PUBLIC AND PATIENT EXPERIENCE OF THE NHS APP

Patient Coalition for AI, Data and Digital Tech in Health

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the current members of the Digital Coalition who have contributed to this work:

- **Diabetes UK**
- **Fight for Sight**
- **Parkinson's UK**
- **Patient Safety Learning**
- **Royal College of Radiologists**
- **Patient Information Forum**
- **MS Society**
- **National Voices**
- **UseMydata**
- **Citizens Online**
- **NHS England**

Thanks also to former members of the Digital Coalition who helped to lay the foundations for this work:

- **Asthma UK British Lung Foundation**
- **British Heart Foundation**
- **Stroke Association**

FOREWORD

The Patient Coalition for AI, Data and Digital Tech in Health, (Digital Coalition) established in 2021, unites a diverse group of patient groups, charities, Royal Colleges, NHS England and industry with a focus on championing the patient perspective in digital health.

Our aim is to ensure that patients are included in the evolving policy discussions surrounding the development, implementation and evaluation of digital health technologies in the UK, and to enable these technologies to be developed with patients, rather than being done to them.

This Coalition acts as an independent campaigning coalition, taking forward joint pieces of work and engaging actively to help influence Government and NHS policy on the use of digital technology in healthcare. We want to encourage the necessary policy conditions to enable the UK to capitalise on new digital health technologies to the benefit of patients and the NHS.

This year we are focussing specifically on the NHS App, and this report details the results and recommendations derived from a survey conducted across the membership of the organisations that make up the Digital Coalition.

Further information on the can be found on the Patients Association website, including details of goals and how we plan to put the patient first ensuring that patient priorities lie at the heart of digital health policy.

Rachel Power, Chief Executive, the Patients Association and Chair of the Patient Coalition for AI, Data and Digital Tech in Health

THE AIMS OF THIS RESEARCH

The overarching aim of this research was to understand the public's engagement and use of the NHS App (abbreviated to 'the App' throughout this document). Specifically, the Steering Group of the Digital Coalition wanted to better understand:

- Our members views on the accessibility and usefulness of the App.
- Which groups of people within our membership are not using the App and why.
- What help and support people need to first engage with the App, use the App independently and gain more from using the App.
- What additional services users of the App might like to be made available.

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A total of 637 people responded to the survey with regards to their own use of the App; 177 people responded with respect to those people who help others to use the App, or who they know do not use it at all.

1. Most respondents are happy to use the App and find it valuable.

Overall, the survey results showed the App is used widely and valued. It is most valued by those people who have the full range of functionality within the App, have access to technology of a specification needed to access the App and feel confident to use it. Carers find it beneficial to be able to use the App to support the health needs of the people they care for.

2. Reasons for not using the App or using it infrequently were related to access to the App, accessibility of information, and skills/confidence.

Feedback from those who did not use the App, use it infrequently, or those who help others to use the App can be grouped in to three themes:

- Difficulties accessing the App or issues with the accessibility of information.
- Variability of the information/services provided by the App depending on which were made available by their GP practice.
- A lack of skills and confidence in using the App, including a lack of motivation to engage with digital healthcare.

3. Those who help others to use the App requested more support to enable those they help to use the App independently.

Those who help others to use the App, (including friends, family, community support workers) believe better training materials and more support is required to enable them to engage with the App independently.

4. Respondents made suggestions for improvement of the App.

Respondents suggested a number of areas for improvement for both accessing the App and accessibility of information within the App, as well as possible further support provisions.

5. It is imperative that non-digital means of interacting with healthcare professionals is retained

Individuals and those helping others to use the App made it clear that there are some people who will choose not to engage with digital technology or are unable to use it for a wide range of reasons, including financial, lack of access to technology, lack of personal capability and/or motivation, or fear of data breaches. The respondents made it clear that it will be important to retain the option for telephone or face-to-face contact for booking and attending appointments, ordering prescriptions etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this survey indicate that use of the App could be improved by policy makers, developers and healthcare providers in the following ways:

1. **Increasing awareness of the App** and promoting the benefits of the App more widely.
2. **Providing universal access to information** (including test results and healthcare records) to enable all patients to be involved in managing their own healthcare through the App if they wish. While GPs restricting access to information via the App may call this 'stewardship', many people in the survey and in the Steering Group perceive this as GPs acting as gatekeepers, disempowering patients. It is felt that GPs shouldn't be able to control the flow of information, as this results in a lack of consistency and leads to disadvantage.
3. **Making the app easier to access** and use by:
   a) Making log-in easier, including settings to 'remember' the user.
   b) Making people aware that they can access the App from a tablet or laptop, especially for those with physical disabilities who might need to use adaptive software.
   c) Increasing accessibility of information contained within the App by simplifying language and improving navigation within the App.
   d) Considering translation of some parts or all of the App into the most commonly used written languages in the UK, such as the 14 languages that the General Practice Patient Survey is translated into currently.[1]
4. **Reassuring people about the confidentiality** of their health data and giving people the choice of when to share data and with whom.
5. **Providing a clear path to find help** with using the App, including printed materials and in-app support.
6. **Providing a clear explanation of the different healthcare apps** available and where and when they are used. Longer term to find ways to integrate or consolidate the healthcare apps to prevent overlap and duplication.

A small but significant proportion of people will choose not to engage with the App or are unable to engage with it due to technological issues, disabilities, or cost limitations. Healthcare providers need to ensure healthcare services will still be available for use via traditional face-to-face or telephone appointments and make it clearer to people that using digital services is a choice.

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1. [1] GP Patient Survey, Other Languages GP Patient Survey – Other Languages (gp-patient.co.uk), accessed 13 February 2024.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this survey highlight the need for NHS England, Integrated Care Boards and Primary Care Teams to promote and support access to the App and increase accessibility of information within it. This will enable all patients to be involved in managing their healthcare through the App if they wish.

Patient Coalition for AI, Data and Digital Tech in Health

PURPOSE OF OUR RESEARCH

As part of our agenda for 2023/4 the Digital Coalition is keen to gain a better understanding of public and patient perceptions of the use of the NHS App. We have conducted research across the membership of multiple organisations to gather a broad range of insights from those who use the App frequently, and those who use it infrequently or not at all. We hope to use the insights gathered from this work to engage with NHS stakeholders to increase public engagement with the App and to help shape its future development, implementation and evaluation.

THE NHS APP

The NHS App was launched in January 2019 following testing with more than 3,000 patients across 30 GP practices in England. At that time, it promised that when a GP practice is connected, patients will be able to use the NHS App to:

- Book and manage appointments at their GP practice.
- Order their repeat prescriptions.
- Securely view their GP medical record.
- Check their symptoms using NHS 111 online and the health A-Z on the NHS website.
- Register as an organ donor.
- Choose whether the NHS uses their data for research and planning.

