

Digital Strategy Patient Engagement

Report Summary – May 2023

Introduction

Context

The NHS and its partners are committed to using digital services to improve the delivery of health and care services. The use of technology and digital services accelerated during the Covid pandemic, changing the ways many people receive treatment or advice.

Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (ICB) has developed a local Digital Strategy that is being reviewed. This strategy will help ensure that excellent health and care services will increasingly be delivered through the use of digital tools and new technology.

In order to ensure that this strategy reflects the needs of BLMK's population, particularly certain groups who are more likely to be excluded, the ICB wants to understand what local people want from digital health and care services.

A period of resident engagement was undertaken to capture local people's views, and explore residents' current experiences of using services as well as their concerns and suggestions for improving access to digital services.

Understanding residents' perspectives

We wanted to understand:

- how residents felt about using technology in health and care services, and what their experience of digital services has been to date.
- how residents would like to see services delivered and how they feel technology and the use of digital/online services can improve access to health and care services for them.
- Understand any concerns residents have over the use of digital services.
- Explore barriers to using digital health care services, particularly from those who are digitally excluded and/or seldom heard

This report sets out the insight gathered through:

- A short desk review of existing insights and reports
- A resident survey
- A series of in-person focus groups with residents

It then draws together some overarching conclusions and recommendations, which can be used to inform the ICB's Digital Strategy.

Our insight gathering approach

Desktop Review

1. Reviewed three BLMK reports.
2. Decided on the key themes and points of interest.
3. Identified and analysed two further reports to provide additional or missing context.
4. Incorporated findings into the research and engagement tools.

Resident Survey

1. Built the survey based on insights from the desk review
2. Shared the survey through existing networks including social media.
3. Monitored response rates.
4. Findings to feed into final report.

Resident Conversations

1. Built the engagement tools and process plan using insights from the desk review.
2. Recruited participants through existing networks across each location.
3. Ran focus groups.

Project approach

Our Approach

BLMK ICB has developing a new Digital Strategy to reflect how health and care services will be delivered in the future, making best use of the technology available as a way to deliver excellent care to residents. In this context, we need to understand what local people want from the use of technology in the delivery of health and care services, as well as any concerns around digital services, which may be a barrier to uptake. Whilst a large proportion of the BLMK population has access to the internet and smart devices some do not, and/or some lack the skills, confidence or desire to use technology to access services digitally. A three pronged approach to gathering insight was taken to understand the perspectives of residents.

Work strand	Approach	Purpose
Desktop review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Five documents covering patient and public feedback on the use of digital tools to deliver health services were reviewed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand existing insight into this topic to form a baseline of intelligence and help shape the resident survey and focus groups.
Resident survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An online and paper copy survey was shared with residents through the ICB's networks. The resident engagement ran initially from 19 October 2022 to 31 January 2023 and was then extended to 12 February 2023. 563 surveys were returned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To gather a broad range of views from residents as to what they want from digital health and care services, including what they like and what they do not like about digital services.
Resident conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 focus groups involving 51 residents were held in community venues in Central Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough and Milton Keynes. These captured a broad mix of views and experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To inform residents about the ICS transformation process and clarifying what digital services are. To capture resident experiences by asking participants to share their stories of using or attempting to use digital services. To capture resident suggestions by asking participants to describe what the ideal experience would look and feel like when it comes to using digital services.

Desktop Review Findings

To help inform the design of the engagement we conducted a document review. This included the following three documents provided by BLMK:

'How are you doing? Gathering feedback from the public and professionals on how they are coping during the Covid 19 pandemic: Being digitally excluded' 2021 – Healthwatch Luton

Healthwatch Luton wanted to find out from some of the Luton population, how being digitally excluded affected them. 60% of participants were over 65 and 80% were female, with a mix of those with known health conditions, including mental health and no known conditions.

'BLMK Digital Inclusion Review Full Report 10 September 2021' – We are digital

The purpose of this review was to better understand digital inclusion provision across the region, particularly in relation to sections of the population known to experience digital inclusion more acutely. The review collected information from local authorities, housing associations, VCSE sector organisations, NHS providers and further education providers

'Briefing Paper: Digital inclusion and older people – how have things changed in a Covid – 19 world?' March 2021 – Age UK

This briefing presents new data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) Covid-19 Sub study (Wave 1), which looks at the impact the pandemic has had on internet use among people aged 50+ in England and what needs to be done to ensure that everyone can benefit from digital technology.

