

# Demystifying ChatGPT

## for active-aging organizations

**Here's what you need to know about what is arguably the hottest technology trend today. The potential benefits for organizations and residents/members are real, but so are the cautions. Be prepared to explore!**

*by Marilyn Larkin, MA*

When artificial intelligence (AI) company OpenAI launched ChatGPT in November 2022, International Council on Active Aging® CEO Colin Milner was intrigued. “I’m always interested in checking out new stuff—the shiny new tools on the block, as they say—to see if it lives up to everything it’s touted to be,” he told me in a recent interview. “There’s a lot of excitement around ChatGPT, and now I’ve become more familiar with it, rightly so.”

This article will introduce you to ChatGPT, ways to use it, and potential benefits for active-aging organizations, as well as for residents and members (see the boxes, “ChatGPT in a nutshell,” on page 59, and “Supporting operations with ChatGPT,” on page 63). However, as Milner noted, “there are challenges. It’s important to understand, for example, that while ChatGPT can be incredibly helpful for certain tasks, such as content development, it isn’t a panacea. The human touch, mind and spirit are still needed.”

After my interview with Milner, I was also intrigued, and I felt a responsibility as ICAA’s technology columnist to get up to speed on ChatGPT. As of now, I am not aware of any “experts” on the use of

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this tool in active aging. But a number of people, some of whom are quoted here, are weighing in with their experiences.

Milner and I agreed that sharing our own insights and experiences—as well as examples of content generated in seconds by ChatGPT—would be a helpful way to inform *Journal on Active Aging*® readers about what to expect and how their organizations might make the most of this AI chatbot (chat.openai.com). We also want to share cautions to keep in mind, especially given the software’s still early stage of development.

## Content development

Milner has been exploring ChatGPT’s potential to assist in content editing and development. For example, for a new initiative, he hired a writer to do frequently asked questions, but he wasn’t happy with the result. “Normally, I’d go back to the writer and say, ‘Can you change this, this and this?’ I decided instead to put it into ChatGPT and said, ‘Can you rewrite this?’ It produced a well-written document in seconds. So, this chatbot is a solid way to obtain factual information—no

frills, no personality—put together from your own input in a coherent way. I received what I needed.”

Milner has also used ChatGPT to edit his own, more personality-driven copy when under time constraints. “I’ve plugged in a paragraph or two and asked it to edit or rewrite them, and what came back to me was well-constructed in a similar tone to the rest.”

On the other hand, Milner said, “ChatGPT doesn’t take the place of a good writer who can tell a story or present information in an accurate, compelling way.” Also, for something like health and medical-related information to use for educational purposes, ChatGPT will streamline your search—that is, you won’t have to plow through numerous sites that come up in a Google search, for example—“but you will need to fact check everything for accuracy and to ensure it comes from a reputable source,” he emphasized.

“Anything produced by ChatGPT that you’re going to distribute to your community, post on your website or social media,

or include in a brochure, blog, email or other communication should be rigorously checked,” Milner continued, “no matter how confidently it’s presented to you by the chatbot. Yes, you can gather information quickly with ChatGPT, but an actual person needs to spend time making sure that information is correct.”

Fact-checking is likely to require some digging. ChatGPT does not provide references to tell you where its information, no matter how technical, came from unless you specifically prompt it to “include references.” My colleagues and I have tried strategies like asking the chatbot to “only use reliable sources”—but we’ve discovered that, even so, we need to fact-check. Sometimes ChatGPT presents references that are old (with possibly outdated findings), contain errors or simply don’t exist.

ChatGPT excels at providing information about what it can do in various contexts (see the sidebar, “Supporting operations with ChatGPT,” on page 63 and the box,



“Security considerations and concerns,” on page 61). You may still want to supplement some of its information with other sources. As you will see in the section, “Enhancing wellness: Potential benefits for residents and members,” outside sources can provide vital caveats and context.

I’ve also learned that the chatbot sometimes limits its responses to a certain length, and may even cut off in the middle of a sentence. Here’s a tip: I prompt “please continue” for additional input; if a sentence stopped in midstream, the continuation picks up where it left off. Also, you can click “regenerate response” for a different version of the response, sometimes with more input.