In reality, GPs have the choice as to which services they make available through the App, with the exception of health information, donor registration and data permissions. In addition, even if made available, patients must undertake additional verification to use some functions.

NHS England has a dedicated user research team on the NHS App that continuously monitors the uptake of the App and gathers feedback from users. The main goals of NHS App user research are to engage with diverse range of user to identify and understand user needs, experiences, challenges, pain points and opportunities. The user research in NHS App is carried out with the guidance from The NHS service standards and the GOV.UK service standards to address the different needs of health service users and to navigate the complexities of delivering digital services in health and care.

In October 2020, the NHS App established a user research participant panel to gather feedback on users' experience with the aim of making improvements to the App.[2] In October 2022, the team ran a national Omnibus survey to compare NHS App user research participation panel demographics to ONS Statistics to assess equality of access to the App and broaden representation of engagement with the App.[3]

Some independent research has also been conducted, such as an observational study into the uptake and adoption of the App in England published in the British Journal of General Practice in December 2023. This specifically looked at the impact of making the Covid-19 pass available via the App on the number of people registering and using it.[4] In addition, The Ada Lovelace Institute with the Health Foundation have published their work on how people who have lived experience of poverty and ongoing health concerns are impacted by health inequalities when interacting with patient-facing digital health services such as the NHS App.[5]

This research conducted by the Digital Coalition seeks to add to and consolidate work done by others in this field.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was built using the SurveyMonkey® software and was distributed via a link on websites, electronic newsletters and social media by some Digital Coalition Steering Group's member organisations, plus some additional organisations that work with the Patients Association. Those distributing the survey were:

- Patient Safety Learning
- Citizens Online
- Diabetes UK
- Healthwatch
- Health Data Research UK
- Patient Information Forum
- The Patients Association

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[2] NHS App User Research Panel, NHSE internal report, presented by Tanja Galloway, September 2023, accessed 18 December 2023

[3] NHS App Omnibus User Research, NHSE internal report, presented by Tanja Galloway, April 2023, accessed 18 December 2023

[4] Kc S, Tewolde S, Laverty AA et al. Uptake and adoption of the NHS App in England: an observational study. Br J Gen Pract. 2023 Nov 30;73(737):e932-e940, accessed 18 December 2023

[5] Access Denied? Socioeconomic inequalities in digital health services September 2023 Ada_Access-Denied-Report_WEB.pdf (adalovelaceinstitute.org), accessed 18 December 2023

The survey was divided into two parts:

Part A – for respondents who use the App or don't use the App.
Part B – for respondents who help others to use the App or who know people who do not use the App, and they would like to respond on their behalf. In this way we hoped to gain the views of people who are less digitally enabled, who are difficult to reach through online survey methods. In addition, for those who wanted to complete the survey but were unable to do so online, they were given the option to call the Patients Association's helpline and the adviser took their responses over the phone.

Collection of demographic data demonstrated a good geographic spread of respondents across England and a broad age range of respondents. However, a very small number of people from ethnic backgrounds responded to this survey (6% vs 25% in 2011 census),[6] which is a much smaller proportion than usually respond to surveys run by the organisations represented here, and consequently reflects a limitation of this research.

All survey respondents were anonymous, including those who called the Patients Association helpline to complete the survey, and provided voluntarily. No reimbursement was provided.

Note on quotations: selected quotes are provided throughout the findings sections, with more details contained within the appendix. Some minor edits have been made to improve readability. There have been no additions, word replacements or other edits that would change the meaning of the quotations.

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[6] Office for National Statistics. Ethnic group, England and Wales: Census 2021. [online].
2022.https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021 accessed 19th December 2023

A total of 637 people responded to the survey with regards to their own use of the App; 177 people responded with respect to those people who help others to use the App, or who they know do not use it at all.

All questions were non-compulsory allowing for both users, infrequent users and non-users of the app to respond to all questions. The percentages presented in the charts are based on the number of people responding to each question, rather than the whole survey cohort. Therefore, the number of people responding to each question is provided alongside each graph to put these percentages into context.

1. Most respondents are happy to use the App and find it valuable.

Of the full cohort responding to our survey, the vast majority (84%), have registered to use the App and approximately three-quarters (78%) are using it. Further, 81% of those people using it find it easy to use and 70% find it useful/helpful.

> "I think the NHS App is a valuable tool I couldn't manage without it."

> "It seems reasonably well designed, and I can fathom out what to do for myself... I actually think it is pretty good."

> "I have no problem using the NHS App and will miss it if it ceases to exist!"

Among the respondents, the App is most commonly being used for ordering repeat prescriptions, although reviewing health records and checking test results are also used frequently.

Fig 1. What do you find useful about the NHS App?
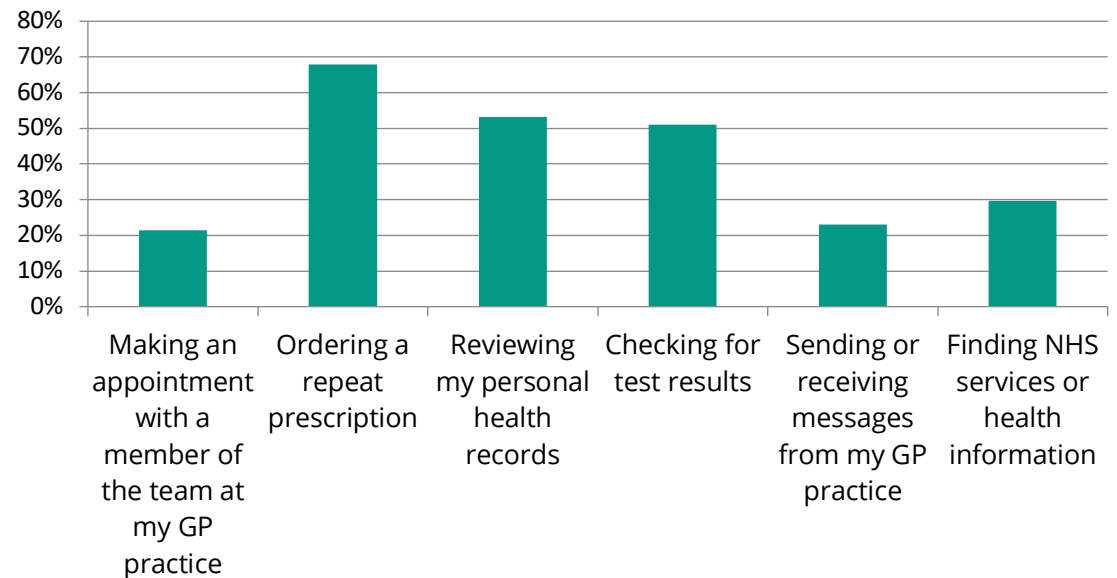
2. Reasons for not using the App or using it infrequently were related to access to the App, accessibility of information, and skills/confidence

