

What is digital inclusion?



1. What is digital inclusion?

Digital inclusion means making sure everyone can access and use digital technology safely and confidently, if they choose to. It's about making sure no one is left behind as more services move online. People are digitally excluded when they are unable to fully participate in modern society due to lack of skills or access to digital technologies. This can result from barriers like the cost of devices and internet, a lack of digital skills and confidence, or physical and connectivity issues.



2. Why does it matter in health and care?

Digital exclusion is now seen as a social determinant of health- meaning it can affect someone's ability to live a healthy life.

The consequences of being digitally excluded may include:

- **Worse health outcomes:** difficulty booking GP appointments, ordering prescriptions, getting health advice, or managing long-term conditions.
- **Fewer job opportunities:** many job searches and applications are now conducted online.
- **Difficulty accessing services:** many essential services have moved online, such as government, banking, or local council services.
- **Educational setbacks:** students lacking digital access may struggle to take part in remote learning and schoolwork, widening the achievement gap.
- **Social isolation:** limited ability to connect with others online may lead to feeling excluded from social networks.



3. Who is most at risk of being digitally excluded?

Anybody can be at risk of being digitally excluded, and a person can move in and out of digital exclusion at different times of their life. For example, if their financial or health situation changes, so just because someone gets the help they need now, it doesn't mean they won't need different help later. Generally, those most at risk of being digitally excluded to some extent or another are:

- Older adults
- People with low income
- People with disabilities
- People who don't speak English well
- People experiencing homelessness or seeking asylum
- People living in rural areas with poor internet access.



4. What are the main barriers?

- **Access**- not everyone has a device or internet connection
- **Skills**- some people don't know how to use digital tools
- **Confidence**- fear of making mistakes or online scams
- **Motivation**- some don't see how digital tools can help them
- **Design**- some websites or apps are hard to use or not accessible
- **Awareness**- people may not know digital services exist
- **Affordability**- not being able to afford a suitable device or internet connection.



5. What can be done?

- **Provide devices (through libraries or community groups)**
- **Offer training and support to build digital skills**
- **Design services that are easy to use and accessible to all**
- **Keep non-digital options available for those who need them**
- **Work with local partners to reach excluded groups.**



6. Norfolk case study: Tech Skills for Life

Tech Skills for Life is a partnership led by Norfolk County Council. They are working with the NHS and a range of volunteer groups and local community organisations as well as District, Borough, and City Councils to make sure everyone can use technology and access essential online services if they want to. The friendly Community Tech Coaches can help people access refurbished laptops, tablets, second-hand phones, internet data, and can give advice about affordable broadband. They can also teach skills that will make technology easier to use and give people confidence to use the internet safely. They currently work across Great Yarmouth Borough, North Norfolk, the Borough of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, as well as parts of Breckland such as Swaffham, Thetford, Watton, and Dereham.

Have a look at the impact this project has had [here](#).

Further reading

- Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps- UK Government:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps>

- Moving from exclusion to inclusion in digital health and care- The King's Fund: <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/exclusion-inclusion-digital-health-care>
- Fit For The Future, 10 Year Health Plan for England- UK Government: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/10-year-health-plan-for-england-fit-for-the-future>
- National Digital Inclusion Network- Good Things Foundation: <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/our-services/national-digital-inclusion-network>
- Four essential steps for delivering digital inclusion projects and initiatives- Local Government Association: <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/cyber-digital-and-technology/four-essential-steps-digital-inclusion>
- Digital Inclusion Toolkit for Councils: <https://digitalinclusionkit.org/>