Overall, ChatGPT can significantly improve the speed and efficiency with which you produce copy. Just be prepared to read everything before sending it out and to confirm what the chatbot generates.

### **Enhancing wellness: Potential benefits for residents and members**

I asked ChatGPT about its potential benefits for older adults in active-aging communities, then checked the information it provided—much of it useful to those in other settings—against reputable sources. Note that the chatbot often refers to itself in the third person. Also, asking the software to do something is called giving it a “prompt.”

ChatGPT elaborated upon the following potential benefits:

**Combating loneliness.** “*Loneliness is a common issue among seniors, especially those who may have lost spouses or friends over time. ChatGPT acts as a friendly and empathetic companion, providing companionship and emotional support.*” In addition, it advised the user to, among other things, “*reach out to friends.*”

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## **Resources**

### **Internet**

#### **App Amped**

[www.appamped.com](http://www.appamped.com)

#### **Chatables**

[www.chatables.com](http://www.chatables.com)

#### **OpenAI: ChatGPT**

<https://chat.openai.com/>

### **Print**

Bolinger, S. (2023, March 13). ChatGPT—Impressive, But Proceed with Caution. *AI Business*. [Written by the chief privacy officer of Informa, parent of *AI Business*, this opinion piece discusses some current cautions about ChatGPT, while acknowledging the exciting potential of this new technology.] <https://aibusiness.com/nlp/chatgpt-impressive-but-proceed-with-caution>

Chu, C. H., Nyrup, R., Leslie, K., et al. (2022). Digital Ageism: Challenges and Opportunities in Artificial Intelligence for Older Adults. *The Gerontologist*, 62(7), 947–955. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnab167>

Hintze, M. (2023, February 26). A Few Thoughts on ChatGPT. *Privacy Law Matters Blog*. Hintze Law, PLLC. [The *AI Business* article above links to this blog post by a leading lawyer in privacy and data security.] <https://hintzelaw.com/hintzelaw-blog/2023/2/26/a-few-thoughts-on-chatgpt>

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Stokes, J. (2023, March 1). ChatGPT Explained: A Normie’s Guide To How It Works. *Jonstokes.com*. [This resource, also linked from the *AI Business* article, describes how ChatGPT works in a useful, fairly technical article. The *Jonstokes.com* site includes artificial intelligence and machine learning among its areas of focus.] <https://www.jonstokes.com/p/chatgpt-explained-a-guide-for-normies>

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Wurmser, Y., & Van Dyke, D. (2023, February 2). ChatGPT and Generative AI: Our Guide to 2023’s Most Talked-About Technology—and Where It’ll Have the Biggest Impact. *Insider Intelligence*. <https://www.insiderintelligence.com/content/chatgpt-generative-ai>

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Sounds reasonable and like common sense. To dig further, I prompted: “You tell me to reach out to friends if I’m lonely. I don’t have any friends.”

First, ChatGPT expressed sympathy: “I’m sorry to hear you’re feeling lonely and don’t have any friends. Remember that it’s never too late to make new connections and form new friendships. Here are some suggestions for reaching out and making friends.” The suggestions, which delved a bit into each option, included joining clubs or groups, volunteering, attending social events and joining online communities, plus motivation to “take the initiative.”

Again, all these suggestions are fine. However, when I see such the like in the lay press, I always wonder if a person who is really depressed, for example, will likely do these things? Possibly. It’s also possible that a lonely older adult might say, “Ah, let me see what’s going on in the community tonight—good idea!”

ChatGPT closed its advice with these words: “It’s important to be genuine, kind and open-minded when trying to make new friends. Be patient with yourself and others,

and don’t be discouraged if things don’t happen overnight. You deserve to have meaningful connections in your life, and taking steps to reach out and connect with others can be a positive step towards overcoming loneliness.”

This response could be reassuring and possibly motivating to someone who feels at loose ends. Of course, an individual who is clinically depressed or isolated will need more targeted interventions and possibly professional help.

