

# Tech to Connect

Tackling isolation  
through innovation

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The **Tech to Connect Challenge** ran from April 2019 to March 2020 and aimed to help civil society develop their early stage ideas for tech to enable more or better interactions between people. Technology can be alienating or divisive for those that are isolated, but it doesn't need to be that way. Tech to Connect was all about supporting civil society to translate their knowledge into good ideas for new ways to connect people.

The challenge prize helped ten finalists develop their ideas into working prototypes and plan for their implementation. The £1 million prize was split into £500,000 of business support with the other £500,000 being awarded as financial support – £25,000 grants for each finalist, plus a winning prize of £100,000 and two runner-up prizes of £75,000.

## Finalist of the Tech To Connect Challenge

### CareToConnect by Marie Curie



#### Location

London-based, with reach across the country

#### Our idea

CareToConnect is a new app designed to help people who feel isolated in their role caring for someone. At the touch of a button, people can connect with a confident, experienced volunteer or Marie Curie expert to access informal support. The app, which uses the same simple technology and design of social apps, will be available to anyone in England caring for someone who is terminally ill, so long as they have access to a smart phone or mobile device. Unlike other support solutions, it will enable people to connect from where they are, and to create their own meaningful one-to-one connections based on their personal preferences and needs.

#### Who do we want to reach?

Our intended beneficiaries are people in a caring role for someone living with any terminal illness or frailty. This includes people who are currently looking after or looking out for someone; they don't need to be family or next of kin, but normally are. Annually, over 2.1 million adults become carers. This can be a challenging role, both physically and mentally.

#### The story so far

CareToConnect embraced a human-centred design approach, building on existing extensive knowledge and experience of providing care, information and support for people affected by a terminal illness. We then consulted our 'Marie Curie Voices' group of former carers, who acted as a critical friend in the initial proof of concept testing. This group has significant experience in providing care for partners, parents and other family members, and was able to reflect on their own experiences to inform their feedback on the app. Eight 'voices' were recruited to a steering group for the app and each took part in in-depth telephone interviews at the outset of the project.

We recognised the need to reach people unfamiliar with Marie Curie and with a wider range of experience of palliative care. To avoid unconscious bias and to test the product with a real-world sample, we worked with a boutique market research agency, skilled in testing and developing products and services around cancer, end of life and health more broadly. A series of focus groups (Manchester) and video interviews (England-wide) took place to present the concept and get feedback on the prototype, which informed our subsequent development.

## What's next?

CareToConnect aims to increase awareness of the societal challenge posed by isolation of people looking after a loved one. By gaining greater insight into their emotional and practical needs, we can better cater and advocate for them. Through a PR campaign, the team will highlight the demands of caring from the angle of social isolation, helping people better understand the impact of caring, while promoting the app. As part of wider work, Marie Curie is seeking to change the UK's perspective on dying and death, one of society's greatest taboos. A recently launched national campaign, Talk About, is encouraging people to have conversations about death and dying because we know that talking about it can improve the experience, and challenge the isolation that comes with it. By tying the CareToConnect product into this, we are focusing on an

anticipatory approach, helping people access the tools they need early on. Furthermore, the app can be used across England (and the UK), building on our nationwide infrastructure and influence in local palliative care services, which will provide the foundation for scaling up. The plan is for it to then be absorbed into Marie Curie's wider, national Information and Support Service.

*"Technology can facilitate communication and connections because it makes it so much easier and accessible to 'meet' and catch-up with people. Likewise, it gives people the opportunity to quickly connect with someone in a similar experience, who is also living through an emotionally challenging time. We believe our idea will help tackle social isolation for carers in a very simple and affordable way, with the potential to help many individuals right across England."*



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