

Digital revolution to bust Covid backlogs and deliver more tailored care for patients

- Rapid expansion of use of technology – including remote monitoring and virtual wards – to drive efficiency, free up hospital space and clinician time, and bust the Covid backlogs
- NHS App to be updated with new features offering more personalised care from home, such as increasing patients' access to their records and enabling notifications directly from their GP
- Digital reforms to deliver benefits over the next decade that could save billions in taxpayers' money while also promoting economic growth and private investment

People across the country will benefit from faster, more personalised healthcare, following a digital revolution to make the health and social care system fit for the 21st century.

The Plan for Digital Health and Social Care, published today (Wednesday 29 June), sets out the government's ambitious vision for transforming health and care with digital technology – which give patients access to quicker and more effective care at their fingertips and will save the health and care systems time and money.

The Plan sets out how we will improve access to information for people and their care teams through the NHS App and NHS.uk – resulting in faster, more personalised treatment. This includes bringing information together into the App and enabling people to view and manage hospital appointments, have virtual consultations, and see notifications from their GP.

It also outlines the acceleration of the use of digital technology across the NHS and social care to improve efficiency and free up frontline workers' time, helping to bust the Covid backlogs. By increasing the availability of remote monitoring – where patients can use technology to keep an eye on their condition from home – a further 500,000 people could be better supported by March 2023. Over 280,000 people already used remote monitoring at home and in care homes for long-term conditions in the last year, freeing up hospital beds and saving clinicians' valuable time. This has resulted in improvements in patient outcomes – with problems picked up earlier, shorter stays in hospital, and fewer admissions in the first place.

£2 billion has been earmarked from the spending review to help digitise the NHS and social care sector, and this Plan will help achieve that aim by rolling out electronic patient records in the NHS to drive efficiency which, in turn, will release billions of pounds back to the NHS.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

We are embarking on a radical programme of modernisation that will make sure the NHS is set up to meet the challenges of 2048 – not 1948, when it was first established.

This Plan builds on our Data Strategy to revolutionise digital health and care, which will enable patients to manage hospital appointments from the NHS App and take more control of their own care at home, picking up problems sooner and seeking help earlier.

Ensuring more personalisation and better join up of the system will benefit patients, free up clinician time, and help us to bust the Covid backlogs.

To further free up clinician time, patients will be able to complete their hospital pre-assessment checks from home across the country by September 2024.

In addition to the investment in technology, the plan recognises our frontline professionals are at the bedrock of health and social care services, so it will bolster the skills in the workforce by:

- Developing a National Digital Workforce Strategy to bridge the skills gap and ensure the NHS remains an attractive place to work
- Grow the specialist data and tech workforce through graduates, apprentices and experienced hires, creating an additional 10,500 positions
- Embed digital skills development into university curriculums to support our future and incoming workforce
- Provide a digital learning offer for adult social care staff, such as offering accessible training and online resources.

The Plan will also promote the use of digital health and social care records, which will underpin more seamless information sharing between care teams, including appropriate access to GP records for people working in care homes, such as registered managers. The adoption of digital social care records and other care technologies is backed by £25 million this year, announced at London Tech Week.

Dr Timothy Ferris, national director of transformation at NHS England and NHS Improvement, said:

By harnessing the power of digital and data we can improve both how people access services and the way we provide care.

Today's plan for digital health and care sets out an ambitious vision for a future where the NHS puts more power and information at patients' fingertips, and staff have the tools they need to deliver better and more joined-up services for those who need them.

More than 28 million people now have the NHS App in their pocket. To support

patients to access more personalised care from home, new features will be added to the NHS App, enabling it to become a digital front door to NHS services.

By March 2023, NHS App users will be able to:

- Book Covid-19 vaccines through the NHS App, as well as the NHS website
- Receive NHS notifications and messaging, including reminders and alerts for Covid-19 vaccine booking and prescription readiness
- Start to see notifications and messaging sent from their GP through the NHS App
- Start to view and manage hospital elective care appointments across participating trusts
- See new information within their GP record by default, with the ability to request retrospective information at their practice
- Access a user profile where they can set and manage contact details and register with a GP practice

Further ambitions for the NHS App will see features including improving access to screening services and enabling reminders, improving ease of access to child health records for parents and carers, and improving access to relevant clinical trials.

Simon Bolton, Chief Executive at NHS Digital, said:

Technology is central in empowering patients and giving them more control when it comes to their health and wellbeing.