Fig 2 If you use the NHS App, how often do you use it?
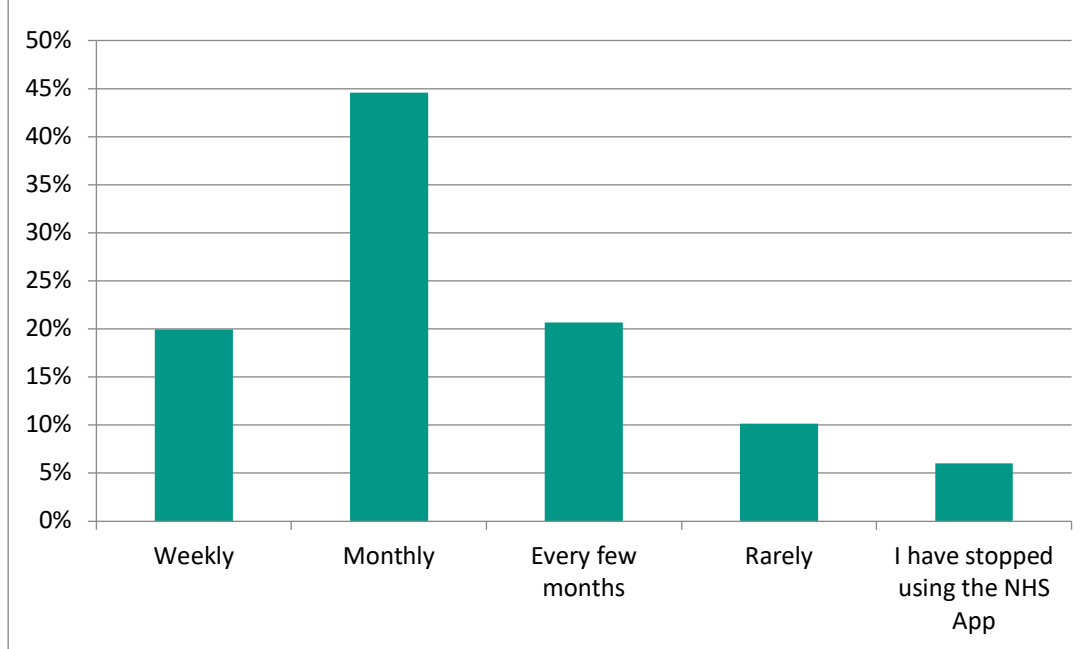
Access to the App and accessibility of information

Overall, just under a quarter (23%) or all respondents told us they never, or rarely use the App for technical reasons. A quarter (26%) of those none-users stated they didn't have a smartphone (10% of the total respondents), most of the other reasons provided included issues with:

- Downloading the App
- Registration
- Logging in.

> **"The usage of the internet by your GP is being used instead of speaking to the person. I do not have the internet on all the time or my mobile phone."**
>
> **"Clarity about registration. I discovered how to register without a photo I.D. by accident."**

Some people who responded to the survey were completely unaware of the App.

When asked what would make it easier to use the App, it was clear that many were not aware that it can currently be accessed via a tablet or laptop, as 24% of total respondents requested this functionality.

> **"I didn't know this existed - how is it being publicised?"**
>
> **"I have no idea what it is. It would be useful if someone in my care teams had mentioned it, but they haven't."**

In addition to issues related to accessing the App already mentioned, the data in figure 4 also illustrates some of the problems of accessibility of information within the App, with significant numbers of respondents requesting adaptations, better layout and simpler wording to improve readability.

Other questions revealed small numbers of respondents to have specific issues such as, a language barrier (two people; see lack of diversity as a limitation of this study), visual impairment (20 people), physical disability (11 people) and learning difficulties (two people). However, other reasons for struggling with accessing the information were wide and varied.

Fig 3 If you do not, or rarely use the NHS App because of issues with technology, please select your reason
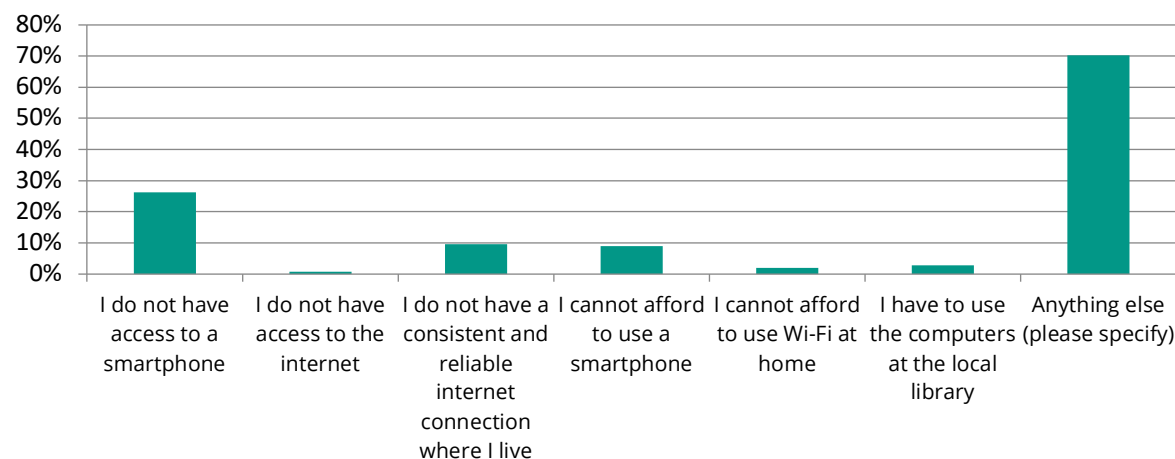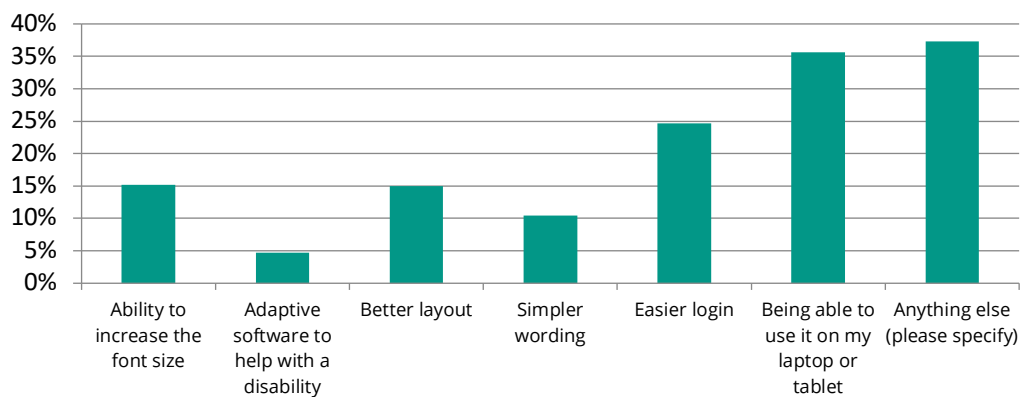
Fig 4 What would make it easier to use the NHS App?

