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Research Article

# Improving Social Support for Older Adults Through Technology: Findings From the PRISM Randomized Controlled Trial

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** Information and communication technology holds promise in terms of providing support and reducing isolation among older adults. We evaluated the impact of a specially designed computer system for older adults, the Personal Reminder Information and Social Management (PRISM) system.

**Design, Setting, and Participants:** The trial was a multisite randomized field trial conducted at 3 sites. PRISM was compared to a Binder condition wherein participants received a notebook that contained paper content similar to that contained in PRISM. The sample included 300 older adults at risk for social isolation who lived independently in the community ( $M_{\text{age}} = 76.15$  years). Primary outcome measures included indices of social isolation, social support, loneliness, and well-being. Secondary outcome measures included indices of computer proficiency and attitudes toward technology. Data were collected at baseline and at 6 and 12 months post-randomization.

**Results:** The PRISM group reported significantly less loneliness and increased perceived social support and well-being at 6 months. There was a trend indicating a decline in social isolation. Group differences were not maintained at 12 months, but those in the PRISM condition still showed improvements from baseline. There was also an increase in computer self-efficacy, proficiency, and comfort with computers for PRISM participants at 6 and 12 months.

**Discussion:** The findings suggest that access to technology applications such as PRISM may enhance social connectivity and reduce loneliness among older adults and has the potential to change attitudes toward technology and increase technology self-efficacy.

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