

Digital Inclusion Guide

What is Digital Inclusion?

Digital inclusion describes the work that is needed to ensure as many people as possible can access services that are delivered on-line. This includes taking account of:

- Digital skills such as being able to use a computer or smart phone
- Connectivity through broadband, wi-fi or mobile
- Accessibility, for example for those with visual/hearing impairment, learning difficulties or language barriers
- Confidence to use devices without fear of online crime for example
- Motivation and understanding of why the internet could be relevant and helpful

See the NHS digital inclusion guide for health and social care for more information: <https://digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/our-work/digital-inclusion>

Why is Digital Inclusion important in healthcare?

Improving digital inclusion has been shown to reduce health inequalities and improve health outcomes including reducing isolation. Helping people to get on-line and use digital health tools can also help reduce the cost of time and transport for patients and reduce the cost of delivering services for the health care system.

The NHS Widening Digital Participation Programme showed of those who were supported by the programme:

- 59% felt more confident in using online health information
- 52% feel less lonely or isolated
- 21% have had less visits to their GP for minor ailments
- 22% have progressed to booking GP appointments online and 20% to ordering prescriptions online
- 39% have saved time through carrying out health transactions online

Read the evaluation report here:

<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/research-publications/health-digital-evaluation-widening-digital-participation-programme>

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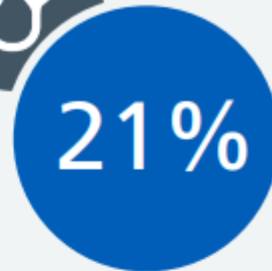




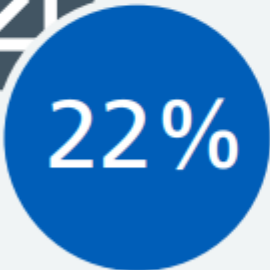
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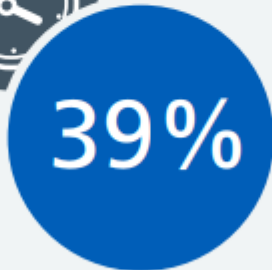
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This evaluation estimates a return on investment of £6.40 for every £1.00 spent by the NHS on digital inclusion support.

Impact of NHS Widening Digital Participation Programme¹

¹ <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/research-publications/health-digital-evaluation-widening-digital-participation-programme>



Why is digital inclusion important to consider when delivering VGCs?

11.9 million people in the UK are estimated to lack the essential digital skills needed to make use of on-line health services. Many of these people are those who are likely most to benefit from VGCs but will not be able to access them without support. There may be many reasons why a patient cannot access VGCs including:

- No private access to the internet or a device
- Cultural or language barriers to participation in group work on-line
- Lacking in skills or confidence to use the IT platform required
- Fear of security on-line
- Low levels of literacy
- Hearing or visual impairments
- Learning difficulties

Improving Digital Inclusion when planning VGCs

1. Check how likely your patients are to be digitally excluded in the “Get Digital Heatmap” <http://heatmap.thetechpartnership.com/> and the Consumer Data Research Centre map of neighbourhoods: <https://maps.cdrc.ac.uk/#/geodemographics/iuc18/default/BTTTTFPT/14-0.0933/51.5015/>
2. Provide a support guide for patients on how to use your chosen platform and use the patient FAQs to reassure those who may be concerned about security issues
3. Consider working with your local library to enable access to computers in a private space for health consultations
4. When choosing your on-line platform, consider which will be the most user-friendly for your patient group e.g. MS Teams has live captions for those with hearing impairments
5. Work with your local commissioners to provide “digital skills tutors” and “digital health champions” as part of social prescribing (see the pathfinder project work of the Good Things Foundation <https://digital-health-lab.org/>)
6. Find out what support is available locally for your patients to get on-line for example at the On-line Centres Network <https://www.onlinecentresnetwork.org/>, Barclays on-line resources <https://www.barclays.co.uk/digital-confidence/eagles/>, AgeUK resources <https://onedigitaluk.com/>
7. Provide information about VGCs in ways that are accessible to those with low literacy, visual impairment or hearing impairment and consider running VGCs specifically for these groups.
8. Consider how patients will book into your VGCs to avoid excluding any particular groups. For information on how to improve access to on-line booking services: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/gp-online-services/support/>

How to support those with poor Digital Access to use VGCs

1. Access to cheaper PCs/laptops/ipads can be found at: <https://www.getonlineathome.org/>
2. Signpost those with access to IT but lacking in confidence or skills to free courses on how to use the internet at <https://www.learnmyway.com/files/resources-for-digital-champions.pdf>
3. Consider training up a member of staff or your facilitator to offer technical support for patients who might struggle with accessing a VGC but wish to participate in one
4. Collate feedback from patients who have been in a VGC to find out what technical issues there were and how you might be able to improve the experience
5. Consider running a group consultation for those with low confidence in using your chosen on-line platform just to help familiarise them with the technology
6. If you have the space and resources, consider providing a safe space for patients to access a computer at your practice
7. Consider running a group selected for language where you could train a facilitator who speaks this language

