How To…

Set up a Digital Inclusion project in GP Surgeries

Why should I set up a digital inclusion project in GP surgeries?

Modern life is continuously reshaped by innovation and technology – and healthcare is no exception. Constant advancements in technology are opening up new possibilities for prevention, care and treatment. Despite the changes happening around us, of the 4.5 million adults who have never been online (2018), more than half (2.6 million) are aged 75 years and over.

In January 2019, the NHS published their Long Term Plan, which includes ambitious plans to allow patients to digitally access health services and health records. Whilst there are lots of benefits to this, these digital health services will only help those who have access to the internet and the skills to use it.

To ensure that the internet is for everyone, and that older people can be digitally included, they need to have access to technology, as well as the skills, motivation and trust to go online, be digitally capable and make the most of the benefits that the internet provides. Experience from Age UK projects shows that many older people are reluctant to go online. The barriers are complex; older people may perceive a lack of need, be unaware of the benefits, lack the access and/or skills, or be fearful of computers and learning at an older age.
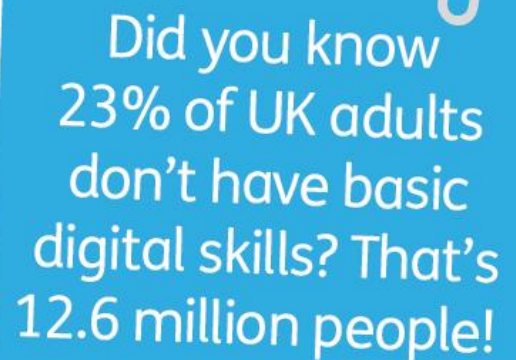
With this in mind, it is not surprising to know that 76% of patients are still not registered for online GP services, including appointment bookings and repeat prescriptions[1]. With 51% of those who are digitally excluded being over 65 years old, it is important to make older people aware why accessing GP surgeries online is beneficial for them, and show them how.

---

[1] NHS website: https://digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/our-work/digital-inclusion/what-digital-inclusion-is

Things to consider when working with GP Surgeries

- In order to get GPs on board, send an email explaining why it is important for older patients to learn how to access health information online (using apps such as MyGP or Patient Access). It is important that you clearly explain how your digital presence in the surgery will benefit them.

- Try not to ask too much from reception staff as they are often extremely busy running the surgery. However, there are certain things you will need to ask them, such as printing off patient login details.

Did you know 23% of UK adults don't have basic digital skills? That's 12.6 million people!

- In order to print off patient login details, some staff may ask to see a patient's ID. This is completely normal. You may need to ask patients to come back to a further session with their ID if they don't have it with them.

- Approach patients in waiting rooms. You will find that some older people are set in their ways and do not want to get online to access GP services. This may also be because they do not have access to the right technology, and more often than not it may be because of language barriers. For some, they like the system already in place and enjoy having that face-to-face interaction with staff members. You will receive some pushback from some older people but don't let that stop you.

Follow us on twitter
@OneDigitalProg | @Age_UK

Step – by – step on how to run a GP surgery session

1. Find your local GP surgeries using the NHS search here. Make sure that you have staff or volunteers who are local to the GP surgery or who are prepared to travel.

2. Contact your local GP via phone or email to introduce yourself and the aims of the project. **Top tip:** Email as many GP Surgeries as possible in one go, that way you will hopefully receive responses from some.

3. Discuss with the GP Manager what your aims and plans are for the day. They will then introduce you to the reception staff.

4. Schedule your first session! Try to hold your session during GP surgery peak times, as this will increase the volume of patients.

5. Sign in with reception staff.

6. Set up your stall in the space provided. Ensure that you have a clear sign indicating what the stall is for, so that patients can easily understand.

7. Approach patients with a leaflet and tablet. Ask patients if they have used online patient access before. Explain why it is important that they can access GP services online and the benefits that it will bring them in the long run.

8. Keep your presence there informal and be mindful that not everyone will take you up on the offer –that's ok!

Top tip: An efficient use of your time in the surgery is for reception staff to ask older people in advance if they would like to sign up to attend a session you will be running. If you have pre appointments, then this will reduce the need to approach people directly.

What are the costs to setting up this project?

