



How Tech
Innovations Help
Members Stay
**Independent at
Home**



Independence is a key indicator of senior long-term health, and advances in Personal Emergency Response Systems (PERS) continue to support independent living.

PERS can call for help in a crisis, alert family and caregivers when the button is pushed, and provide a sense of security, making it easier for older persons to continue living independently. Other in-home health technologies can remind seniors to take their medications, and new service models support members who are lonely or hungry. For members living at home, PERS are more economical than in-home care, nursing homes, or assisted living—but they can be used in these environments as well.

PERS have also incorporated multiple emerging technologies since the 1970s, from speakerphone technology to AI. And they're a booming industry: The global market for mobile PERS is poised to reach \$3.6 billion by 2025, and the U.S. is expected to maintain a 6.6% rate of growth.

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A Brief History of PERS

Here, Jamie L. Jones, LMSW—industry historian and Director of Commercial Customer Service at [Best Buy Health](#)—shares the evolution of PERS from its origins as a landline medic-alert system to the advance social care system members use today. We'll also reveal how evolving PERS capabilities might help seniors in the future.

1970s: Birth of the Button

Early PERS solutions are simple: a button on a lanyard that sends a signal to a base machine attached to the phone lines. If a senior presses their button, the PERS dials a loved one's or caregiver's phone number and relays a message that the button has been pressed. While this is very advanced technology for the time, there is a problem: if the call recipient doesn't pick up the phone, the senior doesn't get help.

Soon, the technology advances to the point where a button press can initiate a two-way call through the base machine. This allows the caregiver or loved one to ask questions, give directions, and determine if the senior really needs help or if they activated the button by accident.

1980s: Centralized Care

In the 80s, the problem of unanswered emergency calls is solved. Now, when the senior presses the button, the call goes directly to a hospital switchboard or emergency room with 24/7 availability.

Later in the decade we see the development of the central monitoring station, where service reps can talk to the senior and send just the right kind of help—whether that's a loved one or an ambulance.

1990s: Cellular Communications

Even with so many advancements in communication technology, some PERS still don't have two-way capabilities: the alert recipient must call the senior back to get the information they need to send the right kind of help. But late in the decade, more advanced PERS send signals directly via cell towers, so seniors don't need a landline—or even a cell phone.

2000s to Today: Streamlined Social Support

We now have mobile PERS, where the button itself serves as the speaker, so seniors can charge the device and take it anywhere they go. GPS location-based services ensure that help arrives at the right place at the right time.

Seniors are also finally free of the big button around their neck that they worry makes them look “old.” PERS devices from Lively are streamlined to look more attractive, and seniors can even sport a PERS wearable instead of a lanyard.

PERS used to have to wait for the senior to activate them. Today, they can collect and transmit information about, for example, when and how often a senior opens their refrigerator door, pillbox, or shower door—which can let caregivers or physicians know if something is amiss. The senior doesn’t have to take any special action and may not even know about the monitoring. With this kind of data, caregivers can provide holistic wellness support at a distance.

Finally, PERS has grown from a simple emergency call system to a social work care model.

Seniors are encouraged to initiate a call for any reason, such as if they’re lonely, have a question about a medical condition, or need to schedule an appointment; the PERS also gives them access to community resources and services.

The staff of service representatives can include social workers who are trained to handle these requests, and they also reach out proactively with wellness coaching, loneliness checks, and more. Best Buy Health has a social work service offering that addresses the emotional well-being of seniors, as well as emergency assistance. This is in line with [what the CDC calls](#) “social and physical environments that promote good health for all.”

The Future of PERS: More Definitive Detection

PERS with AI capabilities, combined with motion sensors, are already able to detect when a senior falls, and the [sensor technology continues to advance](#), making false alarms less frequent. The sensors are designed to tell whether a fall is “real” versus movement associated with activities of daily living (ADL). Soon, with a growing database of elderly fall profiles stored in the cloud, PERS may be able to run a comparative analysis against actual elderly falls to reduce false positives.

Today seniors can truly live more independently at home, and they can look fashionable and tech-savvy while doing it. Many health plans are partnering with technology companies to provide PERS to their members as an added benefit, with service options that include social workers and options to help seniors with ADL.

Best Buy Health would love to talk to you about our technology and touch solutions for your members.

[Find out more.](#)