The NHS App has changed the way millions of adults in England access healthcare services in the three years since its launch and these new features will go further to improve how patients can manage their health and to reduce the burden on the frontline.

We are committed to working with our partners across health and social care to deliver the digitally enabled transformation of the NHS and create a system which provides better outcomes and access for patients.

The publication of the Plan for Digital Health and Social Care follows the publication of [Data Saves Lives: Reshaping Health and Social Care with Data](#).

Supportive quotes

Professor Vic Rayner, CEO at National Care Forum said:

I welcome the focus the government has on supporting digital transformation across the social care sector. There are many opportunities that digital can offer plan brings together a range of initiatives, setting out a pathway that talks ambitiously of a future where digital supports people and communities to live the

lives they want. It is vital that this programme of change continues to listen, adapt and work with the care sector so that the opportunities it presents are available for all.

Dr Layla McCay, director of policy at NHS Confederation, said:

NHS leaders welcome the digital health and care strategy and see it as an important step in joining up health and social care records digitally under one roof. This is essential for enabling better system working and will allow vital data to be shared more widely, helping staff to deliver better care for patients.

The plan presents an exciting opportunity not only to expand access to care via digital channels, but to accelerate the adoption of evidence-based technologies that will help make care more preventative, personalised and empowering for patients.

The task ahead will be challenging and must be done carefully not to exacerbate inequality. It's important that investment in IT infrastructure for the NHS continues and that systems are supported to implement these changes as they work hard to tackle the care backlogs. We hope that the forthcoming digital workforce strategy will help address recruitment and retention issues whilst making the NHS an attractive place to work for digital professionals.

Sarah Sweeney, Head of Policy at National Voices (National Voices is the leading coalition of health and social care charities in England), said:

We welcome the ambition to use technology as an enabler for joined up, personalised care. We haven't yet realised the full power of digital tools to help achieve person centred, inclusive and accessible care for people and we have lots more to discover. We look forward to working with health and care leaders, health and care charities and people living with ill health and disability to explore how digital tools can be used to make what matters to people matter in health and care.

Responding to the publication of the government's Digital Health and Care Plan, Dr Malte Gerhold, Director of Innovation and Improvement at the Health Foundation, said:

This Plan is a welcome consolidation of the myriad of workstreams on tech and digital going on across the NHS and social care – which if properly aligned could add up to a good deal more than the sum of their parts. Steps like making better use of technology and data to support clinical decision making and manage population health could make a big difference to improving both quality of care and

the way in which the health and care system uses its resources.

The Plan's focus on inclusion is welcome. Health Foundation research has found that, while most patients had a positive experience of the increased use of technology during the pandemic, for some groups, including those with a carer, the experience was less positive. Addressing these issues will be important to ensure that those who face particular barriers get the benefits from the increased use of technology.

Achieving the Plan's ambitions will mean learning the lessons of previous initiatives that have struggled to deliver. Many of the new service models proposed are about changing the way staff work and patients interact with services – so it is critical that local services are supported to redesign pathways and implement these changes in practice. Realising this vision will depend on a range of factors beyond the scope of the Plan itself, not least tackling workforce and capacity pressures. If the NHS is to recover from the pandemic and become more resilient it will need significant resources, including a fully funded, long-term workforce strategy, and boosted capital investment to support new ways of working.

Cllr David Fothergill, Chairman of the Local Government Association's Community Wellbeing Board said:

Digital technology has great potential to support those who draw on care services, and the launch of the Digital Health and Care Plan is a positive step in enabling people to live the lives they want.

We look forward to working with NHS to ensure digital transformation occurs in parallel across both social care and health. Only by ensuring that care has an equal footing with health are we able to achieve the best outcomes for people and communities.

The interim chief executive of NHS Providers, Saffron Cordery said:

We welcome this plan which rightly signals digital transformation as a high priority within the NHS, and aims to set out a clear national vision for a digital future, consolidating previous national guidance.

It also provides a much needed and clearer plan of action for trust leaders as they progress digital transformation within their trusts and support digital transformation within systems.

Julian David, techUK CEO, said:

The UK's response to COVID-19 has shown that the scale of opportunities that digital, data and technology offer to address the challenges faced by health and social care is enormous, and the UK needs to capitalise on this potential.

The Digital Health and Care Plan sets out a clear vision for fostering an ecosystem that has collaboration at its core and where innovation can truly thrive. As the document makes clear, to deliver this vision on the ground, the NHS and social care will need to work closely with industry as true partners. Only by doing so will we realise the true benefits of digital transformation.