Overcoming challenges of digital self-management in older adults with multimorbidity: the promise of social connectedness?

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Introduction
Digital self-management for older people holds promises for aging well. However, the adoption readiness remains limited due to barriers in e.g. digital literacy, health issues and support. Furthermore, older people with multimorbidity (PwMs) are at increased risk of experiencing social disconnectedness1,2. This multi-stakeholder living lab study explores the role of social connectedness in dealing with the challenges of digital self-management for older people with multimorbidity.

Methodology
First phase: Semi-structured interviews and focus groups
38 older PwMs, 17 informal carers, 29 formal care workers and 41 healthcare professionals (HCPs).

Second phase: Co-creation sessions
13 sessions with PwMs and informal caregivers.

Data was collected in Belgium and Ireland as part of the ProACT project, which aims to develop a digital integrated health ecosystem to support self-management for older PwMs. The output was used to guide the development.

Results
First phase: Semi-structured interviews and focus groups
• Expected barriers in digital self-management and the lack of social connectedness.
• Loss or lack of social contacts was identified as a key factor in deterioration of health, wellbeing and self-management abilities by HCPs and formal carers.
• The social context was considered an important determinant of PwMs motivation for self-management across stakeholders.

Second phase: Co-creation sessions
• PwM wished to share self-management goals and progress with members of their Care Network and other participants.
• PwM and informal carers desired information on local events and/or groups.

Design
Fig. 1: Older people with multimorbidity can share self-management goals and progress, and receive messages of support.

Fig. 2: Informal carers can send messages to the care receiver to support and motivate them in their self-management goals.

Conclusion and next steps
This study demonstrates the importance of supporting social connectedness in digital care solutions for older PwMs to help overcome the common challenges of digital self-management and increase adoption of digital self-management tools.

The proposed solutions will be tested and further iteratively developed in a 12-month Proof of Concept trial in Belgium and Ireland, starting in January 2018.

References