IARJSET ISSN (O) 2393-8021, ISSN (P) 2394-1588

International Advanced Research Journal in Science, Engineering and Technology

Impact Factor 8.311 ⁜ Peer-reviewed & Refereed journal ⁜ Vol. 12, Issue 7, July 2025

DOI: 10.17148/IARJSET.2025.12740

# Role of Smart Home Technology in Upgrading Facilities for Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities in India

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**Abstract**: This report examines the role of facility upgrades and smart home technology in enhancing Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) in India to better support aging in place. NORCs, formed as seniors remain in their longstanding neighborhoods, are emerging across India's urban, suburban, and peri-urban areas, offering culturally familiar environments that foster strong community ties. However, aging infrastructure in these communities often lacks accessibility, safety, and social engagement features essential to senior well-being. Smart home technology presents an effective solution to these challenges, enabling seniors to live independently while enhancing safety and connectivity. Technologies like smart sensors, remote health monitoring, and voice activated systems allow seniors to manage daily tasks, monitor health, and stay connected with caregivers and family. This report highlights case studies from Indian cities, such as initiatives in Bangalore and Mumbai, where smart technology integration has reduced hospital visits and improved residents' quality of life. Despite benefits, barriers remain, including costs, privacy concerns, and the digital divide affecting older adults' comfort with technology. To address these, policy recommendations include subsidies for technology adoption and training programs to support senior users. Ultimately, investing in smart technology within NORCs creates age friendly environments that promote independence, safety, and connectivity for India's aging population.

**Keywords**: NORC, smart homes, facility upgrades, urban aging, accessibility, safety, remote health monitoring, smart sensors, voice-activated systems, senior care policy, age-friendly environments.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In India, Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) are becoming more prevalent as neighborhoods or apartment complexes evolve into senior-dominated spaces, even though they weren't originally designed for older adults. With India's rapidly aging population - expected to reach over 19% of the total population by 2050 [23] - NORCs are increasingly seen in urban areas where older residents have lived for decades, transforming these spaces into organic retirement communities. These NORCs are emerging across diverse settings in India, from densely populated urban neighborhoods to suburban and peri-urban areas, presenting a unique, community based model of senior living [9].

The concept of aging in place in India is vital for older adults, as it emphasizes the importance of staying in familiar homes or communities, surrounded by known social networks and cultural settings. This approach supports seniors in maintaining a sense of stability, autonomy, and emotional security, which are critical to their well-being [7]. Aging in place is especially valued in Indian society, where familial ties and community connections are strong; for many older adults, remaining close to family and within culturally familiar environments is essential to their quality of life [13].

As the population of older adults in India continues to rise, the demand for appropriate living environments that promote their independence and well-being becomes increasingly critical. Many NORCs are characterized by aging infrastructure that may not adequately support the specific needs of seniors, such as mobility challenges, safety concerns, and social isolation [24]. Upgrading facilities within these communities is essential not only for enhancing physical accessibility - such as installing ramps, widening doorways, and improving lighting - but also for integrating smart home technologies that can assist with daily activities and health monitoring [11].

Facility upgrades are vital for ensuring safety and preventing accidents, as falls remain a leading cause of injury among older adults. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the risk of falls can be significantly reduced through environmental modifications and assistive technologies [26]. Moreover, creating spaces that encourage social interaction, such as communal areas and activity rooms, can help combat loneliness and foster a sense of community among residents, contributing positively to their mental health [19].

  

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The implementation of smart home technology in senior care settings not only promotes independence and safety but also fosters a sense of connection and community for older adults, ultimately improving their quality of life.

## II. UNDERSTANDING SMART HOME TECHNOLOGY

Smart home technology refers to a suite of devices and systems that allow for the automation and remote management of household functions through internet connectivity and advanced sensors. This technology has become increasingly relevant to senior care as it offers solutions that enhance the quality of life, safety, and independence of older adults. By integrating smart devices into their living environments, seniors can maintain their autonomy while ensuring their safety and well-being [2].

### A. Smart Sensors

Smart sensors are devices that detect and respond to changes in the environment, such as motion, temperature, and light. For seniors, these sensors can be used to monitor daily activities and provide alerts in case of unusual behavior, such as prolonged inactivity or falls. This proactive approach can significantly enhance safety and enable care givers to respond quickly to emergencies [5].