**Conversation.** “Seniors can engage in meaningful conversations with ChatGPT, sharing their thoughts, memories and stories, which helps reduce feelings of isolation and enhances their mental well-being.”

True to an extent. As Amy Stapleton, CEO of conversational AI firm Chatables, points out in *Medium*,<sup>1</sup> ChatGPT currently cannot “store” memories, so it takes some finessing to try to continue a conversational thread from the day before.

All is not lost, however. When I asked ChatGPT if we could pick up a conversation from a few days ago, the chatbot acknowledged that it couldn’t remember

specific conversations but asked for more information about that particular conversation to see if that could help. Importantly, ChatGPT contains transcripts of previous chats, accessible from a sidebar on the left side of the interface. When the chatbot asked for more information, it helpfully highlighted that chat in the sidebar to facilitate access.

Stapleton also noted that ChatGPT is not yet accessible by voice, which could be a drawback for older adults. While it is true that, for now at least, ChatGPT is a text-to-text program, organizations can take advantage of its open-source code to integrate ChatGPT with Amazon’s Alexa, Apple’s Siri and other established voice technology. A few startup companies have also put together proprietary platforms using ChatGPT aimed at older adults.<sup>2</sup> As this is still a nascent field, however, it’s too soon to recommend any of these platforms.

**Cognitive stimulation.** ChatGPT wrote, “Keeping the brain active and engaged is crucial for cognitive health. ChatGPT offers a plethora of opportunities for mental

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*stimulation, allowing seniors to engage in stimulating conversations on various topics, from history and literature to science and technology. ChatGPT can also provide trivia quizzes, brain teasers and other cognitive exercises.”*

True! Mobile blog company App Amped has posted a blog<sup>3</sup> that provides prompts for 15 games from trivia to chess, with prompts on how to play, and what to look out for. You can consider pointing your constituents to this page to get started.

**Access to information.** *“ChatGPT serves as a valuable source of information for seniors, providing them with answers to questions about current events, news, health and more,”* ChatGPT writes.

That can be true, but as Milner pointed out, it’s critical that users not accept responses at face value; when in doubt, check other sources. Also remember that ChatGPT has limited, if any, knowledge of events that happened after 2021, so it’s not true that it can provide answers to questions about current events.

**Emotional support.** *“ChatGPT offers a nonjudgmental and compassionate space for seniors to express their feelings and concerns. Through its conversational capabilities, ChatGPT can offer emotional support and provide coping strategies, helping seniors manage their emotions and improve their mental well-being.”*

Yes, but with cautions. NBC News reported on a mental health tech company that conducted an experiment (without informing participants) in which it used ChatGPT as well as actual volunteers to respond to users in an online emotional support group.<sup>4</sup> The company was heavily criticized for acting unethically and tricking people into participating in an experiment. Yet, the experiment revealed that people rated ChatGPT’s responses higher than the responses of volunteers. Why isn’t clear, but certainly it points to the need for users to understand where the advice they’re receiving comes from.

In fact, Mashable has a good article<sup>5</sup> describing the advice one person received when he turned to ChatGPT to help him

work through some issues that were depressing him. The article pinpoints three things to know before attempting to use the chatbot to discuss mental health:

- “ChatGPT wasn’t designed to function as a therapist and can’t diagnose you.”
- The chatbot is “not always comprehensive or right.”
- “There are alternatives to using ChatGPT for mental health help.”

**Enhanced social interaction.** *“ChatGPT fosters social interaction by offering a platform for seniors to connect with others. Seniors can engage in group discussions, share stories and experiences, and even participate in virtual social activities, such as book clubs or language classes, through ChatGPT. This enhances their sense of community and belonging, which is crucial for their emotional and mental health.”*

This is true, but only when the chatbot is integrated with existing technologies; and it should have some value added to proven interactive platforms such as Zoom and Facebook Live.



### Personalization and customization.

*“ChatGPT is designed to adapt to the individual needs and preferences of seniors. It can be customized to reflect the unique personalities and interests of each user. Seniors can personalize the conversations with ChatGPT, creating a tailored experience that aligns with their preferences, making it a truly individualized and enjoyable interaction.”*

This may be true, but again ChatGPT will need to be integrated into your organization’s existing technologies to be truly personalized.

