

Digital Test of Change

Summary

The Digital Test of Change, developed in partnership with ALLIANCE Scotland, examined how community members across Aberdeenshire engage with three key digital self-management tools: the ORCHA Digital Health App Library, Sleepio, and the NHS Quit Smoking app. The four Community Health Improvement Officers (CHIOs) received training from ALLIANCE to equip them to run engagement sessions at various settings. Feedback was gathered through public feedback form, CHIO debriefs and session record.

Across all sessions, there was consistently strong public interest in digital tools particularly ORCHA and Sleepio while engagement with the NHS Quit Smoking app was lower due to low relevance among attendees. Engagement was most successful when CHIOs used informal, conversational approaches and when printed materials and QR codes were easily accessible. Confidence in using digital tools varied and was closely linked to digital literacy, device access and session environment.

This report provides an in-depth analysis of the feedback gathered from both the CHIOs and members of the public, examining their experiences, observations, and levels of engagement. The findings identify key learning points, highlight what worked, where challenges emerged and develop recommendations to guide future implementation and improvement.

Aim

To raise awareness of evidence based digital tools that support self-management with the public and understand barriers, enablers and digital confidence.

ALLIANCE Scotland

ALLIANCE Scotland played a pivotal role throughout the Digital Test of Change, contributing significantly to its design, preparation and delivery. Their expertise helped to shape the test of change, ensuring that the selected digital tools were introduced in a way that aligned with principles of digital inclusion and best practice. They delivered two comprehensive training sessions for the CHIOs equipping them with a strong understanding of the digital apps and effective approaches for engaging the public in conversations.

In addition to their training, ALLIANCE provided four loaned tablets to facilitate delivery of the test of change, ensuring CHIOs had the necessary resources to demonstrate the apps confidently and inclusively. Throughout the implementation period, they remained a consistent partner, attending review meetings and offering ongoing guidance and troubleshooting support whenever required. Their collaborative approach, shared knowledge, and technical expertise greatly strengthened our working relationship and were instrumental in the delivery of the Test of Change.

Engagement Sessions

The CHIOs delivered nine engagement sessions in a range of settings that offered varied levels of footfall and opportunity for conversations:

- Huntly Breakfast Club
- Fraserburgh Community Café
- Banchory Wellbeing Fayre
- Peterhead and Stonehaven Vaccination Clinics
- ARI Health Point
- Inverurie Library
- Garioch Community Kitchen, Inveruire
- Wyness Hall, Inverurie

Findings

Public Feedback

A Snap Survey was developed to gather public feedback at each engagement session. It was available both online and in paper format. In total, twenty-nine surveys were completed. Responses were evenly split between male and female participants. The survey was completed predominantly by older adults, particularly those aged 65–74 and most respondents identified as White Scottish, with smaller representation from Asian and African backgrounds.

Participants consistently described the sessions as informative and useful. Awareness and interest were highest for ORCHA and Sleepio, with many reporting that they had not heard of ORCHA before but were keen to explore it further. Sleepio attracted strong interest among those experiencing sleep difficulties.

Engagement with NHS Quit Smoking app was low because most did not smoke. Confidence in using digital apps was generally moderate to high, with participants reporting that hands on experience, reassurance around safety and repeated use would help build their confidence further.

Open text feedback highlighted appreciation for the sessions, a desire for a single integrated NHS health information platform like NHS England's, requests for more vaping information, and concerns about app accessibility for people without smartphones.

Overall, the findings indicate strong support for digital tools, growing awareness following engagement activities, and clear opportunities to enhance promotion of ORCHA and Sleepio while adjusting smoking-related content to reflect its lower relevance for attendees and shifting the focus toward more vaping-specific guidance.

CHIO Debrief Questions

The CHIOs completed debrief questions after five sessions. The debrief questions related to their confidence in explaining the apps, suitability of the event, appropriateness of app training and barriers/challenges encountered.

The CHIOs generally agreed that most settings were suitable for promoting self-management apps. Four of the five offered strong opportunities for engagement. Their confidence levels remained consistently high across sessions, with staff reporting that training had prepared them well, while also recognising that confidence grows further through practice and delivery.

The apps themselves continued to be well received across all sessions. ORCHA emerged as the most popular and versatile resource, attracting interest from a wide range of individuals. Sleepio also generated good engagement, particularly among those reporting sleep challenges. Several CHIOs used personalised examples—such as supporting individuals with COPD, sleep concerns, or step tracking habits—to make the apps more relatable and promote meaningful engagement.

Engagement with the smoking cessation app was low—not because smokers lacked interest, but because most of the individuals the CHIOs spoke with were vapers rather than smokers. As a result, the smoking focused content did not feel relevant to their needs. In fact, more vapers actively engaged and requested support to quit vaping, highlighting a shift in demand away from traditional smoking cessation. Among the people who did smoke, some were hesitant to disclose their smoking habits in that setting due to stigma or privacy concerns, which further reduced engagement.

Barriers varied across settings but were generally manageable. Common concerns included digital literacy, with some older participants stating they were “too old” for apps or preferred face-to-face support. Others were willing to try apps but might rely on family members to help. At one event, some individuals expressed a desire to reduce screen time. Technical or logistical challenges included slow Wi-Fi, hotspot battery drain, an incorrect ORCHA QR code at an event and fast paced or socially busy environments limiting the time available for conversations or feedback collection.