Smart sensors are devices designed to collect environmental or contextual data and process it to trigger specific actions or alerts. These sensors are crucial in enabling smart home technology and are particularly beneficial in enhancing safety, accessibility, and convenience for seniors in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs). Below are some examples:

- Motion Sensors

Purpose: Detect movement in a room or specific area.
Application: Automatically turn on lights when someone enters a room, ensuring safety for seniors at night. They can also alert caregivers if there is unusual inactivity.
Examples:
*Philips Hue Motion Sensor:* Works with smart lights.
*Ring Motion Detector:* Integrates with security systems.

- Fall Detection Sensors

Purpose: Detect sudden falls, a common risk among seniors.
Application: Automatically notify caregivers or emergency services if a fall is detected.
Examples:

*Apple Watch Series (with Fall Detection):* Wearable that detects falls and sends alerts.
*Vayyar Home Sensors:* Wall-mounted sensors that monitor falls without requiring wearables.

- Temperature and Humidity Sensors

Purpose: Monitor and maintain optimal indoor climate.
Application: Helps prevent heatstroke or hypothermia by alerting users when temperatures are unsafe.
Examples:
*Google Nest Temperature Sensor:* Works with Nest thermostats.
*Airthings Wave:* Tracks air quality, temperature, and humidity.

- Door and Window Senors

Purpose: Detect if doors or windows are opened or closed.
Application: Enhance security by alerting users or care givers of unauthorized entry.
Examples:
*Wyze Contact Sensor:* Integrates with home automation systems.
*Eve Door & Window Sensor:* Works with Apple HomeKit.

- Health Monitoring Sensors

Purpose: Collect vital health data such as heart rate, blood pressure, and oxygen levels.
Application: Alerts family or healthcare providers of irregularities.
Examples:
*Omron HeartGuide:* Wearable blood pressure monitor.
*Withings Smart Scale:* Measures weight and health metrics.

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- Environmental Senors

Purpose: Detect harmful substances or conditions like smoke, carbon monoxide, or gas leaks.
Application: Alert residents or emergency services to prevent accidents.
Examples:
*Nest Protect:* Smoke and carbon monoxide detector.
*First Alert Onelink:* Smart smoke detector.

- Occupancy Sensors

Purpose: Identify the presence of individuals in a room.
Application: Optimize energy use by turning off appliances or lights in empty rooms.
Examples:
*Ecobee Smart Sensors:* Works with Ecobee thermostats for climate control.

These sensors, when integrated into smart home systems, can significantly enhance the quality of life for seniors, ensuring their safety and enabling independent living.

B. Remote Monitoring Systems

Remote monitoring systems allow family members and healthcare providers to track seniors' health and daily activities from afar. These systems can include wearable health monitors that provide real-time data on vital signs, medication adherence, and physical activity levels. This information helps caregivers make informed decisions and intervene when necessary, ultimately reducing hospital visits and improving health outcomes [20].These systems play a vital role in smart home technology, enabling real-time observation and management of various aspects of senior care. Below is a categorization of these systems:

I. Health Monitoring Systems
Purpose: To track vital health parameters for early detection of medical issues and chronic disease management.
Application: Used by seniors, caregivers, and healthcare professionals to monitor conditions like hypertension, diabetes, and heart health remotely.
Examples:
*Omron VitalSight*: Connects health monitoring devices to a clinician's dashboard for real-time data access.
*Withings BPM Connect*: Wi-Fi-enabled blood pressure monitor with app integration for historical data.

II. Activity Monitoring Systems
Purpose: To observe daily routines and detect anomalies such as reduced movement or irregular activity.
Application: Suitable for identifying early signs of declining health or emergencies in senior care.
Examples:
*CarePredict Tempo*: Tracks motion, eating habits, and sleeping patterns to alert caregivers about abnormal activities.
*Zanthion Smart Senior Monitoring*: Uses a combination of wearables and sensors for comprehensive monitoring.

III. Home Security and Surveillance Systems
Purpose: To ensure the safety of home residents and provide real-time alerts for potential security threats.
Application: Monitors homes for break-ins, unusual activity, or emergency situations like fires.
Examples:
*Vivint Smart Home Monitoring*: Provides cameras, sensors, and emergency notifications.
*Ring Home Security*: Includes video doorbells and motion-activated cameras for remote access.