As with all technology, it’s important for people to be cautious about the information they share with ChatGPT. Taking the time to learn about security considerations, such as privacy and data security, will help equip you to use this software and to help your staff and constituents do the same. (For more information, see the box “Security considerations and concerns” on page 61.)

### What organizations can do with ChatGPT

Active-aging organizations will likely play several key roles with ChatGPT. To stay competitive, you will want to introduce your customers to ways in which they can use the technology themselves, as described in this article and others.

You will also want to talk with your tech experts about integrating the chatbot with your existing technologies to see if this has the potential to enhance functionality and streamline operational tasks, including information retrieval, staff support, and care coordination, among others. You might want to see whether the chatbot could help with meal planning and/or scheduling, and other tasks that are part of day-to-day operations (see the sidebar, “Supporting operations with ChatGPT,” on page 63 to learn more).

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## ChatGPT in a nutshell

ChatGPT, produced by artificial intelligence company OpenAI in November 2022, is a natural language processing tool that reached 100 million users within two months of launching, setting a record for rapid technology adoption. The chatbot is an exciting tool with numerous potential uses and benefits for active-aging organizations, residents and members. It is available by visiting [chat.openai.com](https://chat.openai.com) and creating an OpenAI account. As of April 2023, there are both free and paid options.

The acronym stands for a mouthful: Chat Generative Pre-training Transformer. Simply put, this means it is software that allows users to ask it questions (prompts) using conversational language, and the chatbot generates responses. But asking ChatGPT questions is just the beginning.

ChatGPT can also assist with tasks such as composing emails, blogs, essays and articles. It can produce code that you can use on your website. It can answer questions about topics you want to learn more about, challenge you with games, tell you where to access hobby groups online and in person, and—when integrated into existing voice and other technologies—it can perform a range of operational functions and improve quality of life for residents and members. (To learn more, refer to “Enhancing wellness: Potential benefits for residents and members,” on page 53, and “Supporting operations with ChatGPT,” on page 63.)

The chatbot also has some limitations. As of now, its knowledge base only contains information through 2021. It is not connected to the internet, so it cannot provide the most up-to-date information on many topics. It does not retain individual data, so it’s not possible to have free-flowing conversations from previous

interactions. Also, it has a text-to-text interface for now, rather than the easier-to-use voice-to-text. Organizations can solve this issue by asking their tech experts to integrate ChatGPT with voice-activated devices such as Amazon’s Alexa or Apple’s Siri, while some companies are producing their own versions of voice-activated ChatGPT for senior living.

All information and content products generated by ChatGPT should be fact-checked prior to distribution to customers. This is particularly true for topics like health information, which your constituents may want to use in their daily lives. The chatbot typically does not tell you where it gets its information unless asked for references. Even then, references may be incorrect, out of date or nonexistent. Users should vet content to ensure any explanations or advice provided are evidence-based (that is, in line with reputable sources), and references are real and appropriate.

As with any new technology, ChatGPT can seem intimidating. But once you get started, simply by asking a question (giving it a “prompt”), you are on your way! The more you use it, the more you drill down when you prompt, the more useful and exciting ChatGPT will be. Read the main article for examples of how to do this, and what the results can be.

*Adapted from experience, as well as multiple sources, including: ZDNet’s “What is ChatGPT and Why Does It Matter? Here’s What You Need to Know” ([www.zdnet.com/article/what-is-chatgpt-and-why-does-it-matter-heres-everything-you-need-to-know](https://www.zdnet.com/article/what-is-chatgpt-and-why-does-it-matter-heres-everything-you-need-to-know)); Insider Intelligence’s “ChatGPT and Generative AI: Our Guide to 2023’s Most Talked-About Technology—and Where It’ll Have the Biggest Impact” ([www.insiderintelligence.com/content/chatgpt-generative-ai](https://www.insiderintelligence.com/content/chatgpt-generative-ai)); and ChatGPT on the OpenAI website ([chat.openai.com](https://chat.openai.com)).*

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ChatGPT can also provide code that enables you to add content, such as news, to your website. Again, you will need to curate the results manually for now to ensure your posts are relevant and accurate.