The information/services provided by the App

There is a lot of frustration among people who can't access the services that are listed on the NHS App, and/or they see others accessing. When asked what respondents would find useful if it were added to the App,

More than a third (39%) of all respondents said they would like their test results to be available.

A similar proportion (36%) said they would like to be able to access their personal health records through the App,
These responses highlight how many people still don't have access to these services.

> **"I can never get the information I'm seeking."**
>
> **"More consistency in what services GPs allow on the App, including medical records."**
>
> **"Consistent content or menus appearing in the App wherever you are registered with a GP, so you can walk someone through it remotely."**

There is some confusion about the number of different apps and websites available across primary and secondary care for example System Online, Patient Knows Best, MyChart, and some respondents requested these be consolidated or at a minimum be connected.

> **"More facility of general use, less duplication I have 4 apps that can order medication."**
>
> **"I would use the App if it was joined up care and I could see all appointments/prescriptions for physio, hospital and referral etc. otherwise it's just another pointless one place for one thing app."**

When asked if there were any features that didn't add value, the most common response related to directing people to other services and health information (17% of the total respondents) although 22% of respondents had considered this useful in an earlier question. The Steering Group observed that providing such information may be seen in the current climate, as a barrier to gaining an appointment with a GP or other healthcare professional.

> **"I recently discovered the option to request health information from my GP when no appointments are available and have used this twice in the last month for my children. Very effective when you have a question that doesn't require an appointment. GPs called me back promptly and were helpful."**

Skills and confidence in using the App

Overall, just over a third (36%) of all respondents told us that they never or rarely use the App due to personal reasons, the most common being that they don't see the benefit of using the App or they don't want to engage with technology and would prefer to speak to a person instead.

Of note, 21% of the people answering this question (8% of total respondents) said their use of the App was limited by their concerns about what will happen to their health data.

Fig 5 If you do not, or rarely use the NHS App for personal reasons, please tell us why from the list below
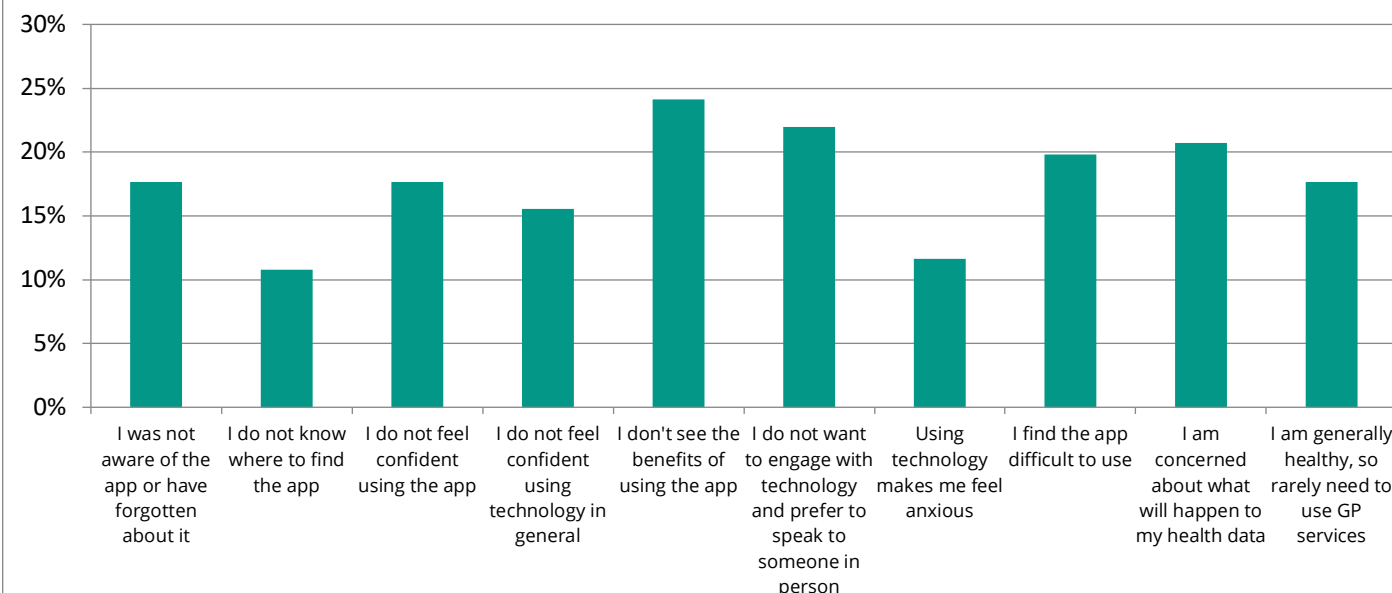
> **"Clear concise instructions for the whole process [are needed]. Using government websites in my experience are not easy to navigate. I am computer literate and I found the whole experience stressful and gave up on the first attempt."**
>
> **"I feel I am being forced into having to use this form of contact with my GP surgery, choice is being taken away from the patient."**
>
> **"Others my age cannot be bothered to use apps and fail to appreciate the benefits apps can bring."**
>
> **"My Mum is 95, is partially sighted, and doesn't have a computer or a smartphone, so please don't make it harder for people like her to communicate with the NHS by doing everything via an App."**

3. Those who help others to use the App requested more support to enable those they help to use the App independently.

While most people turn to family or friends when they have difficulties using the App, 14% of the total respondents said they didn't know where to go for help.

Some people responded to the survey on behalf of others (described here as 'helper respondents' n=130), 53% of which were people who knew others who were not using the NHS App and 45% actively help family and friends to use the App.

A small number of others have roles as volunteers or community coordinators specifically to support people to use the App.

When asked what the helper respondents understood to be the most common reasons for others **not** engaging with the App, almost all of them stated a lack of confidence with using the App (92% of this population) or technology in general (99%) and a preference for in-person contact (89%).