IV. Medication Adherence Systems
Purpose: To ensure timely and accurate medication in take, reducing the risk of missed doses or overmedication.
Application: Helps seniors and caregivers manage complex medication regimens efficiently.
Examples:
*MedMinder*: Tracks pill consumption and sends reminders for missed doses.
*Hero*: Automates pill sorting and schedules reminders for multiple medications.

V. Environmental Monitoring Systems
Purpose: To maintain safe and comfortable living conditions by monitoring factors like air quality, temperature, and lighting.
Application: Supports a healthy environment for seniors by reducing hazards such as excessive heat or poor air quality.
Examples:

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*Nest Protect*: Smart smoke and carbon monoxide detector with app notifications.
*Ecobee Smart Thermostat*: Monitors temperature and air quality while optimizing energy use.

C. Voice-activated assistants

Voice-activated assistants, such as Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant, have gained popularity among older adults due to their ease of use and hands-free functionality. These devices can assist seniors in managing their daily routines by setting reminders for medications, controlling home appliances, and even providing companionship through conversation. By facilitating access to information and services, voice-activated assistants can help reduce feelings of isolation and enhance overall well-being [21].

- General-Purpose Virtual Assistants

Purpose: To assist with various daily tasks, provide information, control smart devices, and facilitate communication.
Application: Used in homes to manage schedules, play music, control smart appliances, and answer general queries.

Examples:
*Amazon Alexa*: Integrates with multiple smart home devices, offers skills for diverse functions, and provides reminders or alarms.
*Google Assistant*: Provides voice-activated search, device control, and integration with Google services like Calendar and Maps.

- Senior-Focused Virtual Assistants

Purpose: To aid older adults with memory prompts, safety alerts, and health management while promoting in dependent living.
Application: Assists seniors with medication reminders, emergency calls, and simplified interfaces for smart home controls.

Examples:
*LifePod*: Focuses on senior care with proactive voice prompts for reminders and health check-ins.
*Care Angel*: Monitors seniors' well-being through voice-based health and wellness checks

- Entertainment-Focused Assistants

Purpose: To provide a hands-free experience for accessing media, games, and entertainment content.
Application: Integrated into smart speakers, TVs, and media systems for music, videos, and games.
Examples:
*Apple Siri*: Integrated with Apple Music and Home Kit, enabling control of entertainment devices.
*Bixby*: Samsung's assistant with a focus on multimedia integration for TVs and appliances.

IV. Health-Focused Voice Assistants

Purpose: To offer health-related advice, monitor symptoms, and support fitness routines.
Application: Integrated into healthcare systems and devices for personalized health guidance.

Examples:
*Amazon Alexa Health Skills*: Provides medication tracking and connects with fitness devices.
*Google Assistant for Fitbit*: Tracks physical activity and gives fitness tips.

- Accessibility-Focused Assistants

Purpose: To assist individuals with disabilities in accessing technology and performing daily tasks. Application: Used for speech-to-text conversion, smart device control, and mobility support.
Examples:
*Microsoft Cortana*: Offers speech-to-text and integrates with accessibility tools.
*Dragon NaturallySpeaking*: Focused on dictation and accessibility for differently-abled individuals.

## III. CHALLENGES IN TRADITIONAL FACILITY DESIGN FOR NORCS

Traditional facility designs often overlook the specific needs of aging residents, leading to several limitations that can adversely impact their quality of life. Common challenges include:

A. Safety Limitations

Many older buildings feature outdated safety measures, such as insufficient lighting in hallways and common areas, leading to an increased risk of accidents and falls [22]. The National Council on Aging states that falls are the leading cause of injury for older adults in the United States, and similar patterns can be observed in India, where the incidence

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of falls is rising due to an aging population [17]. Therefore, it is essential to upgrade safety features, such as installing motion-sensor lighting and non-slip flooring, to create a safer living environment.

B. Accessibility Issues

Accessibility is a significant concern in traditional designs, as many NORCs lack features that accommodate residents with mobility challenges. According to a study by the World Health Organization, approximately 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability, and many of these individuals are elderly [26]. Building modifications are necessary to address these accessibility issues, including the installation of ramps, wider doorways, and elevators that can facilitate easier movement within the community [2].

