A summary of our research findings:

The barriers to digital inclusion in Cheshire and Merseyside

November 2022

Background

The Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System (ICS) commissioned Influential, an award-winning marketing communications agency, to undertake research to investigate the barriers to digital inclusion, to help identify interventions that might help increase the adoption of digital health and care services for both the digitally enabled and the digitally excluded.

Research approach

Surveys

1,015 digitally enabled people were surveyed online and **275 digitally excluded** people were surveyed on the street to capture the drivers for, and barriers against, accessing NHS services online.

Stakeholder research

18 in-depth interviews were conducted with NHS staff and organisations delivering care and support to disadvantaged communities and hard to reach groups to better understand the drivers for, and barriers against, accessing NHS services online. Hard to reach groups included older people, travelling communities, adults with mental health support needs and young adults leaving care.
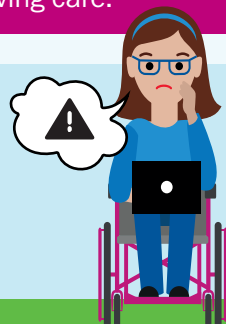
Focus group sessions and interviews

Focus group sessions and interviews were held with d**igitally enabled and digitally excluded people** to explore the drivers and barriers to accessing NHS services online in greater detail and to identify opportunities for enhancing digital adoption.

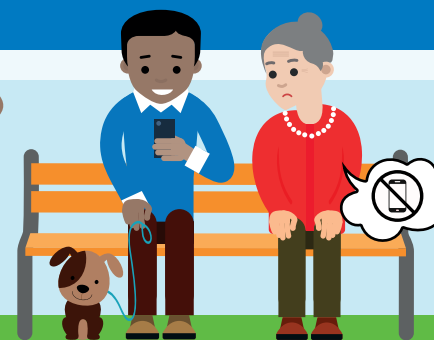7 focus group sessions of up to seven digitally enabled people.

4 paired in-depth interviews with digitally enabled carers and the people they care for.

4 in-depth interviews with digitally enabled people whose first language was not English.

77 face-to-face interviews with digitally excluded people.

Findings this way

Findings

Online survey (digitally enabled)

- Confidence in using online services is high but the majority of people receive a little help.
- There is strong appetite for NHS services online.
- Key barriers to using NHS services online are ambivalence and desire to do things in person.
- There are four attitudinal segments towards accessing NHS services online.
- Use of the NHS App could be higher and a significant number have lapsed.
- Future take up of the NHS App is likely to be weak without a compelling set of benefits.
- Promoting the range of features and building trust in security are key messages to encourage uptake of the NHS App.

Street survey (digitally excluded)

- There are strong barriers to overcome about the Internet before the digitally excluded will consider using NHS services online.
- The digitally excluded have limited knowledge or experience about NHS services online.
- The digitally excluded have very limited appetite for accessing NHS services online.
- Appetite for online services increases if help is available to set up and use it.

Stakeholder research

There are **3 groups of people**:
1. People who can access online services on their own.
2. People who can access online services with help.
3. People who need access to online services provided for them.

There are **several barriers** to using NHS services online:
- **Lack of trust** due to data privacy and security concerns.
- **Lack of digital skill** or confidence.
- **Lack of digital kit** or connectivity to the Internet.
- **Lack of will** due to not being aware of the benefits.

There are **3 areas requiring focus**:
1. **NHS App** – improvements in design, features and functionality.
2. **Access to shared records** across health and care services.
3. **The support of the health and care workforce** is key to promoting the use of online services.

Focus group and interview feedback

Digitally enabled

- The societal move to online services is thought to be inevitable.
- There is an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the NHS post COVID.
- There are strong concerns about the move towards NHS services being online and face-to-face interactions are seen to be vital in healthcare.
- NHS services online are positively viewed if they meet a need.
- The NHS App currently has a weak market offer and requires improvements to design and functionality.
- Data security concerns are not a barrier to using NHS services online, with most trusting the NHS.
- The role of carers is too complex to be completely online.
- When English is not a first language, face-to-face interactions are more important.

Digitally excluded

- Supplying digital kit to those who don't have it is unlikely to encourage use of online services.
- Offering training or support could help only a small minority.
- Communications are unlikely to encourage the digitally excluded but messages around data security work slightly better.
- Despite access to a variety of interventions interest in using NHS services online was weak.

Recommendations

We need to follow a **two-tiered strategy for the digitally excluded** to provide non-digital alternatives for those who don't want to or are unable to access online services, whilst providing training and support for those who might.

We need to **promote the personal benefits of using NHS services online** to the public and our health and care system.

We need to **make Improvements to the design and functionality of the NHS App** to encourage uptake.

We need to **address the issues raised about existing NHS services online** such as online consultations.