I found ChatGPT's language translation functionality valuable when I covered a news story about overcrowding in emergency rooms in Québec, since most of the relevant documents and news stories were in French—and I understand enough French to know that ChatGPT's translations seem better than Google's. This functionality could be invaluable for organizations that serve diverse constituencies, and need materials in multiple languages.

Beyond integrating ChatGPT into your technologies, how else might you use this software in your community or organization? Expect to see a diversity of products and services that incorporate this software come to market, expanding options and accelerating growth in aging technology.

## What's ahead

The global generative AI in business market was worth USD\$1.2 billion in 2022, according to market research consultants Market.Us.<sup>6</sup> The firm expects this market to reach USD\$20.9 billion by 2032, with a compound annual growth rate of 33.5% in the 2023–2032 forecast period.<sup>6</sup> Consider jumping in now to stay ahead of the curve, and to be in a position to assess the value to your community or organization of products that come out. [Ed. Two recent releases, for example, announced healthcare companion robots<sup>7</sup> and in-home sensing technology<sup>8</sup> updated with ChatGPT.]

Text-to-text generators like ChatGPT will likely be enhanced going forward with art- and video-generating capabilities, and use cases specific to active aging will likely be more targeted, according to Milner. [Ed. A use case outlines the various steps involved in an individual's interaction with a product or system and how that product or system responds.]

“When I started with ChatGPT, I felt a bit intimidated realizing I was using a new tool,” Milner recalled, “and I really had to learn how to use it. I encourage everyone to read articles like this one first, and then go through a process of experimenting to become comfortable with ChatGPT before you start using it professionally.”

Importantly, “as our members become more familiar with the technology and its capabilities, we [ICAA] will be positioned to develop a scope of practice for the industry that we should not venture outside of,” Milner said.

For now, “we are at the starting gate for a lot of organizations and companies,” Milner added, noting the industry generally has not embraced new technologies quickly. “We have a lot to work out before we can optimize the value of generative AI—but even the very near future is excit-

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## Security considerations and concerns

What are the security concerns around ChatGPT's use in senior living? I asked ChatGPT, and gave instructions to include the need for human oversight and authentication, among others. The response, below, covers vital ground and can serve as a checklist for organizations (including other active-aging settings) that seek to integrate the chatbot into operations on its own, or in conjunction with other technologies (see the sidebar, "Supporting operations with ChatGPT," on page 63).

According to ChatGPT, there are several security concerns associated with use of this tool in senior living. These include:

- 1. Privacy and data security.** ChatGPT interactions may involve sensitive information shared by residents, such as their medical history, personal preferences and financial information. Ensuring that these conversations are kept private and secure is critical. There is a need to implement robust data encryption, access controls and secure storage practices to protect residents' information from unauthorized access or data breaches.
- 2. Authentication and authorization.** Authenticating the identity of residents and staff who interact with ChatGPT is essential to prevent unauthorized access. Adequate authentication mechanisms, such as multifactor authentication, should be implemented to ensure only authorized individuals can access and use ChatGPT. Additionally, proper authorization protocols should be in place to limit access privileges to appropriate personnel, preventing misuse or unauthorized actions.
- 3. Human oversight and intervention.** While ChatGPT is designed to generate responses autonomously, it is crucial to have human oversight to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the responses. Residents may require assistance in interpreting the responses generated by ChatGPT. Having trained staff who can monitor and intervene when needed is essential to prevent misinformation or misunderstanding.
- 4. Vulnerability to manipulation and abuse.** ChatGPT could be vulnerable to manipulation or abuse by malicious actors who may try to trick or deceive residents for financial gain or other nefarious purposes. This could include phishing attempts, social engineering [efforts to manipulate individuals into revealing personal information], or other types of scams. Implementing safeguards, such as content filtering, threat detection and user education, can help mitigate such risks.
- 5. Ethical concerns.** There are ethical concerns surrounding the use of ChatGPT in senior living, such as potential biases in the language generated by the model. ChatGPT may inadvertently exhibit bias based on the data it has been trained on, leading to unfair treatment or misinformation for certain groups of seniors. Ethical guidelines and regular model audits should be in place to ensure that the interactions with ChatGPT are fair, unbiased and aligned with the ethical standards of care for residents. [Ed. The emergence of ChatGPT will also heighten existing concerns that this widely used tool, like other AI technologies, could "perpetuate existing ageism in society."<sup>9</sup>]
- 6. Technical issues and system failures.** Like any technology, ChatGPT may experience technical issues or system failures, which could disrupt its availability or functionality. This could impact the quality of care and services provided to residents. Regular system maintenance, backup and recovery plans, and contingency measures should be in place to minimize the risk of technical failures and ensure reliable access to ChatGPT.