The following two documents were provided by Traverse:

'The Doctor Will Zoom You Know: getting the most out of the virtual health and care experience. insight report' July 2020 – Healthwatch, National Voices and Traverse

Traverse, in partnership with Healthwatch and National Voices conducted a qualitative study to find out the experiences of those who had had digital GP, outpatient or follow up appointments with their health care provider. The majority of participants were over 65 and 20% were of an ethnicity other than white.

'Health and care in Sussex: Deliberative engagement findings' February 2022 – Traverse

Part of this project explored public views about remote access to care and digital inclusion. Specifically views, experiences and aspirations for digital health and care services. 42% of participants had a long-term health condition, 24% were carers and 24% were of an ethnicity other than White.

Key themes from the report

Theme	Summary
Inequality	There is widespread inequality in the experience of digital healthcare access nationally. Digital exclusion correlates strongly with social aspects such as low income, disability and age. However most intervention to support digital access in BLMK so far has been digital which is failing to support those with no access, excluding them further. For that approach to work. There would need to be significant structural change first, which is unlikely to happen.
Communication and support	Digitally excluded people may lack the skills, the means or have limited trust in digital services. Support and communication to overcome this is key. There are opportunities within the digital care service journey to provide support, such as by providing instructions, guidance and reassurance. A lack of supporting infrastructure has also been identified, such as a lack of access to computers and the internet in supported housing facilities, as well as a lack of training and public wifi.
Experience	Experience of using digital services for accessing healthcare varies. Some find their experience frustrating and lacking respect for patient comfort with the process and technology, and people worry that they will get left behind in the transition. Others are optimistic about the opportunities, such as patient empowerment through access to digital medical records, supporting them to advocate for themselves, and providing flexible appointment times without the need for travel.
Choice	Choice is key to digital services in health care. Patients must have a choice about when and how they use digital options, picking formats that suit the nature of the contact and their level of comfort in the use of technology. Face to face options must continue for those who are digitally excluded.
Systems, processes and design	Users of digital health services feel that the opportunities for digitalisation present themselves more in the back stage systems that would support a better experience for patients, and better resource management. Good design of digital services is seen as paramount as bad design might exclude people further, leading to disengagement and worse clinical outcomes. Most patients experiencing remote consultations are not being asked for feedback on their experience, which is key to building a better system.

Survey Findings

Survey Findings

Use of Digital Services

78.72% of respondents had either used digital services themselves or on behalf of someone else. 20.11% of respondents had not used digital services.

65.19% had used the NHS App, 45.00% had accessed their personal health record online, 43.65% has accessed health and care information online and 41.54% had used an online appointment booking system.

74.71% of all respondents either agree very strongly, strongly agree or agree that they feel there are benefits to the increase in digital services. 73.56% held this view when considering if they were comfortable accessing digital health and social care services, and 79.42% that they would like to see access to digital services continue.

23.56% of all respondents stated that they Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Disagree very strongly that there are benefits to the increase in digital services, 24.71% indicated they are not comfortable accessing digital health services and 18.09% indicated they would not like to see access to digital services continue.

Survey Findings

Use of Digital Services

31.48% don't want to use digital technology for health and care services, 65.64% indicated that they do. 22.80% stated that they lack confidence using digital technology, compared to 74.71% who disagreed with this statement.

11.89% agreed that they felt they did not have the right skills to access digital services, 84.85% indicated they did have the skills to access services in this way.

A low percentage of respondents indicated that the cost of the internet (4.85%), the cost of the device (5.78%), not owning a computer or other device (3.47%), not having access to a computer or other device (2.71%) were barriers for them.

21.42% sited communication needs which mean they prefer or need to speak to someone face to face.

41.81% indicated they are happy to use digital services but have found the technology has not worked well 50.48% or respondents disagreed with this statement to some extent.

25.63% stated to some extent that they were happy to use digital services but had difficulty getting the required passwords issued by their GP practice, 58.57% disagreed with this statement.

54.16% were happy to use digital services, but no appointments were available on the NHS App, 20.30% disagreed with this statement.

