

Technology and Older Adults



Key Points

- As people age, vision, hearing, or dexterity impairments can affect their computer use. Tools and features that address these issues and allow personalization can make it easier and more comfortable for older adults to see, hear, and use their computers and other devices.
- Microsoft helps address the computing needs of older adults by building accessibility features into its products, offering training resources, and collaborating with organizations that help older adults use technology to maintain independence, productivity, connectivity, and enjoyment.
- Microsoft offers educational resources to help older adults learn how to use computers more proficiently, avoid online scams, and make their computers safer and more secure.
- Microsoft supports the work of governments to help promote digital inclusion, ensure technology neutrality, and promote interoperability among accessible technology products.

BACKGROUND

Older adults are increasingly embracing the digital world. According to a 2012 [Pew Research Center study](#), 34 percent of Internet users age 65 and older use social networking sites such as Facebook, and 18 percent do so on a typical day. As more people use computers and interact online, it is increasingly vital that technology be accessible to everyone, regardless of their age or ability level.

By age 50, many people have vision, hearing, or dexterity impairments that can affect their use of technology. For example, people with low vision may have difficulty seeing default screen fonts or may experience increased visual fatigue. Those with discomfort in their hands and arms may have difficulty typing or using a mouse for long periods.

Accessibility features and assistive technologies can help users improve their computer experience by allowing them to adjust display, mouse, keyboard, sound, and speech options. Education and training can help older adults learn how to use computers more proficiently, avoid online scams, and make their computers more secure, such as by installing antivirus software and setting up automatic updates.

MICROSOFT APPROACH

- **Accessibility.** Many Microsoft products include options that promote accessibility and personalization. For example, people with vision impairments can benefit from the Narrator and Magnifier tools in Windows 8 and the display features in Office 2013.
- **Training.** Microsoft provides tutorial materials and participates in events and conferences, including:
 - » The [Microsoft Accessibility website](#), which provides demos, tutorials, and guidance on how to make computers easier to see, hear, and use.
 - » The [Microsoft Digital Literacy program](#), which helps novice computer users become proficient in basic computing skills.

» The [Microsoft Safety & Security Center](#), which provides guidance for safer Internet use. Brochures such as “[Stay Safer on the Internet](#)” include advice specifically for older computer users.

- **Collaboration.** Microsoft works closely with organizations such as AARP and SeniorNet to better understand and meet the needs of older adults. Microsoft also partners with governments, standards organizations, and the technology industry to help shape policy and solve shared challenges in making technology easier to use.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Governments should work to create policies that advance digital inclusion for older adults. Specifically, they should:

- **Ensure technology neutrality.** Technology-neutral policies that do not favor one technology over another can help lead to greater innovation, help eliminate barriers to trade and market access, encourage enhanced competition, and assist in the prevention of bias in government procurement.
- **Support interoperability.** Interoperability among systems is a key contributor to accessibility. Public policies should promote interoperability and allow technology vendors and purchasers to choose the solutions that best meet their needs.



Helpful Resources

Microsoft Accessibility website
www.microsoft.com/enable

Microsoft Accessibility Guide for Individuals with Age-Related Impairments
www.microsoft.com/enable/aging

Microsoft Digital Literacy program
www.microsoft.com/digitalliteracy

Microsoft Safety & Security Center
www.microsoft.com/security

SeniorNet
www.seniornet.org