"In conclusion, it is essential to address the security concerns associated with ChatGPT's use. Implementing robust privacy and security measures, authentication and authorization protocols, human oversight, and ethical guidelines are critical to ensure safe and responsible use of ChatGPT in senior living environments."

*The "Resources" box on page 53 lists several articles that are recommended reading for those who want to explore ChatGPT and learn more not only about how it works, but also what concerns exist about privacy and data security, in particular. Also listed are resources about ageism in artificial intelligence technologies.*

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ing. What's clear is that we can't wait. We need to start learning and using these technologies now, so we can exercise due care while opening the door to new possibilities.”

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## Supporting operations with ChatGPT

I asked ChatGPT how it can support an active-aging organization's operations. Following is the response, most of which applies in senior living as well as other settings. Be aware that to use ChatGPT in these ways will require technical expertise to integrate the chatbot with your existing technology (i.e., voice) and in some cases—for example, to use it to produce appropriate protocols in an emergency—to create a knowledge base that it can quickly access.

Here, from ChatGPT, are examples of the types of support it can provide.

- 1. Customer engagement.** ChatGPT can help enhance the quality of life for your residents by engaging in conversational interactions with them. It can provide companionship, engage in reminiscing activities, play games and provide mental stimulation through conversation, which can improve overall well-being. [Ed. Also see the caveats in the section, “Enhancing wellness: Potential benefits for residents and members,” on page 53.]
- 2. Information retrieval.** ChatGPT can assist with retrieving information quickly and accurately. This can include providing answers to frequently asked questions about your senior living community, such as meal schedules, activity calendars, visiting policies, and more. It can also help seniors and their families access
- 3. Staff support.** ChatGPT can serve as a resource for your staff, providing information and guidance on various operational aspects. It can assist with scheduling, tracking tasks and organizing information, helping your staff manage their workload more efficiently.
- 4. Care coordination.** ChatGPT can help facilitate care coordination by providing reminders for medication schedules, coordinating appointments, and assisting with communication between residents, families and healthcare providers. This can help streamline operations and improve care.
- 5. Emergency response.** ChatGPT can be programmed with emergency protocols and procedures, and serve as a quick reference tool for your staff during critical situations. It can provide guidance on emergency procedures, evacuation plans and other critical information to ensure the safety and well-being of your residents and staff.
- 6. Feedback collection.** ChatGPT can be used to collect feedback from residents and their families about their experiences and satisfaction with your senior living community. This can help you gather valuable insights to improve operations, identify areas for improvement, and enhance the overall quality of care and services.
- 7. Language translation.** ChatGPT can assist with language translation services, helping your staff communicate with residents and families who may have limited English proficiency, and facilitating effective communication in diverse communities.

[Here are some possible ways ChatGPT says it can help you collect feedback:

- generate feedback forms to share with residents, family members or caregivers
- prompt users with in-chat surveys during interactions
- analyze tone/sentiment in conversations to gain insights into how users feel about their experiences
- generate open-ended prompts in conversations to encourage users to share feedback
- send follow-up emails to request feedback from users who interacted with the chatbot
- monitor social media platforms and extract feedback to provide insights about what users say about their senior living experiences

The chatbot cautions that “user feedback should be collected and used in accordance with privacy laws and regulations, and users should be informed about how their feedback will be collected, used and stored.”]