C. Social Isolation

Social isolation is a growing concern among older adults, particularly in traditional designs that do not promote community engagement. Research indicates that social isolation can lead to severe health implications, including increased mortality rates and mental health issues [8]. Upgrading facilities to create communal spaces, activity rooms, and outdoor gardens can foster social interactions and improve the overall well-being of residents.

## IV. ROLE OF SMART TECHNOLOGY IN NORC FACILITY UPGRADES

Smart home technology plays a crucial role in upgrading facilities in NORCs to support aging in place effectively.

A. Safety and Security

Smart locks, fall-detection systems, and surveillance cameras enhance safety and security within NORCs. Smart locks allow for secure entry without traditional keys, making it easier for seniors to manage access to their homes. Fall-detection systems can automatically alert caregivers in case of an accident, ensuring prompt assistance [14]. Moreover, surveillance cameras can provide an extra layer of security by allowing family members to monitor the safety of their loved ones remotely.

B. Health Monitoring

Technology that tracks vital signs, medication reminders, and emergency alerts is integral to supporting seniors' health. Wearable devices can monitor heart rates and other vital parameters, while apps can remind seniors to take their medications on time. Emergency alert systems provide peace of mind by allowing seniors to call for help easily when needed [25]. A study found that integrating health-monitoring technology can lead to a 25% reduction in hospital admissions among older adults [5].

C. Enhanced Accessibility

Voice-activated controls, automated lighting, and motorized adjustments are essential upgrades for enhancing accessibility. Voice-activated assistants can manage lighting, temperature, and appliances, making it easier for seniors to control their environment without physical exertion [18]. Additionally, smart home systems can automate window shades and doors, allowing residents to adjust their surroundings with minimal effort [10].

D. Social Connectivity

Smart technology also facilitates social connectivity, helping to reduce feelings of isolation among seniors. Platforms for video calling and social media integration allow older adults to stay connected with family and friends, fostering a sense of community even when physical visits are not possible [15]. The integration of virtual reality (VR) platforms can also provide immersive experiences that help seniors engage with their surroundings and loved ones [6]. (Fig. 1)

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Figure 1. Visual representation of digital home solutions for elderly residents in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) in Kolkata. Source: Author

## V. SUGGESTED SMART HOME SOLUTIONS FOR KOLKATA NORCS

### A. Health Monitoring and Telemedicine Integration

Deploy wearable devices and non-invasive health monitors to track vital signs such as blood pressure, glucose levels, and oxygen saturation. Residents can sync these with local telemedicine platforms that connect with Kolkata's growing network of digital health providers, such as Medica Super specialty Hospital's telehealth services.

Example: Wearable devices linked to telemedicine platforms enable timely interventions and regular health up dates.Health monitoring improves autonomy and quality of life for older adults when combined with accessible telemedicine services [12, 20].

### B. Enhanced Safety Features

Install motion sensors and emergency alert systems in apartments and common areas. For instance, sensors can detect falls and alert emergency services or caregivers.
Example: Adapt apartment entry systems with biometric access or app-based security systems that residents can manage via smartphones.

### C. Energy Efficient Smart Appliances

Implement smart energy systems like automated lighting and temperature controls to reduce electricity costs for elderly residents living on fixed incomes.
Example: Use low-cost automated lighting in cooperative housing complexes in Kolkata to address load-shedding issues.

### D. Community Centric Technologies

Create digital hubs within NORCs for social engagement, such as virtual meetups or collaborative learning sessions. Platforms like Zoom or Microsoft Teams with elder friendly interfaces can be utilized. [3]

  

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E. Localized Solution for Accessibility

Smart lifts and stairlifts with voice activation can help those with mobility challenges.

Example: Retrofitting lifts in Kolkata's older apartments to be voice-enabled or app-controlled ensures usability without high literacy or tech skills.

F. Challenges and Considerations

Cost Barriers: Smart technology needs to be affordable, which can be achieved by leveraging state subsidies or CSR initiatives from companies.

Training Programs: Educating residents about using smart home systems is critical. Collaboration with local NGOs or tech companies could facilitate training sessions.

Privacy Concerns: Systems must comply with data protection regulations and ensure ethical use of personal data.

G. Potential Impact

By adopting these measures, NORCs in Kolkata can significantly enhance the quality of life for older adults. They can enjoy increased independence, better health outcomes, and stronger community connections, aligning with global best practices in urban aging-in-place solutions.