Fig 6 If you need help using the NHS App, where do/would you go for help?
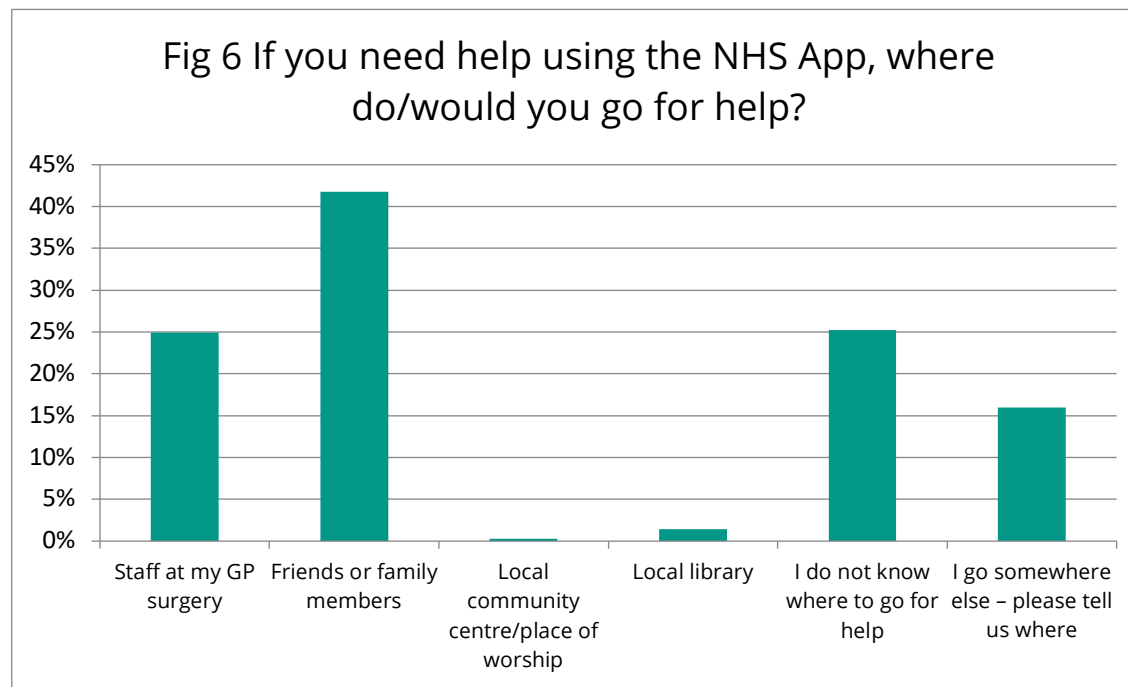
> **"Some just don't want a Smartphone, they want to speak to a person."**
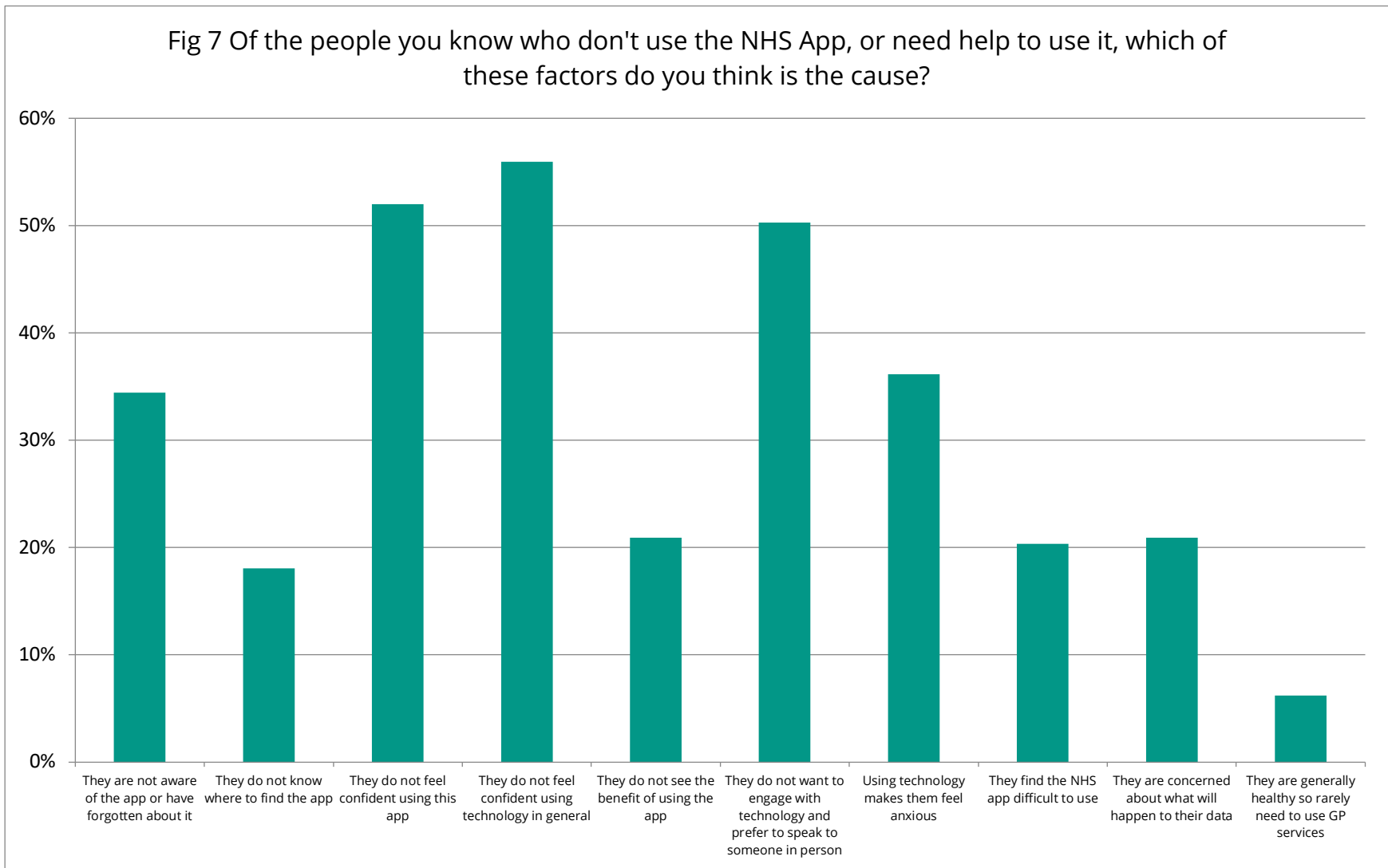>
> **"No one has taken time to alleviate their real concerns."**
>
> **"Using apps is just rather overwhelming. Other mental health issues eg depression. Generally, a passive participant in managing their own health."**

On probing the technological barriers for those people who need help using the App, the most common reasons were lack of access to a smartphone (63% of respondents to this question, 14% of respondents overall) or access to the internet (40% of respondents to this question, 9% of respondents overall).

