initial findings from the study were presented as a "dramatic reading"at the ActivAge 2012 conference.