You should consider these particular costs:

- **Marketing resources** – for example:
    - Leaflets and posters at the GP surgery
    - A stall which clearly shows what the project is about
    - Advertisements in your local newspapers, radio stations and shops

- **Staff** – you will need a staff member to oversee the project

- **Volunteers** – you may want to pay for marketing resources to recruit volunteers, e.g. through social media platforms, your website, or advertisements in local community spaces

- **Technology** – you will need to purchase some tablets in order to show people how to access GP services

What are the risks to running this project?

- The quality and level of engagement from GP surgeries can be quite low and so it can be resource intensive

- During winter, DCs do not want to go into surgery because of fear of getting unwell themselves

- Time spent in GP surgeries can be hard work. This is because you may be talking non-stop trying to explain to older people on how to access GP services online

- For many of the people you approach, their health concerns will be their first priority, and therefore they may not want to engage with the project at that time. It's worth letting them know if you'll be returning again so that they can sign up to another session

- Frontline staff in GP surgeries are under a lot of pressure themselves – and so sometimes it's difficult to convince them that setting up a digital inclusion project in surgeries will actually take the pressure off them in the long term
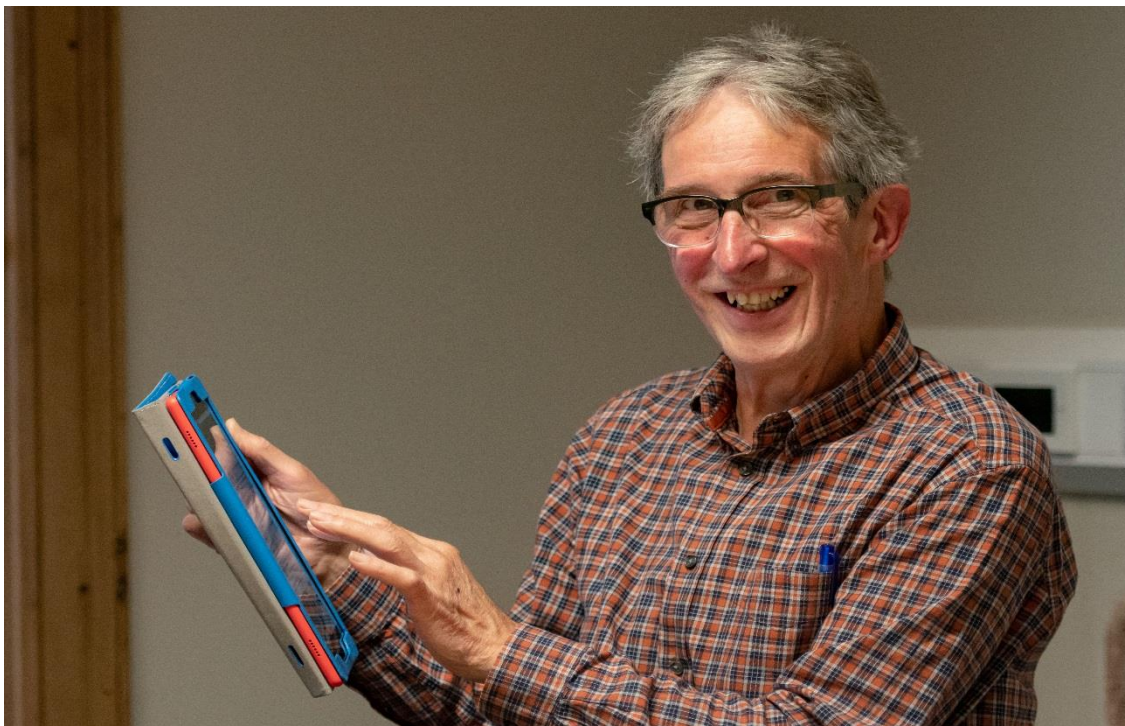
Evaluation: why is it important?

It is important to assess and adapt your activities to improve your services and ensure that they are as effective as they can be. By collecting evaluation information, it will enable you to demonstrate your project's successes and impact, and allow you to communicate your learnings with anyone else who may want to set up a similar project in their local community or to potential funders.

When evaluating your digital inclusion project in GP surgeries, you could consider:

- Using survey printouts to gather the views of older people you are engaging with at the point of interaction
- Holding a focus group of older people from the GP surgery
- Getting direct feedback from the GP surgery through surveys or interviews with staff

It is best practice to develop and design your project with evaluation in mind, collecting data regularly and using this data to improve your project.