These technical difficulties were reflected in the ways in which the helper respondents support other people.

Fig 7 Of the people you know who don't use the NHS App, or need help to use it, which of these factors do you think is the cause?

Factor	Value
They are not aware of the app or have forgotten about it	34%
They do not know where to find the app	18%
They do not feel confident using this app	52%
They do not feel confident using technology in general	56%
They do not see the benefit of using the app	21%
They do not want to engage with technology and prefer to speak to someone in person	50%
Using technology makes them feel anxious	36%
They find the NHS app difficult to use	20%
They are concerned about what will happen to their data	21%
They are generally healthy so rarely need to use GP services	6%

"Try to explain the advantages and convenience of using NHS App but might as well talk to a brick wall."

When asked what could be done to support those who help others to use the App, training materials, technical support and encouragement were most commonly cited.

Of those people providing support to others, only two reported having received any training for this role, although one person told us that their GP Practice runs training sessions for over 70s.

4. Respondents made suggestions for improvement of the App.

Respondents' suggestions for making use of the App easier were varied and covered several areas.

With regards to the content of the App, respondents' requests reflected the inability of some users to access various services, including making appointments with GPs and other practice staff, and accessing personal health records and test results.

Fig 8 How do you help/support people to use the NHS App?
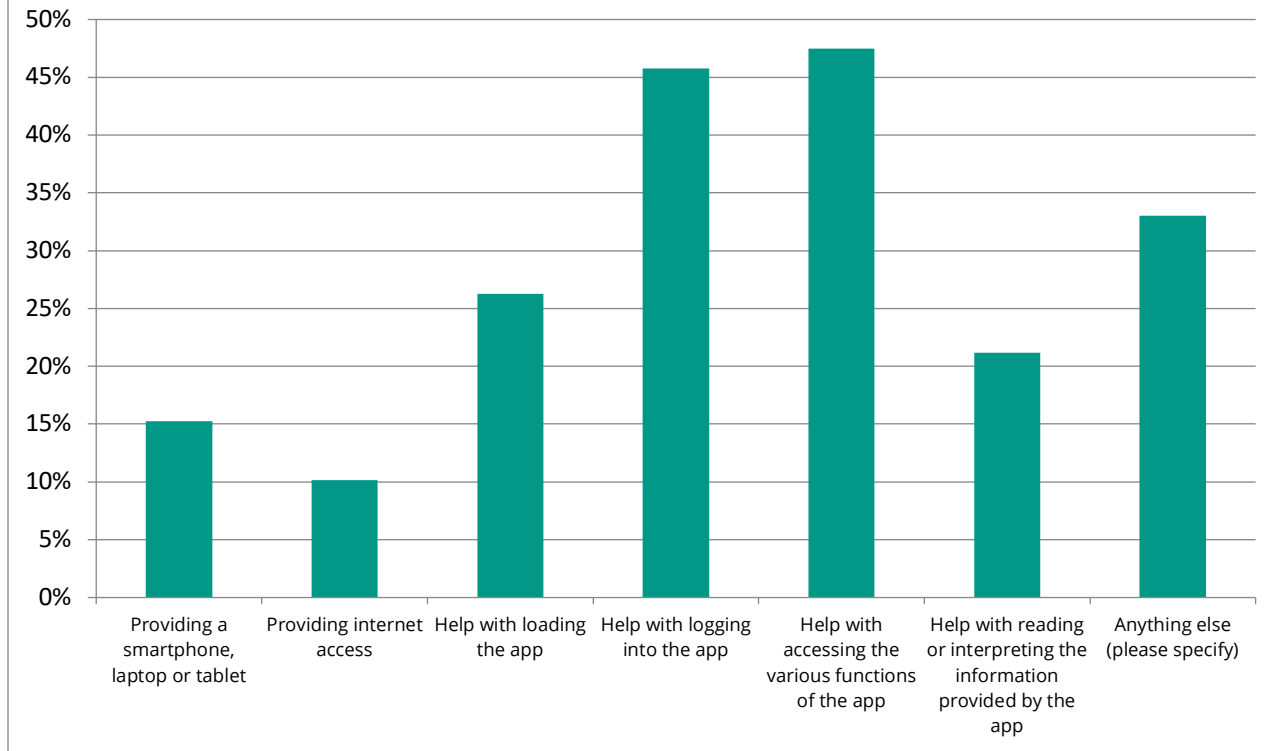
> "Re 'printed instructions' this would make a MASSIVE difference to so many many people."
>
> "A telephone number for support to use the NHS App that is available evenings and weekends."
>
> "Please let's get proper human contact for people in their daily lives including for support in the NHS Digital App access."

In addition:

- Over a third (37%) of all respondents would like to have the ability to let their GP know what matters to them about their health and care
- A third (34%) of respondents also said they would like to nominate a hospital consultant to see their GP personal health records
- A small but significant proportion of respondents (15%) would like more control over the privacy of their data.

> **"Patient Data Ownership. I can own my data, control within a click or two who has access to it."**
>
> **"The App occasionally requires me to give permission to medical partners to access information. This was unexpected and caused some anxiety. The provision of YouTube type video training media would be very helpful."**

Those people helping others to use the App believe that beyond the technical barriers, more support could be offered by:

- Providing instructions people can refer back to in a printed format half of respondents to this question),
- Providing online instructions within the App (around a third of respondents)
- Making available a person to instruct them on how to use the App at their GP practice (43%).
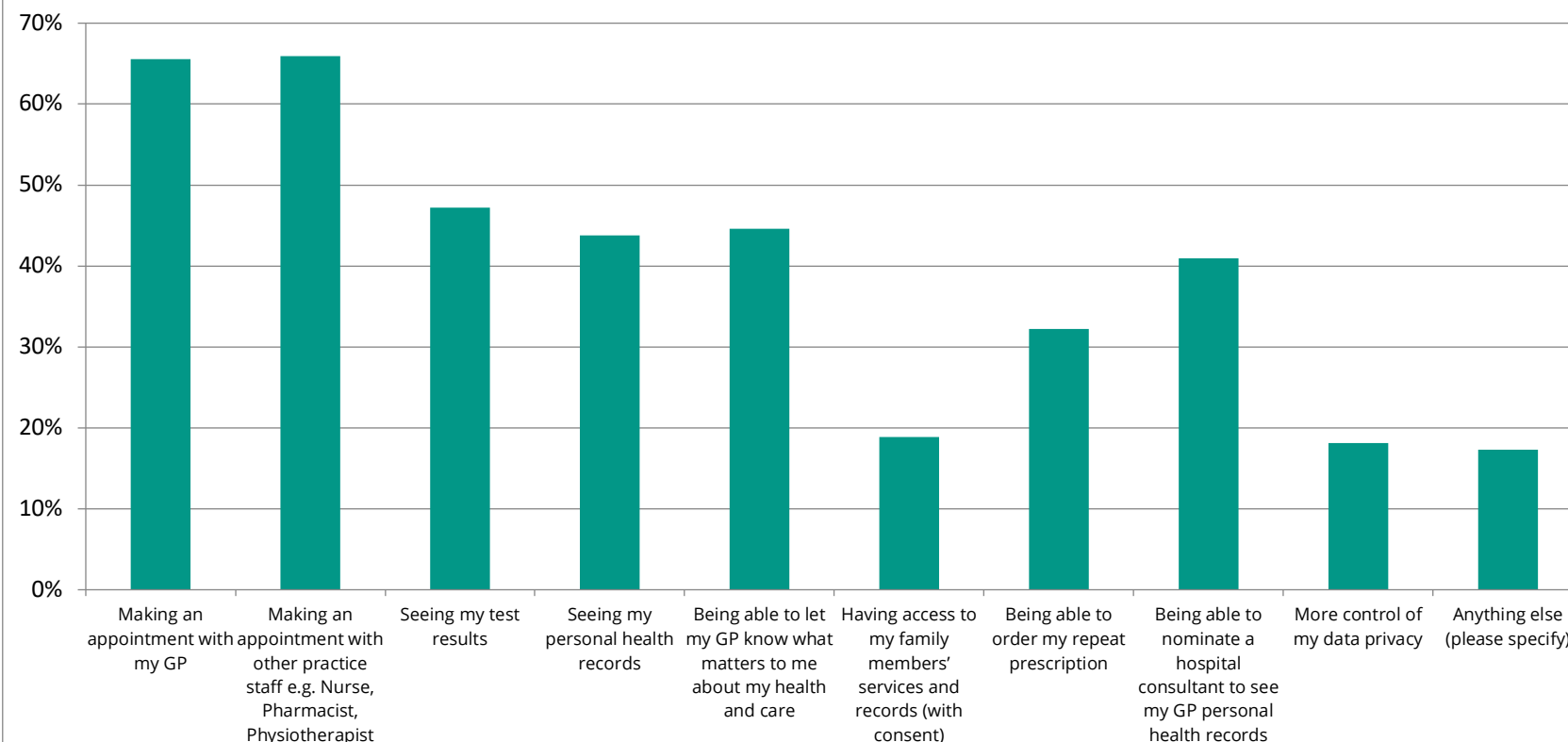
When the helper respondents were asked what would make it easier for them to help others, the most popular response again was printed instruction leaflets to use with people they are helping (46% of respondents to this question) and better publicity around the App to increase awareness and to encourage people to use it (43%). question).

> **"A lot of the apps the NHS uses including the NHS App have a lot of options, half of which are always unavailable at your GP (across several GPs) so more obvious sectioning, and not having things offered that then can't be followed. It would also be helpful if the App had results like the Patients Know Best App - in a graph as medical records are very hard to follow in the App and miss a lot of tests etc."**

Other suggestions for improvement are documented below.

Fig 9 What would you find useful if it were added to the NHS App?

Bar chart showing approximate percentages:
- Making an appointment with my GP: 65%
- Making an appointment with other practice staff e.g. Nurse, Pharmacist, Physiotherapist: 66%
- Seeing my test results: 47%
- Seeing my personal health records: 44%
- Being able to let my GP know what matters to me about my health and care: 44%
- Having access to my family members' services and records (with consent): 19%
- Being able to order my repeat prescription: 32%
- Being able to nominate a hospital consultant to see my GP personal health records: 41%
- More control of my data privacy: 18%
- Anything else (please specify): 17%

"Ensuring I am up to date with vaccinations (not just the dates but whether I am missing any vaccinations)."

"Being able to challenge and correct inaccurate personal records."

"Request annual blood tests."

"Anything more would be good. Only current use is Covid pass for travel."

Demographic analysis

More responses were received from women than men, with 60% of respondents identifying as female and 38% as male. The age of respondents ranged from 25 years to over 80 years, with half of respondents being in the 64–79-year-olds.

There was a good geographic spread of respondents across England, although over a quarter of respondents were from the Southeast, with other regions being represented more evenly.

Strikingly, 94% of respondents identified as white (from the British Isles) with a further 2% as white (Irish). The Patients Association and Steering Group noted that we had received far fewer responses from all other ethnic groups than we would have anticipated, considering other survey work carried out by our various organisations. This is a notable limitation of the study findings but could point to lower engagement or less interest in the App in these communities.

 Not surprisingly, 65% or our respondents reported having a physical or mental disability, with 48% of them declaring a hidden disability, (a disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.) In addition, 71% of respondents described themselves as currently managing a condition, and 90% as currently using prescribed medication.

Conclusion

The NHS App is being widely used and valued by the majority of respondents to this survey. However, in order to engage those who rarely or never use the App, policy makers, developers and healthcare providers need to promote and support access to the App, make all services available to everyone who wishes to use them and increase accessibility of that information to those with a range of different needs.

There is a clear message from the survey results that some human issues will never be addressed by improvements to the App, and it is, therefore, always important to retain alternative methods of accessing healthcare. However, further support should be provided to enable people who struggle to use the App, to do so independently. This will reduce the risk of exposing the personal health data of those who need help with the App to those who are assisting them.

Bearing in mind the low engagement of people from ethnic minorities in this survey, more work needs to be done to establish their perceptions and use of the App.

The Digital Coalition is keen to promote improvements to the awareness, access, accessibility and support to use the App, to enable as many people as possible to manage their healthcare independently through the App if they wish.

Improvements already in progress

It is noted that between us collecting the survey data and distribution of this report, NHS England have launched an update to the NHS App with the aim of improving navigation, making the homepage more streamlined, simplifying navigation, and making the language clearer for patients, https://digital.nhs.uk/services/nhs-app/redesigned-nhs-app. We hope that it will now meet the Accessible Information Standard.

With regards to the variation in services made available by different GP practices, there has been guidance issued by NHS England that all GPs should allow access to healthcare records from November 2023, but it is yet to be seen if all GPs are doing so.

NHS England is encouraging GPs to make all services available and to promote the use of the NHS App https://digital.nhs.uk/services/nhs-app/toolkit

1. Most respondents are happy to use the App and find it valuable.

"I think the NHS App is a valuable tool I couldn't manage without it."

"It seems reasonably well designed, and I can fathom out what to do for myself... I actually think it is pretty good."