Survey Findings

Personal Data

60.72% agreed that they understand how their data is shared and stored and 57.09% were confident that their data is secure when shared with health and care services.

20.39% of respondents agreed they were concerned about how secure their data is so do not want to use digital services.

However, when asked to rate their agreement with the statement 'I do not know how my data is shared and stored and I would like to know more' 44.59% agreed with this statement and 48.65% disagreed

When asked to rate their agreement with the statement 'I am concerned about how secure my data is but want to use digital services so share my data' 48.84% agreed and 45.17% disagreed.

Survey Findings

Convenience and Cost

56.74% of respondents agreed to some extent with the statement that online appointments reduced the cost of attending appointments in person and 58.89 % agreed that they reduced the time compared to attending an appointment in person.

72.89% agreed to some extent that they found arranging repeat prescriptions online more convenient and 56.34 % that they feel better informed as they can access their medical records online.

46.25% disagreed to some extent that online appointments were more convenient than face to face appointments and 44.90% disagreed to some extent that they found booking appointments online quicker and more convenient.

Improving the Experience

92.54% agreed to some extent that their experience would be improved if there was a clear option to request a face to face appointment, 86.82% that receiving information in advance of the appointment and 82.76% that receiving joining instructions for using the technology would improve their experience.

78.51% agreed to some extent that set/agreed appointment times for online and remote appointments would improve the experience and 47.26% that training on how to use online services would be improve services.

Conversation Findings

Conversation Findings

We held 5 focus groups to encourage in-depth conversations, the key themes from these conversations are summarised below.

Initial perceptions of digital services

- A great opportunity but risks marginalising those that can't/won't use digital services
- Digital health and care services sounds like jargon – what does it actually mean
- Deaf people are often reliant on quality digital services to assist them
- Professionals often lack the knowledge / understanding how to use/book interpretation services.
- Some GP practices have better online services than others e.g. access to E-consult

General Sentiment

- Participants of some groups were positive overall about the opportunities digital services might bring, particularly in easing some of the pressures on the NHS
- Some thought that digital advances should be behind the scenes in systems and medical advances and not at the interface with patients
- Feelings were mixed in the groups, most were able to use digital services, but found them confusing and were not particularly confident

Conversation Findings Continued

Positive Experiences

- Organising repeat prescriptions online is very easy and efficient
- Some attendees were positive about e-consult which they found they got a quick response from
- Some have found the access to their medical records through the NHS App very useful
- National system for booking vaccinations was extremely useful

Negative Experiences

- GP Practices in Milton Keynes and Milton Keynes University Hospital use different systems, this needs to be integrated
- Inaccuracies showing on health records
- Phone and video appointments are not appropriate for very difficult or personal situations
- Receiving links to booking platforms is worrying in case they are scams
- Having to go into the surgery to obtain a number to create an account online – tedious
- Not having a specific time for appointments over the phone means you end up waiting around all day for a consultation you know will need to be face to face anyway
- It is a lack of digital systems that is a problem, different places have different systems, which is frustrating

Conversation Findings Continued

Barriers

- Lack of confidence in using digital technology
- Not having access to a computer or smart phone
- People must not be forced to engage digitally
- Lack of information, where do people go to find the information they need to access services
- Lack of volunteers to support and train people with sensory needs to use/navigate digital health systems

Enablers

- Training could be provided
- Tablets could be provided to those who don't have the means to buy one themselves
- The design of platforms must be accessible to as many people as possible e.g. language choices

Conversation Findings Continued

What would help improve experiences

- A simple to use public interface and a fully integrated system
- Websites that meet accessible standards
- Having a technology hub for the visually impaired – to provide training or support to navigate systems
- Dedicated physical spaces like libraries or citizens advice to drop into to get help
- Give patients a specified time for telephone and video appointments
- NHS App to be more deaf friendly using appropriate language and BSL videos
- Make communication flags on medical records accessible and easy to use for staff
- Have a patient profile on the system which shows key medical information and communication needs. If there are specific needs they can then be taken into account by the health care professional. Such as there are sensory needs and communications is only possible in certain ways.

