# Patients value NHS App but not all users able to access information they want, finds new report from the Digital Coalition

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**London, 27th March:** Patients in England value the NHS App, but some users say there are limits to the information they can access, or find it difficult to use, according to a new report from the Digital Coalition.

Patients who need help to use the NHS App would value more support materials to enable them to use it independently, according to the report's findings. But survey respondents were clear that using the NHS App must remain the patient's choice, and face-to-face services must be retained.

The report is based on findings from a survey run by The Patient Coalition for AI, Data and Digital Tech in Health (also known as the Digital Coalition). More than 600 people from across England completed the survey.

More than three in four (78%) respondents said they use the NHS App, with four out of five (81%) of this group finding it easy to use and seven out of ten (70%) finding it of value. But more than one third said they would like the ability to access test results (39%) or personal health records (36%) through the NHS App, as they could not currently.

While NHS England aims to make these available to all patients, some GP practices have prevented access to this information. Some patients said the variability of accessing this information was impacting their motivation to use the App.

More than a fifth (23%) of people completing the survey never or rarely use the NHS App for technical reasons, including issues with:

- Accessing a smartphone
- Downloading the App
- Registration
- Logging in.

Among this group of respondents, or people who said they helped others to use the NHS App, there was a significant lack of skills and confidence in using it. More than one third (36%) of respondents never or rarely used the NHS App because they didn't want to engage with technology or didn't see the benefit of using the App and would prefer to speak to a person instead.

**Rachel Power, Chief Executive of the Patients Association**, said: "The Patients Association has welcomed the NHS App as a way for many people to easily access their health records. It also supports them in managing their health and working in partnership with their doctors and other health professionals.

"We're pleased to see from the survey that most patients use the NHS App and value it. We're pleased that NHS England has already made some changes to App since the Coalition ran the survey and hope it'll use our findings to further improve ease of use and look into reports that some users can't get the information they want. So it's important that future development of the App takes into account the barriers this research has uncovered."

**Anthony Walker, Senior Policy Officer at Diabetes UK**, said: "There is great potential for the NHS App to become a digital front door to the health system that is accessible and empowering for all patients, and this report illustrates the benefits many have already seen. However, it also points to key areas of improvement to enable the App to realise its ambitions: including the need for more consistency in the services available to users, and practical support to develop the knowledge and skills people need to access them, whilst crucially retaining non-digital routes for those who cannot or prefer not to interact digitally."

**Sophie Randall, Director at Patient Information Forum**, said: "The results of this independent public

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survey show that while the NHS App is a valuable tool for many, some people are being left behind. We would like to see an inequalities impact assessment on the NHS App with strategies put in place to support its wider use.

“PIF fully endorses the recommendations to improve the accessibility of the NHS App and provide translation into commonly spoken languages. “

**Dr Emma Koivunen, Research Manager, Citizens Online,** said: “This research is an important reminder that service design and digital transformation must not widen health inequalities. Making the NHS app easier to use and providing support to use it will encourage better take-up. We strongly agree with the recommendation that non-digital service pathways are maintained to ensure that the 10.2 million adults in the UK who lack the most basic digital skills are not excluded from accessing health services. Especially as these people are more likely to have a disability or health condition, be older or living on low income.”

**Christoph Zehendner, Medical Director UK and Ireland for Boehringer Ingelheim,** said: “We are delighted to be able to support this report, which is the cumulative efforts of the hard work from everyone involved with the Digital Coalition. Digital technology is a vital tool in helping patients access health services and it is important that these are as inclusive as possible, so the report’s findings will be essential in supporting patient centred decision making.”

**Recommendations**

The Digital Coalition, based on the survey findings, recommends developers of the NHS App and all those involved in healthcare delivery in the community to:

- Increase awareness of the NHS App
- Provide universal access to information via the App
- Make the App easier to access
- Reassure people about data security within the App
- Provide a clear path to find help using the App
- Provide a clear explanation of the different healthcare apps in use.

NHS England, the developers of the NHS App, are members of the Digital Coalition and conduct ongoing research into how people find using the NHS App.

**Dr Vin Diwakar, Interim national director for transformation, NHS England,** said: “NHS England welcomes this important research undertaken by the Digital Coalition. We are encouraged to see that most people find the NHS App valuable to help them manage their care, or those they help to care for. Valuable insights into the reasons why some patients find in hard to access and use the NHS App, combined with existing research activities, provides us with a solid evidence base to focus our improvements on.

“The NHS App user research team gather feedback from hundreds of people who provide insights and help us shape the functionality of the NHS App. We also have a network of over 800 NHS App ambassadors who share their observations when using the NHS App in a clinical setting.

“We thank the Patients Association and all contributors to the research, for supporting us to unlock the overwhelmingly positive impact that digital self-care can have for the public and the health system’s ability to serve them well.”

Since the survey was conducted, NHS England have made several updates to improve the layout of the App and make it easier to use.

Download Digital Coalition’s report, Public and Patient Experience of the NHS App.

**Ends**

**Notes for editors**

**About the Digital Coalition**

The Digital Coalition unites a diverse assembly of patient groups, charities, Royal Colleges, and industry with a focus on championing the patient perspective in digital health. It is chaired by the Patients Association.

Its members are:

- 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

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**About the survey**

The survey was built using SurveyMonkey software and distributed via a link on websites, electronic newsletters and social media by some Digital Coalition Steering Group's member organisations and other stakeholders. The survey ran from 29th
August to 7th October. 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.

Patients who wanted to complete the survey but were unable to do so online, were given the option to call the Patients Association's helpline and respond verbally.

A total of 637 people responded to the survey with regards to their own use of the App with 117 of these responding on behalf of others who they help to use the App.

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