"I have no problem using the NHS App and will miss it if it ceases to exist!"

"It seems fine to me. I like the fact that my browser remembers my login details."

"I feel as though the App has transformed my interaction with my GP practice. Having the ability to answer questions I might previously have needed to discuss with a staff member is invaluable."

"I think it is excellent. Easy to use and full of helpful information. Much better than Patient Access."

"I am 70 years old and find the App easy to use. My wife also finds the NHS App easy to use."

"Losing this App would be a disaster as I use it to order regular medication, see test results and to manage my type 1 diabetes."

2. Reasons for not using the App or using it infrequently were related to access to the App, accessibility of information, and skills/confidence

Access to the App and accessibility of information

"I would like to be able to use the App but don't know how."

"I need someone to give me a lesson."

"My attempt to register was fraught with problems, then I had to go to the surgery to get the form to complete for the surgery to link up with the technology and also take ID. Not everyone has or wants a smart phone either, a section of the population are being marginalised by this one size fits all approach."

"It's become FAR too complicated and offering too many things."

"The usage of the internet by your GP is being used instead of speaking to the person. I do not have the internet on all the time or my mobile phone."

"Clarity about registration. I discovered how to register without a photo I.D. by accident."

"Still trying to tie up with the person who can help me through the initial code numbers to get on to the App."

"You CANNOT use a laptop unless you register, which requires a smartphone."

What would make it easier to use the App?

"I do not find the App flows well. Some of the services on the App do not seem to be available. Find it irritating to receive a text telling me of a message in the App, having to log into it for it to be only a reminder of an appointment."

"Badly laid out and services not joined up."

"Fairly confusing to navigate, and I am an ex-IT professional!"

"Cataracts and essential tremor make it hard to use a smartphone."

"In general, I find (smartphone) Apps difficult to use/navigate and would prefer to access technology via a website on a PC."

"Actually, I do use the NHS App on my laptop and not on a smartphone as I am disabled. And yes, there is assistive software from Microsoft to link the smartphone to my tablet."

The information/services provided by the App

"I can never get the information I'm seeking."

"GP Practices need to make better use of it. They make it harder."

"I find the App one of the easier ones to use. it would be improved if my GP allowed me to book appointments with it."

"Oblige medical staff to put patient history on the App. Some practices do not do this."

"It's over sold."

"More consistency in what services GPs allow on the App, including medical records."

"Consistent content or menus appearing in the App wherever you are registered with a GP, so you can walk someone through it remotely."

"I'm registered with Patient Access, and the NHS App won't let me do both."

"My GP practice doesn't encourage the use of anything other than the SystemOnline App and I use the MyChart for all my interactions as a hospital patient."

"More facility of general use, less duplication I have 4 apps that can order medication."

"I would use the App if it was joined up care and I could see all appointments/prescriptions for physio, hospital and referral etc. otherwise it's just another pointless one place for one thing app."

Skills and confidence in using the App

"Just a bit anxious about doing something wrong."

"Have only recently bought a smartphone and struggle with the most basic of stuff as it all seems quite complicated - and no instructions!"

"It is just another thing that when you start to use it, nobody there to help."

"Clear concise instructions for the whole process [are needed]. Using government websites in my experience are not easy to navigate. I am computer literate and I found the whole experience stressful and gave up on the first attempt."

"I feel I am being forced into having to use this form of contact with my GP surgery, choice is being taken away from the patient."

"It's far, far, far too complicated to access all the various apps through their links and vice versa. When I go to my GP website I'm always being directed to the NHS App which never seems to deliver what I want with a lot of faffle."

"I found the App totally unusable and useless for me as an OAP."

"We are older and not used to using this technology."

"Others my age cannot be bothered to use apps and fail to appreciate the benefits apps can bring."

"My Mum is 95, is partially sighted, and doesn't have a computer or a smartphone, so please don't make it harder for people like her to communicate with the NHS by doing everything via an App."

3. Those who help others to use the App request more support to enable them to use the App independently.

"They do not like the idea of their data being stored in this way; they do not trust the security of their personal data being stored."

"Some just don't want a Smartphone, they want to speak to a person."

"They don't own a mobile phone because they see no need for one when they have a desk top computer. Especially as mobile connection in our rural area is very poor. Once again rural areas have been forgotten."

"No one has taken time to alleviate their real concerns."

"Using apps is just rather overwhelming. Other mental health issues eg depression. Generally, a passive participant in managing their own health."

How do you help/support people to use the NHS App?

"Try to explain the advantages and convenience of using NHS App but might as well talk to a brick wall."

"I've provided a phone and tablet, but my father still isn't able to use them - he can't remember how to find the App, let alone log in."

"As a PPG chair I help promote use of the NHS App, but no resources (money, identification of patients who are not users, or fellow patients to help run a support scheme."

When asked what could be done to support those who help others to use the App, training materials, technical support and encouragement were most commonly cited.

"Re 'printed instructions' this would make a MASSIVE difference to so many many people."

"Technological support being available that is provided as a universal service, rather than part of a selling process."

"The desire to use it."

"The App being a little more intuitive in how to find what you're looking for."

"A telephone number for support to use the NHS App that is available evenings and weekends."

"Please let's get proper human contact for people in their daily lives including for support in the NHS Digital App access."

"None of this help if someone doesn't have the personal motivation to overcome any perceived or actual challenges to get to grips with the App. And this is not just the elderly, but also eg those with mental health issues and living in poverty."

"GP surgery should be helping others use the App. It shouldn't be down to family because sometimes getting technology resistant relatives to use apps can be difficult. Also support should be available for people who don't want to use the App."

4. Both those using the App and those not using it made suggestions for improvement.

What would you find useful if it were added to the App?

"Having a record of times I have had to call an ambulance, whether or not I was taken to hospital or treated at home."

"Accessing Complementary Therapies and ways to support myself in understanding my own health and self-healthcare."

"Ensuring I am up to date with vaccinations (not just the dates but whether I am missing any vaccinations)."

"Ability to obtain new medical exemption certificate online."

"Access to and renewal of prescription exemption certificate."

"Being able to request prescriptions for medication not on my list of routine medication but prescribed as needed."

"Able to print out my latest covid vaccine."

"Being able to challenge and correct inaccurate personal records."

"Information about the steps needed to gain authorization. I had to ring the surgery for that."

"Request annual blood tests."

"How to complain about technology issues."

"Asking for referral to podiatry or hospital."

"Information I need is too deep into the system. I would love to be able to set up My Shortcuts to avoid multiple menu selections for the features I use."

"Anything more would be good. Only current use is Covid pass for travel."

Patient Coalition for AI, Data and Digital Tech in Health

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