

## Controlling your home environment

If you have an injury that's impacted your mobility and hand function, you may have difficulty accessing your home and controlling devices in your home environment. For example, you may have difficulty using standard remote controls, operating light switches or opening and closing doors. A home automation system is one solution that could enable you to regain control of your home environment.

### What is home automation?

Home automation is the use of one or more devices to control home functions and features through an application (app) and/or a voice controlled hands-free device. Examples of functions that can be automated include:

- switching lights on and off
- controlling power points
- temperature control through air conditioning
- opening and closing blinds
- controlling a television and home entertainment/audio-visual systems (TV/AV)
- opening and closing doors, including use of an intercom
- controlling electric/adjustable bed functions.

### How does home automation work?

An integrated home automation system typically includes a central hub (or processing unit) that sends instructions to each of your connected devices (such as lights, air conditioner, TV etc.) and is controlled via an app on your tablet device or mobile phone. The display and function of certain apps can be customised to cater for different access needs, including:

- adjusting the screen layout
- larger buttons for increased accuracy
- switch scanning for users who don't have the dexterity or accuracy to physically press buttons on a tablet
- integrating voice control through a hands-free device with built-in speakers (e.g. Amazon Echo or Google Home).

## How do you review my needs for home automation?

The purpose of home automation is to provide you with greater control of your home environment and increased independence in day-to-day activities around your home.

Your needs for home automation will usually be identified by you as part of your assessment for home modifications, with support from a building modifications occupational therapist, or a specialist occupational therapist with skills in home automation.

We consider the following circumstances when reviewing your needs and any request for home automation:

- Your functional abilities, such as mobility; amount of hand function; and your ability to understand and use an integrated home automation system.
- Your care needs and the type and amount of approved attendant care supports you have.
- Whether a home automation system will promote your independence in day-to-day tasks.
- Other considerations about your personal circumstances such as your goals, life roles, family environment, and any safety risks.

If you've already had your home modified, or your needs have changed, talk to your icare contact and they can arrange for a review of your home automation needs.

## What home functions and features will icare consider including in a home automation system?

The following may be considered reasonable to include in a home automation system depending on your identified needs and circumstances:

1. Door openers – for primary access points to your home. This may include garage door controls if you're driving, or you need to access your garage independently.
2. Video intercom – for the main entrance door.
3. Lights – in the main rooms you use in your home, such as your bedroom, bathroom and kitchen/living room. If you live in a large home, we may not consider it reasonable to automate features and functions in all rooms in your home.
4. TV/AV – in the main room/s you regularly use such as living room and bedroom.
5. Air conditioning – On/off plus temperature control.
6. Blinds – in key rooms, such as your bedroom so you can open the blind before a support worker or family member comes to assist you in the morning. We may consider automating blinds in other rooms depending on your circumstances and amount of time you spend at home alone during the day.
7. Electric/adjustable bed control.

## What home automation systems does icare recommend?

We have consulted with specialist occupational therapists and home automation suppliers to help us identify the most suitable solutions that can meet the needs of a range of icare participants. These include:

- Push Controls - App that can be accessed on a tablet device or mobile phone. It can include pre-set scenes to control multiple functions (e.g. bedtime – turn off main lights, turn on bedside lamp) and has a customisable display with different levels of access options (direct/touch, joystick, and switch scanning) that provides users with integrated control of multiple devices.
- Z-Wave modules – Z-wave is a wireless system that allows control of connected devices such as lights, power points etc via the Push Controls app or voice.
- Voice controlled hands-free devices such as Amazon Echo (using Alexa Voice Service) or Google Home (using Google Assistant voice service).

We recommend these solutions because they are commercially available and commonly used, and relatively easy to set up (including less hard wiring compared to other automation systems). This makes them more cost effective, particularly when retrofitting to existing homes. They are also customisable to meet the needs of different participants.

## Further Information

If you're interested in exploring if home automation is suitable for you, please speak to your icare contact who can discuss your needs and make a referral for an assessment.