The bar chart in fig 2 highlights suggested smart home solutions for Kolkata's Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs):

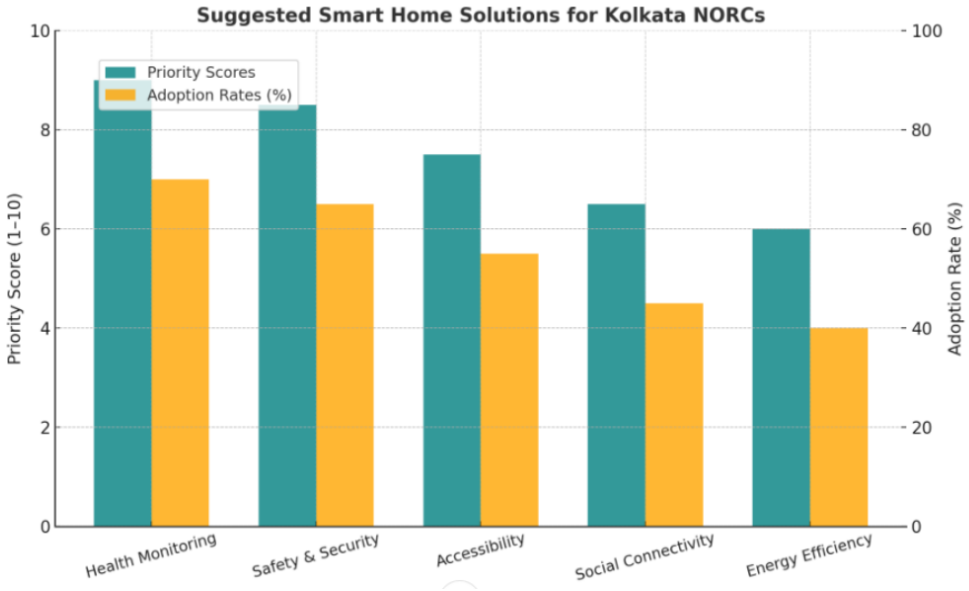


Figure 2. Suggested smart home solutions for Kolkata's Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs)
Source : Author

- Health Monitoring: High priority (score 9) and strong adoption potential (70%), indicating the need for systems like remote health monitoring.
- Safety & Security: Rated 8.5 with 65% adoption potential, reflecting the demand for fall detection and surveillance systems.
- Accessibility: Scored 7.5, with moderate adoption potential (55%), including solutions like smart ramps and voice-activated controls.
- Social Connectivity: Scored lower (6.5), adoption at 45%, focusing on video calling platforms and VR for engagement.
- Energy Efficiency: Lowest priority (6), adoption rate of 40%, suggesting room for growth in this area.

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IARJSET ISSN (O) 2393-8021, ISSN (P) 2394-1588

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4.. Case studies of NORCs in Bangalore and Mumbai, *Elderly Care Initiative reports (2019-2023).*
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## VI. BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

The benefits of integrating smart home technology into NORCs are multifaceted. For residents, these upgrades can enhance independence, ensure safety, and improve overall quality of life. According to a study by AARP, 83% of older adults prefer to age in place, and smart technologies can facilitate this desire by providing necessary support [1].

However, challenges remain, such as the initial costs of implementing these technologies, concerns about privacy and data security, and the digital divide that may hinder tech adoption among older adults [2]. A survey conducted by Pew Research Center found that only 40% of seniors are comfortable using digital technology, which highlights the need for educational programs and support to bridge this gap [4].

## VII. FUTURE TRENDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Looking ahead, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things (IoT) promise to further enhance the capabilities of smart home systems for seniors. Policy recommendations should include subsidies for smart home technology installations in NORCs, as well as training programs to help older adults adapt to new technologies [25]. Design recommendations should prioritize accessibility and user-friendliness to facilitate adoption [11].

Moreover, as smart technology evolves, there is a growing emphasis on the need for interoperable systems that can seamlessly integrate various devices and services, enhancing the overall user experience [16].

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Smart home technology has the potential to transform NORCs into age-friendly communities that support the independence, safety, and quality of life for aging residents. Investing in technology upgrades is not merely an enhancement of physical infrastructure; it is a crucial step toward fostering a supportive environment where seniors can thrive in their own homes, surrounded by the community they love.

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