Overarching Findings

Overarching Findings

Use of Digital Services

Of the 511 responses 78.72% of respondents had experience of digital services and 20.11% of respondents had not used digital services. Of those that had used digital services the highest usage was of the NHS App (65.19%) personal health record (45.00%) and accessing health information online (43.65%). 24.62% had used an online GP practice tool such as EConsult and the same number had used online appointments for example video consultations.

Data

Respondents were asked their views on the personal data used by health and care services. 60.72% agreed that they understand how their data is shared and stored and 57.09% were confident that their data is secure when shared with health and care services. 20.39% indicated they do not use digital services and they are concerned about how secure their data is.

44.59% agreed with the statement 'I do not know how my data is shared and stored and I would like to know more' (48.65% disagreed) and when asked to rate their agreement with the statement 'I am concerned about how secure my data is but want to use digital services so share my data' 48.84% agreed and 45.17% disagreed.

Overarching Findings

Experience of Digital Services

When considering if they thought there were benefits to the increase in digital services 74.71% of respondents either agree very strongly, strongly agree or agree that there are benefits. 73.56% also agreed they felt comfortable accessing digital health and social care services, and 79.42% that they would like to see access to digital services continue.

84.85% indicated they feel they have the skills to access digital services.

4.85% of respondents indicated that the cost of the internet, the cost of the device (5.78%), not owning a computer or other device (3.47%), not having access to a computer or other device (2.71%) were barriers for them.

21.42% of respondents cited communication needs which mean they prefer or need to speak to someone face to face. (68.34% disagreed with this statement, 10.23% not applicable).

54.16% were happy to use digital services, but no appointments were available on the NHS App, 20.30% disagreed with this statement.

When thinking of whether digital appointments were convenient for residents 56.74% of respondents agreed to some extent that online appointments reduced the cost of attending appointments in person and 58.89 % agreed that they reduced the time compared to attending an appointment in person.

72.89% agreed to some extent that they found arranging repeat prescriptions online more convenient and 56.34 % that they feel better informed as they can access their medical records online.

46.25% disagreed to some extent that online appointments were more convenient than face to face appointments and 44.90% disagreed to some extent that they found booking appointments online quicker and more convenient.

Overarching Findings

Improving services

A significant number of respondents (92.54%) agreed to some extent that their experience would be improved if there was a clear option to request a face to face appointment, 86.82% that receiving information in advance of the appointment and 82.76% that receiving joining instructions for using the technology would improve their experience of digital services.

Other ways that respondents agreed would improve services were set/agreed appointment times for online and remote appointments (78.51%) and training on how to use online services (47.26%).

Respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of a number of initiatives, 66.05% of respondents thought access to their health record online was useful, 59.88% that services using the same apps/systems for remote appointments and online services would be useful, 58.05% that services making the best use of the NHS app to operate appointment systems, 46.45% access to assistive technologies, such as health monitoring at home and 45.70% fully accessible services for those with impairments would all be useful options.

Initiatives that were considered to not be useful were, training courses to improve online skills and confidence (40.16%), access to internet connected devices for use in your own home (29.65%) and access to internet connected devices in a private area or community space such as libraries and community centres (36.87%).

Overarching Findings

What has worked well and not so well.

The qualitative feedback highlights some areas where there was a broad consensus of what respondents thought to be the positives of digital services. Many respondents found online prescriptions services and the national covid vaccination booking services of benefit and found the systems easy to use. Being able to access their own health records many respondents were in favour of, as long as the information was complete and accurate.

Respondents in the main could see the benefits to telephone and online appointments with doctors and consultants, but only when it is suitable for the condition being discussed and for it to not be the only option.

Among a number of the focus groups there was an acceptance of the benefits of digital services but that benefits are only realised when the systems are user friendly and when systems 'talk' to each other to improve the service patients receive.

Some attendees could not understand why services were not more seamless between providers when the technology exists and is used in other areas such as in retail and banking.

There was an overall willingness to accept digital services, but attendees felt improvements were needed to ensure the systems used were patient friendly, easy to use and that systems were seamless across providers for the benefit of patients. There was also an overarching view that patients should have an element of choice in how they access services.

Next Steps

Next Steps

- Insights from the full engagement report will be used to inform the development and revisions of the Digital Strategy for Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes.
- This report will be made available online and shared with all of those who took part and indicated they would like to receive a copy.