

Doing Digital Inclusion: Health Handbook

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12.6 million UK adults lack basic digital skills and 5.9 million have never used the internet before.

People who do not use the internet, in comparison to those who do, tend to be older, poorer, and more likely to be disabled. These demographics are also at greater risk of poor health and tend to rely most heavily on the NHS. Health inequalities amount to over £5.5 billion in annual NHS healthcare costs.

- In 2014, 2% of the population reported digital interaction with the NHS
- Despite 98% of GP's in England offer online booking
- 51% NHS Choices users are more confident in dealing with healthcare professionals, with 27% of users making fewer visits to their GP because of visiting the site.

Emerging themes from our Widening Digital the Participation programme

Barriers to Learning

Access:

- **Limited home access:** Cost and availability of broadband and kit remain a barrier to universal uptake of online health resources, especially for those at increased risk of poor health
- **Language barriers:** Online health resources can often be in English. Although machine-translated versions are available, they may not always be of a high standard so people may rely on family or bi-lingual support staff to help them.

Motivations and skills:

- **Concerns about losing contact with GPs:** Older learners can be reluctant to use online health resources as they see it as face-to-face services being shifted online. Staff may be required to reassure learners that online services are supplementary and not a replacement.
- **Preference for offline:** many older people use traditional offline means of transacting, as they value the social contact. Over 70s are used to managing their health in more traditional, offline

ways, and can resist any change.

- **Assumptions about younger learners:** Young people are sometimes referred to as ‘digital natives’ it isn’t always true that they’re all equally skilled in using the internet to find trusted health-related information.

Delivery challenges

- **Building Partnerships:** Partnerships between community organisations and GP’s are often extremely fruitful, but centres may initially struggle to engage local GP practices.
- **Fears about too much or wrong information:** there may be concerns about widespread use of online health resources relating to the risk of misinformation and hypochondria. Centres note that this usually happens with only a very small number of learners and can be dealt with through appropriate training.
- **Lack of support from GPs:** some centres identified that some GPs were wary of online resources and reluctant to use them. A focus group of learners identified a divide between older and younger GPs, with the younger being more digitally aware and welcoming.

Health Delivery Models

- 1) **Community outreach activities and events:** Outreach can take place at a wide range of venues across communities, using tablets and laptops to community groups gather to demonstrate online health resources.
- 2) **Social prescribing:** Partner with local GP practices to directly engage and train patients with digital health in a GP surgery. Trained volunteers can run one-to-one drop-in or scheduled sessions in the GP practice to support patients to encourage them to take advantage of online health resources, transactional services and opportunities to provide feedback on GP services. Patients who want more training in digital health or digital skills can be directed to further support at a local centre.
- 3) **Digital surgeries:** Establish a referral pathways from GPs to UK online centres, for support of various kinds including digital health skills. GPs should refer on to local UK online centres those patients who have non-clinical needs that could be well met by a centre offering a range of support services and learning opportunities, and/or have a long-term condition that could be more effectively managed if the patient had the skills, motivation and access to use digital health resources.

- 4) **Embedding digital health in digital inclusion:** The most common delivery model involves embedding digital health learning within wider digital skills training, using NHS Choices and the Learn My Way platform's digital health resources as part of structured classes or less formal drop-in sessions. Use tools such as health quizzes and self-assessment tools to introduce people to NHS.
- 5) **Embedding digital health in informal learning:** There are many opportunities to embed digital health learning into non-digital activity. Centres have demonstrated many ways to use health as a bridge between offline and online aspects of informal learning activities.
- 6) **Training health and care professionals:** Training local health and social care professionals to use digital health resources with the public provides additional resources for professionals to draw upon in the clinical/service setting, and creates opportunities cascade awareness of digital health resources to patients encouraging them to get online.

Tips for delivering digital health training in your community

1. Go to where people are
2. Make it easy to transition from non-digital to digital
3. Use portable technology
4. Think of ways to overcome additional barriers
5. Identify digital champions in the health sector
6. Run digital health education events
7. Offer supported, flexible, learner-led learning in a one-to-one or small groups
8. Embed digital health learning in multiple services
9. Develop partnerships with the local GP practice
10. Offer adequate privacy options