CHIOs offered several practical suggestions to strengthen future delivery. These included: bringing more printed ORCHA and Linktree flyers; having app info sheets and key referral links open in advance on tablets; ensuring chargers are available when using hotspots; and using conversational, needs led approaches rather than structured demonstrations. For busy or highly social environments, having two CHIOs present was seen as important to reach more people effectively.

Positive relationships with venue staff and community volunteers were a strong theme across multiple events. Vaccine centre staff were particularly welcoming and proactive in facilitating engagement, at another event having the CHIO presence was felt to be valuable and could be repeated with other health topics. A clinical lead expressed interest in the potential benefits of promoted apps, further highlighting a growing appetite for digital tools.

CHIOs often left resources behind for continued use and followed up with staff to support ongoing engagement.

CHIO Session Record

The CHIOs delivered 9 sessions during October 2025 to February 2026. After each session they collected information on event type, estimated engagement, number of downloads and information distributed.

At the outset of the Test of Change, CHIOs highlighted several practical challenges associated with using unfamiliar devices. Being introduced to new tablets and digital tools naturally created some initial anxiety, particularly as they were required to adapt quickly, navigate different environments, and ensure reliable access to Wi-Fi to support delivery.

CHIOs also needed to take account of individuals' varying levels of digital and general literacy, providing appropriate signposting to local support services when additional help was required. Furthermore, they had to remain mindful that individuals used a range of devices—such as tablets and smartphones—which meant that app interfaces and user experiences could differ significantly. Connectivity issues, which are known to vary across Aberdeenshire, were an additional factor influencing how easily individuals could access and engage with the digital tools. These considerations were essential in ensuring an inclusive, person-centred approach throughout the Test of Change.

In total eight Apps were downloaded at the nine sessions and the CHIOs engaged with approximately 158 individuals. The ORCHA website generated the strongest and most consistent interest among attendees. Although most people had not heard of ORCHA before, they were keen to learn more once it was introduced, and ORCHA leaflets and QR codes were the most frequently taken resources. In contrast, interest in smoking cessation was lower, though several individuals expressed curiosity about reducing vape use.

The setup of each venue played a significant role in the quality of engagement: community cafés offered a warm, conversational environment but required at least two staff due to the pace; busy corridors like those in ARI had high footfall but little willingness from people to stop; and child centred events saw reduced adult engagement due to distractions. Overall, the most successful engagement depended on clear visibility and positioning, adequate staffing, and selecting times and locations that supported natural interactions.

Key Learning

The Digital Test of Change delivered nine engagement sessions across a variety of settings in Aberdeenshire over a six-month period. Eight app downloads took place during these sessions, and approximately 158 individuals engaged directly with CHIOs. This demonstrates clear progress in promoting digital tools within local communities.

The Digital Test of Change generated valuable insight into how people across Aberdeenshire interact with digital tools. Public appetite for digital tools is strong—particularly when tools address common, everyday wellbeing needs such as sleep, general health information, and lifestyle management.

ORCHA consistently emerged as the most compelling tool, especially among people who had not previously heard of it but were eager to explore it when introduced. Sleepio also resonated strongly with individuals experiencing sleep difficulties, demonstrating that digital tools with clear, relatable relevance generate the greatest engagement.

The quality of engagement depended heavily on the environment and the approach taken by CHIOs. Informal, conversational interactions proved far more effective than structured demonstrations, especially when CHIOs personalised examples to individual situations such as COPD, sleep concerns, or step tracking.

Venues with natural waiting times e.g. vaccination clinic created ideal conditions for deeper conversations, while fast paced environments e.g. hospital corridors limited the time people were willing to stop.

CHIOs found that having QR codes, printed materials, and apps preloaded onto devices greatly improved the flow and quality of conversations, while reliable connectivity and access to chargers reduced disruption. Established relationships with venue staff, alongside the ongoing support from the ALLIANCE contributed to effective delivery, highlighting the importance of collaborative working.

Digital literacy and confidence varied widely across participants, particularly among older adults. Some individuals expressed that they felt “too old” for apps, preferred face-to-face support, or would require assistance from family members to use digital tools.

Engagement patterns showed a clear shift in public need, with significantly greater interest in vaping reduction support than traditional smoking cessation, emphasising the importance of aligning resources with evolving behaviours.

Consistent public interest, increased CHIO confidence and positive feedback from community partners (including vaccination centre staff and clinical leads) indicate that these digital tools are well received and ready for further development. The Test of Change not only achieved its aim but also established strong foundations for future digital innovation across Aberdeenshire.

Recommendations

1. Embed digital tools into existing Community Health Improvement Officers (CHIOs) work

Integrate ORCHA, Sleepio and other evidence- based apps into routine CHIO activity and engagement.

2. Develop a standardised Digital Engagement Model

Create a delivery model outlining recommended venues, staffing levels, essential materials (QR codes, flyers, pre- loaded devices) and approaches for inclusive, conversational engagement.

3. Prioritise vaping cessation support over smoking cessation where appropriate

Shift the balance of digital resources toward vaping cessation in settings where vaping is more prevalent, while deploying smoking cessation tools in venues with known higher smoking rates.

4. Develop an accessible digital toolkit

Co- design, with ALLIANCE, a user-friendly toolkit containing simple guides on QR codes, app navigation, privacy, security, and local digital support options, along with printable materials for use with professional.

5. Strengthen digital inclusion support for Older Adults and Low- Confidence Users

Work with ALLIANCE to expand accessible training and signposting for people who require additional digital support.