

# Barriers to Digital inclusion



a guide based on  
**the mPower**  
**Ayrshire and Arran**  
**legacy project**



May 2022

# Context

The **Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)** was commissioned by **mPower NHS Ayrshire & Arran** to deliver a project across North, East and South Ayrshire. The **mPower Ayrshire and Arran Legacy Project** aimed to support people to use digital health, social care and wellbeing tools to stay well.

The ALLIANCE have committed to working with mPower, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, libraries and Integration Authorities across North, East and South Ayrshire between November 2021 and May 2022. The aim of this collaboration was to trial potential ways of increasing digital inclusion in local communities by increasing awareness and access to digital tools.

The project started with the vision of supporting people to improve their wellbeing, or that of their community. The project wanted to help prevent people becoming ill by enabling them to access early support in a way that suited them. There was also a desire to address inequalities around access to services and healthcare outcomes.

However, it was quickly understood that there are many reasons why some individuals may not be able or comfortable to access digital solutions. As technology now plays an increasingly big part in our day to day lives, particularly with regards to accessing public services, this means that digital exclusion can lead to inequality of access and outcomes.

For example, if an individual is unable to get online and does not have access to traditional media either, they may be unaware of the latest health advice. The most striking anecdotal example of this was provided by those working to support homeless people during 2020. Some support workers shared that, in the early days of the pandemic, many homeless individuals were unaware of there being a global pandemic and a national lockdown, as they were completely cut off from the national discourse.

Similarly, not being able to access digital options, whether it is due to not having an internet-connected device, or due to a lack of skills, confidence or suitable circumstances, can mean having less choice when wanting to access support. With so many services requiring access to an email address when booking, or the ability to navigate rather complex two-factor authentication processes, those unfamiliar with these technologies can be left behind or with very few alternatives.

The purpose of this document is to highlight some of the key reasons why individuals may be unable or unwilling to access digital, as well as suggesting some ways that you might want to try and address these barriers. This learning is based on insights from both stakeholders and individuals with lived experience. It also draws on the [Digital inclusion insights and considerations](#) paper published by the ALLIANCE in early 2022.

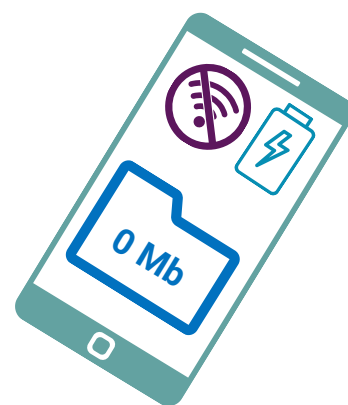


# Lack of adequate devices and connectivity

## The problem

Despite the cost of some devices having fallen in recent years, it is important to remember that even so, not everyone will be able to afford a suitable device to access online information and services. Having a smartphone, tablet, laptop or a computer can be a huge cost to a low-income individual or household, particularly if they are having to prioritise other costs such as food and utilities. Refugees and asylum seekers can also struggle to access these technologies due to their low weekly allowances.

Furthermore, whilst some individuals do indeed have some devices, the more affordable ones often offer very little storage, which means they can only perform limited functions. If an individual wants to keep in touch with family, shop online, access education, entertainment and use health services, for example, lower-cost devices might not be able to run all the different applications required for these tasks. This means that lower-income individuals may need to make difficult choices and sacrifices, that others don't even have to think about.



Finally, connectivity can also present affordability issues. Broadband, WiFi and mobile data can all pose significant costs. Whilst there is some connectivity available in public spaces, these public networks are less secure than private ones and can put those who are reliant on them at additional risk of cybercrime. Furthermore, there are areas within Scotland where connectivity is in short supply, inadequate or inequitable. For example, those living in remote and rural areas often have to pay more for lower speed internet.

## How you can help

If your library offers computer access, you could highlight to them that they can use these computers to access relevant information through websites such as NHS inform ([www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot)), ALISS ([www.aliss.org](http://www.aliss.org)) or any other local sources of information.

If you want to go one step further, you could look at identifying a private room in your library which offers computer and internet access. You could offer this room to individuals to book for more sensitive issues. This could be used to give them some privacy to research sensitive issues, or it could even be used for health and social services appointments through the Near Me service ([www.nearme.scot](http://www.nearme.scot)).

You can discuss how this might work and hear about similar examples across Scotland by getting in touch with the Near Me team: [nss.nearme@nhs.scot](mailto:nss.nearme@nhs.scot) or the local library for assistance.

# Lack of skills, motivation or confidence

## The problem

Even if individuals have suitable devices, with internet connectivity, this does not necessarily mean that they will know how to use them, or even want to. There are many people who have limited basic digital competency, due to a variety of reasons including a historical lack of opportunities to learn such skills and keep up with technological advancements, as well as other barriers. Whilst there is an assumption that this applies mostly to older individuals, it is important to keep in mind that younger and care experienced individuals can also be digitally inexperienced.

Motivation, as well as being a key enabler, can also be a barrier. Many people feel that the internet is 'simply not for them.' This can be due to a lack of skills or confidence, or is at other times more culturally-driven. For example, some might think that there is nothing of interest to them on the internet. Others may fear being scammed or hacked if they go online. These attitudinal barriers can make it very difficult for individuals to realise the benefits that going online could offer them.

