

Title: Improving Digital Access

Wards Affected: All

To: Health and Wellbeing Board **On:** 10th Sept, 2020

Contact: Katy Heard – Carers and Volunteer’s Lead - TSDFT

Telephone: 07747 847 569

Email: Katy.heard@nhs.net

1. Background

1.1 The coronavirus pandemic and associated lockdown brought an exponential increase in the necessity for people to use technology, whether for internet shopping, on-line medical appointments or to connect with friends and family / reduce isolation.

1.2 It therefore brought into stark relief the digital divide between those who have access to technology and those who have not. As quoted in The Lancet Digital Health, “There's a massive overlap between digital exclusion and social exclusion, and then social exclusion and poverty, and poverty and health inequalities.”

1.3 Various statutory and voluntary representatives of both Adults’ and Children’s Services in Torbay are therefore working together to develop a plan to address this.

2. What are the blockages?

2.1 Part of the difficulty is assessing the scale of the issue and prioritising how to address it in a coordinated manner with appropriate funding.

2.2 There are four main barriers to digital inclusion¹

- access - not everyone has the ability to connect to the internet and go online
- skills - not everyone has the ability to use the internet and online services
- confidence - some people fear online crime, lack trust or don’t know where to start
- motivation - not everyone sees why using the internet could be relevant and helpful

2.3 However, as highlighted by the COVID technology funding for vulnerable pupils, issues of access cannot be resolved simply by providing providing tablets / laptops. Consideration needs to be given to how to enable people with limited means to have sustainable access to the internet, before addressing the issues of skills and confidence.

¹ <https://digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/our-work/digital-inclusion>

3. What is the planned activity for the next six months?

3.1 Due to the scale of the issue, there are a number of avenues being explored contemporaneously. A questionnaire will be offered on-line and over-the-phone by partners to identify both individual need and the areas of greatest demand / need.

3.2 Access: Various partners are attempting to source or have sourced funding to support loan hardware provision. There should be more feedback about the digital loans to vulnerable pupils once they return to school. There is support in some residential homes and some hospital wards where volunteers enable the patients / residents to use communal equipment to maintain social contact with their families. This will require funding to expand.

Discussions are taking place with NRS, providers of Adult Social Care Technology-Enabled Care, to offer people advice about which hardware is likely to best suit their situation. Some people / Carers may be eligible for funding, some may be able to fund privately, and some may be able to access loan hardware as above.

3.3 Skills: Healthwatch Torbay coordinates Digital Health Devon, improving people's skills in accessing various health systems, using video tutorials and over-the-phone or virtual help.

They are piloting providing over-the-phone or virtual help for unpaid Carers in Torbay providing advice, support and guidance for anyone wishing to improve their digital skills. If this is successful, then consideration will be given as to how to make this a sustainable, more widely-available offer.

TSDF Trust is piloting using volunteers to provide over-the-phone / virtual support for people being offered 'Attend Anywhere' video consultation appointments. This enables people to be talked through and practice logging on to a video consultation so that they are more competent and confident for their actual appointment.

3.4 Confidence: All of the above should increase people's confidence, but we are also developing volunteer 'tech buddies' offering over-the-phone or face-to-face informal practice to maintain people's IT skills and hopefully build social links.

3.5 Motivation: Accepting that there will always be people who will never use technology, it is hoped that by improving the above and publicising potential benefits, such as time saved on medical appointments, some cynics may be won over.

3.6 By offering a full range of support to access health services, on-line services, and social media linking with family / local groups / activities it is hoped to address the widest range of motivations.

3.7 As services start to re-open their face-to-face services, it is hoped that many of the partners, libraries and colleges will be able to offer opportunities for people to access IT on-site and improve their skills and confidence accessing all of the above.

Appendices

Appx 1 – Facts from 'Digital inclusion, exclusion and participation' or ONS

Appendix 1 – Facts from ‘Digital inclusion, exclusion and participation’, or Office for National Statistics.

Studies show that overall non-users are increasingly older, less educated, more likely to be unemployed, disabled, and socially isolated ([Helsper, 2016](#))

In 2019, 91% of adults in the UK had used the internet in the last 3 months (up 1% on 2018), but only 78% of disabled adults.

For adults aged 16 to 44 years it was 99%, compared to 47% of adults aged 75 years and over. ([ONS, 2019](#))

In 2018, 12% of those aged between 11 and 18 years (700,000) reported having no internet access at home from a computer or tablet, and a further 60,000 had no internet access at home at all ([ONS, 2019](#)).

The Citizens Advice Scotland survey ([2018](#)) showed only 19% of respondents from the most deprived areas being able to use a computer at all. 51% of respondents living in the most deprived areas reported never using the internet, in comparison to only 8% of respondents living in the least deprived areas.

The Centre for Economics and Business Research ([2015](#)) identifies five areas in which individuals with basic digital skills benefit:

- increased earnings
- higher employability
- cheaper shopping
- improved communication
- time saved through online services

They also argue the benefits of Basic Digital Skills training outweighs the costs involved, showing that the boost in tax receipts and NHS savings alone exceed the investment required.

Background Papers:

The following documents/files were used to compile this report:

The Lancet Digital Health Volume 2, Issue 8, e395-e396, August 01, 2020 'COVID-19 and the digital divide in the UK'

NHS Digital, July 2019, Digital inclusion for health and social care

Evidence Search and Summary Service Outline, April 2020, Digital inclusion, exclusion and participation

Office for National Statistics, May 2019, Internet users, UK: 2019

Centre for Economics and Business Research, 2015. The economic impact of Basic Digital Skills and inclusion in the UK

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