

# Why assistive technology matters in palliative care

Anahit, diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer, uses a walker, wheelchair and adjustable bed (assistive products). These assistive products support mobility, reduce fatigue and improve rest, enabling her to stay safely at home, maintain routines and receive dignified care in familiar surroundings. ◀



Access to assistive technology can make the difference between dependence and independence, isolation and participation, and distress and dignity for people approaching the end of life. Assistive technology supports function, comfort and communication, enabling people with serious health conditions to manage symptoms, engage in daily activities, and maintain meaningful relationships. It reduces complications such as falls and pressure injuries, lowers caregiver burden, and fosters independence, confidence and emotional well-being.

Despite its benefits, access remains limited due to cost, service gaps and stigma, leaving up to 90 per cent of those in need in low income countries without support. With populations ageing, and chronic illness increasing, demand will continue to rise. Expanding access to assistive technology in palliative care is a human rights issue and a vital component of universal health coverage.



By 2060, **48 million** people will die with serious health-related suffering

**1 in 3**

adults with serious illness need assistance with basic activities such as bathing, dressing or moving around.

In low-income countries only

**10%**

of people have the assistive technology they need.



Up to

**50%**

of people live the last year of life with symptoms including pain, breathlessness and fatigue, which may be alleviated with assistive products.

# Why assistive technology matters in palliative care

**Assistive technology helps people live and die with dignity as they approach the end of life.** People who have access to assistive products are more able to maintain greater control, autonomy, confidence and emotional security in their daily lives. The products help them carry out daily personal care, household work and leisure activities independently, despite declining health status and physical abilities. Assistive technology also supports communication and participation in family life, which can reduce loneliness and social isolation.

**Assistive technology supports family caregivers.** Timely provision of appropriate assistive technology reduces the physical and emotional strain on family members. Their time is freed up so they can continue to work, helping them maintain family income when healthcare costs are increasing. When the end of a person's life is approaching, assistive technology can delay the need for hospital or institutional care, reducing the need for their family members to spend time travelling to visit.

**Safety, symptom relief and system efficiency** Properly fitted products reduce preventable complications, falls and infections, while helping manage pain, fatigue and breathlessness. Integrated into discharge planning and community services, assistive technology enables safe, dignified personal care at home or in institutions, shortens or avoids hospital admissions and paid care hours, and makes better use of scarce palliative care resources by reducing reliance on costly professional carers.

**Children and young people.** Assistive technology helps children with life-limiting conditions to improve their mental well-being and maintain independence. They can play games with siblings, chat online, talk to their parents, and explain their pain and symptoms clearly to healthcare professionals. These technologies help children navigate challenges such as chronic pain, loss of functions such as walking or seeing, communication barriers, and social isolation, fostering improved emotional wellbeing, reduced isolation, and greater family resilience. By supporting participation in everyday life, assistive technology gives children and young people a sense of control and inclusion, even as their health declines.



*Inclusion is key to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and leave no one behind. There will not be full inclusion while people are unable to access assistive technology. Assistive technology cuts across all 17 SDGs and is particularly relevant to some.*

**Assistive Technology** is an umbrella term for products such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, prostheses, eyeglasses and digital products, and their related systems and services. It can help people move, communicate, hear and see better than before.

**ATscale** is a cross-sector global partnership with a mission to improve people's lives through assistive technology. It catalyses action to ensure that, by 2030, an additional 500 million people in low- and middle-income countries get the life-changing assistive technology they need.

**Let's ensure people in palliative care get the assistive technology they need**