## How you can help

If you know an individual you are supporting has a particular interest, such as live music, gardening or sport, you could point out to them some useful online websites that are relevant to their hobbies to get them thinking about going online. If they need additional support developing their digital skills and knowledge, you could signpost them to some of the resources below:

- **AbilityNet** runs a national network of volunteers who provide free IT support to older people and disabled people of any age. They are all disclosure-checked and can help with all sorts of challenges, from setting up new equipment, fixing technical issues, helping individuals stay connected to family and use online services. Individuals can request support themselves by filling in a form or by calling their helpline on 0800 048 7642 during UK office hours. You could also help individuals by filling in their referral form for them, with their permission. [www.abilitynet.org.uk/at-home/request-free-it-support-home](http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/at-home/request-free-it-support-home)
- **Connecting Scotland** also have advice aimed specifically at citizens. This includes advice on how to choose a device and internet package, how to set these up and use them safely, as well as information on how to browse the internet, make video calls, use email and so on. [www.connecting.scot/citizens](http://www.connecting.scot/citizens)



- The **Learn My Way** website, from the Good Things Foundation, offers free courses to teach digital skills to stay safe and connected.  
[www.goodthingsfoundation.org/learn/learn-my-way](http://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/learn/learn-my-way)

There may also be other Digital Champions or digital support initiatives available locally. You may be able to find these by searching **ALISS** or another local directory.

# Lack of accessibility features (dexterity, sensory ability etc)

## The problem

Unfortunately, the majority of digital tools and services are designed without taking into account their accessibility. Many small devices, such as phones or keyboards, can be problematic for those who have dexterity problems. Online information is very rarely accessible in alternative formats, such as British Sign Language, and it often doesn't work great with screen reading software. All of this means that individuals who are living with various long term conditions or sensory loss actually have to work harder to access the same information as everyone else, if they can access it at all.



## How you can help

Again, although you might not be able to provide support yourself, you can signpost to useful information and support.

- As well as offering IT support, **AbilityNet** provide free support to disabled people, their family and friends, their employers and other people who care for them. Anyone living with a disability can call their free **Helpline** on **0800 048 7642** to get help with using technology or adapting it to meet their needs.
- **ADAM (About Digital and Me)** is a platform provided by Alzheimer Scotland. It can help individuals find the right pieces of technology depending on their personal circumstances and abilities. It is intended for families and carers who would like to try using digital products and services to look after their health and wellbeing.  
[www.meetadam.co.uk](http://www.meetadam.co.uk)

- **The Carers UK Ask Sara** platform aims to offer advice, support and products to make daily living easier. It is an online self-help guide for carers, disabled people and older people. It provides advice and information on accessible products and equipment. [carersuk.livingmadeeasy.org.uk](http://carersuk.livingmadeeasy.org.uk)
- **Parkinson's UK** have a collection of resources specifically aimed at helping individuals with Parkinson's use computers and other devices more easily. They also suggest various apps and technologies that can help with daily living. [www.parkinsons.org.uk/information-and-support/equipment-living-aids-and-technology](http://www.parkinsons.org.uk/information-and-support/equipment-living-aids-and-technology)

# Stigma and lack of privacy

## The problem

Another less obvious barrier that can help individuals access support and information digitally is stigma and lack of privacy. Whilst online tools can help many people access services from the comfort of their own homes, if someone does not have a safe or private environment at home this can become very problematic. The issue is only exacerbated for those living in a situation of domestic abuse, when even the contents of a personal device may be closely scrutinised.

## How you can help

Similar to the recommendation for addressing the lack of devices or connectivity, you may be able to provide a safe space within your library for those facing these issues. Public libraries are often agenda-free spaces, that people can access without facing any stigma or negative consequences. You could build on this opportunity by providing further information on how anyone can use your computers to access information in a safe and private way.



You could also use your devices and facilities to signpost to further support that people may feel concerned about accessing, such as sexual health hubs, mental health helplines, homelessness advice and domestic abuse support. Finally, you could work on making your library as accessible as possible by removing barriers to registration, such as needing to have a physical address or an email contact. This might make your space more inviting to those who worry about accessing public spaces.

# What next

We hope that this document has helped you think about some of the key barriers that individuals face in the digital world, as well as some potential ways of tackling them. However, the list above is not an exhaustive one. There may be many more reasons why people struggle to access the online world. However, there will also always be steps we can take to minimise these barriers and work towards a more inclusive digital world.

If you would like to provide feedback on this document, or to suggest other barriers and advice for future editions, please contact us at [DHCscot@alliance-scotland.org.uk](mailto:DHCscot@alliance-scotland.org.uk) or call us on [0141 404 0231](tel:01414040231) and ask to speak to someone from the digital team.





## the mPower Ayrshire and Arran legacy project



The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) is the national third sector intermediary for a range of health and social care organisations. We have a growing membership of over 3,000 national and local third sector organisations, associates in the statutory and private sectors, disabled people, people living with long term conditions and unpaid carers. Many NHS Boards, Health and Social Care Partnerships, Medical Practices, Third Sector Interfaces, Libraries and Access Panels are also members.

The ALLIANCE is a strategic partner of the Scottish Government and has close working relationships, several of which are underpinned by Memorandum of Understanding, with many national NHS Boards, academic institutions and key organisations spanning health, social care, housing and digital technology.

Our vision is for a Scotland where people of all ages who are disabled or living with long term conditions, and unpaid carers, have a strong voice and enjoy their right to live well, as equal and active citizens, free from discrimination, with support and services that put them at the centre.

The ALLIANCE has three core aims; we seek to:

- Ensure people are at the centre, that their voices, expertise and rights drive policy and sit at the heart of design, delivery and improvement of support and services.
- Support transformational change, towards approaches that work with individual and community assets, helping people to stay well, supporting human rights, self management, co-production and independent living.
- Champion and support the third sector as a vital strategic and delivery partner and foster better cross-sector understanding and partnership.