



Exploring attitudes and accessibility of the NHS App

Neighbourhood health and wellbeing insights – June 2026

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About us

Healthwatch Gloucestershire is the county's health and social care champion.

We're here to listen to your experiences of using local health and care services and to hear about the issues that really matter to you. We are entirely independent and impartial, and anything you share with us is confidential. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice to help you to get the care and support you need. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care. This report is an example of how your views are shared. Healthwatch Gloucestershire is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We cover the geographical area of Gloucestershire County Council, which includes the districts and boroughs of Cheltenham, Cotswold, Forest of Dean, Gloucester, Stroud, and Tewkesbury.

Background

As part of the NHS 10-year plan, the government has said they will create a more modern NHS by bringing together a single patient record, summarising patient health information, test results, and letters in one place, through the NHS App. This aims to put patients in control of their own medical history, meaning they do not have to repeat it at every appointment, and ensure staff will have the full picture of patients' health.

Through our work over the last two years looking at digital inclusion, access to GPs and community pharmacy, we have acknowledged the benefits of using the NHS App but also highlighted the barriers that some groups of people face in accessing technology like this. For example, because of mistrust over whether personal information is secure, language barriers, or not having the digital devices to be able to use the app due to cost or not having access to the internet.

There are pockets of digital exclusion in Gloucestershire's most rural areas and an ageing population, some of whom have told us they are less inclined to use digital technology.

Our project has been looking at the accessibility and attitudes towards this to find out how many people use it; what they use it for; if they don't use it, what are the barriers and what can be done to help them.

What we aimed to understand

We were keen to understand the experiences of different communities and groups, to find out what works well and what could be improved.

To narrow down our research, alongside a public survey, we focussed on having conversations with people where English is not their first language and those who are digitally disadvantaged to amplify their voices.

We explored the following areas:

- Whether people use the NHS App
- If they do, how they access it?
- What they use it for
- If they don't, what are the barriers to using the app?
- If they are aware of what they can access through the NHS App
- For those who do not use the app, would they like to receive some help and training through the Gloucestershire Digital Hubs?

What we did

We worked on this project for three months between September and early December 2025, gathering people's views and experiences through focus groups and via an online and paper survey. We shared details and links to the project via our website and social media channels and through various VCSE Newsletters and our community networks.

Who we heard from

We gathered feedback from 176 people via our survey.

We received responses from people living across 21 of the 27 postcodes in Gloucestershire.

- People were aged between 18 to 80+
- 8% were aged 18-25; 13% aged 26-35; 16% aged 36-45; 14% 46-55; 23% 56-65; 24% 65-80
- 81% were White British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh; 2.4% Asian/Asian British; 7% Chinese; 2% Black British
- Of the 127 people who disclosed their gender, 64% identified as women; 30% as men; 1.6% non-binary
- 26% considered themselves to be a carer
- 1.7% served in the army for more than one day

Out in the community

We visited a wide range of voluntary services and groups across Gloucestershire, speaking to around 132 people through focus groups, basing discussions around the questions in our survey. These included:

- Gloucester City Mission
- Women's Carers & Cared for Group – Friendship Cafe
- Men's Group, Friendship Cafe
- Chinese Community, Stroud
- Arabic Carers Group, Cheltenham
- Bangladeshi Carers Group, Friendship Cafe, Gloucester
- Chinese Community, Gloucester
- Nelson Trust Women's Centre, Gloucester
- Chinese Community, Cheltenham

Key messages

Many of those who are currently using the NHS App, and feel confident using it, find it works well for most things and appreciate being able to access services remotely and in their own time.

- However, a point of frustration for these users is that there is a lack of consistency on what information and services each patient can access, depending on which GP practice they are registered with.

Some NHS App users find the functionality of the app can be a barrier to accessing services

- The registration process is complicated and puts people off trying to access it, particularly when they hit a barrier or things go wrong.
- Many people who get 'locked-out' of the app, give up trying to access it again, telling us that the system is too difficult.
- Some reported that their patient records are not up to date or different to what has been communicated with them through the GP surgery.
- Navigating the NHS App is not intuitive for some people.
- The language used on the app can be difficult to understand, especially when complex medical terms are used.
- Carers are unable to access services for their loved ones if they are not registered at the same GP practice
- People are unsure about who to go to when something goes wrong and can get caught between the national NHS App helpline and their local GP practice

Many people who don't currently use the NHS App expressed an interest in finding out more as they don't feel fully informed about what it can offer them.

- Lots of individuals also said that they would like to learn how to use the NHS App but did not know where or how to access support.

However, some individuals don't use the NHS app because they prefer to access their GP either in person or over the phone, and others expressed thoughts of being 'left behind' due to concerns with the app.

- People who don't speak English as their first language are disadvantaged in accessing and using the NHS App as it does not allow them to change the language.

- Some individuals expressed concern over the safety of their medical records and highlighted recent data breaches in other professional settings.
- People with sight loss, certain disabilities and those without internet access also reported feeling excluded.

Recommendations

Locally

- NHS Gloucestershire to work with GP practices to ensure a consistent approach to patient access and functionality of the NHS App across Gloucestershire.
- NHS Gloucestershire to work with GP practices to provide training on the NHS App for all staff, to ensure they can help patients with their queries.

Promotion of the NHS App should focus on:

- Greater emphasis should be given to the promotion on how the NHS App can help individuals take control of their own health
- Provide more detail on the different ways people can navigate the NHS App, such as on their laptop, desktop, mobile phone etc.
- More information should be provided to individuals to allay their fears of their medical records being accessed through cyber breaches.
- GP practice and NHS Gloucestershire messaging should make clear there are other options for those who do not want to use the app or choose not to use it.

Support and training

- Training on the NHS App should continue to take place in people's own homes, and community settings including GP practices, Community Halls and libraries. This should be available regularly.
- Promote the Digital Hubs in Gloucestershire and share clearly and precisely the help and training they can provide to enable individuals to access various functions through the app.

- Healthwatch Gloucestershire to continue to raise awareness and signpost people to digital support in the county

Nationally

Our findings from feedback in Gloucestershire has been collated along with other Local Healthwatch's from around England and will be shared with Healthwatch England and The Kings Fund. Gloucestershire feedback is also being shared with the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England as part of their "NHS online" consultation with Local Healthwatch.

We are making the following recommendations:

- The registration process needs to be simplified.
- The process for regaining access to the NHS App must be easier, to ensure people are not permanently locked out.
- Step by step details on how to register and access the NHS App should be provided in different formats, including videos, leaflets, easy-read and face to face.
- The NHS App must be available in different languages.
- More needs to be done to ensure the foundations of the NHS App are robust and the same for everyone. E.g. Access, history, hospital records etc.
- The language used must be simplified, and brief descriptions of medical terms provided.
- Provide clearer understanding on how and when carers can access the NHS App on behalf of minors and adults.
- The NHS App helpline needs to be transparent on what help is available, rather than directing people to their local GP practice.

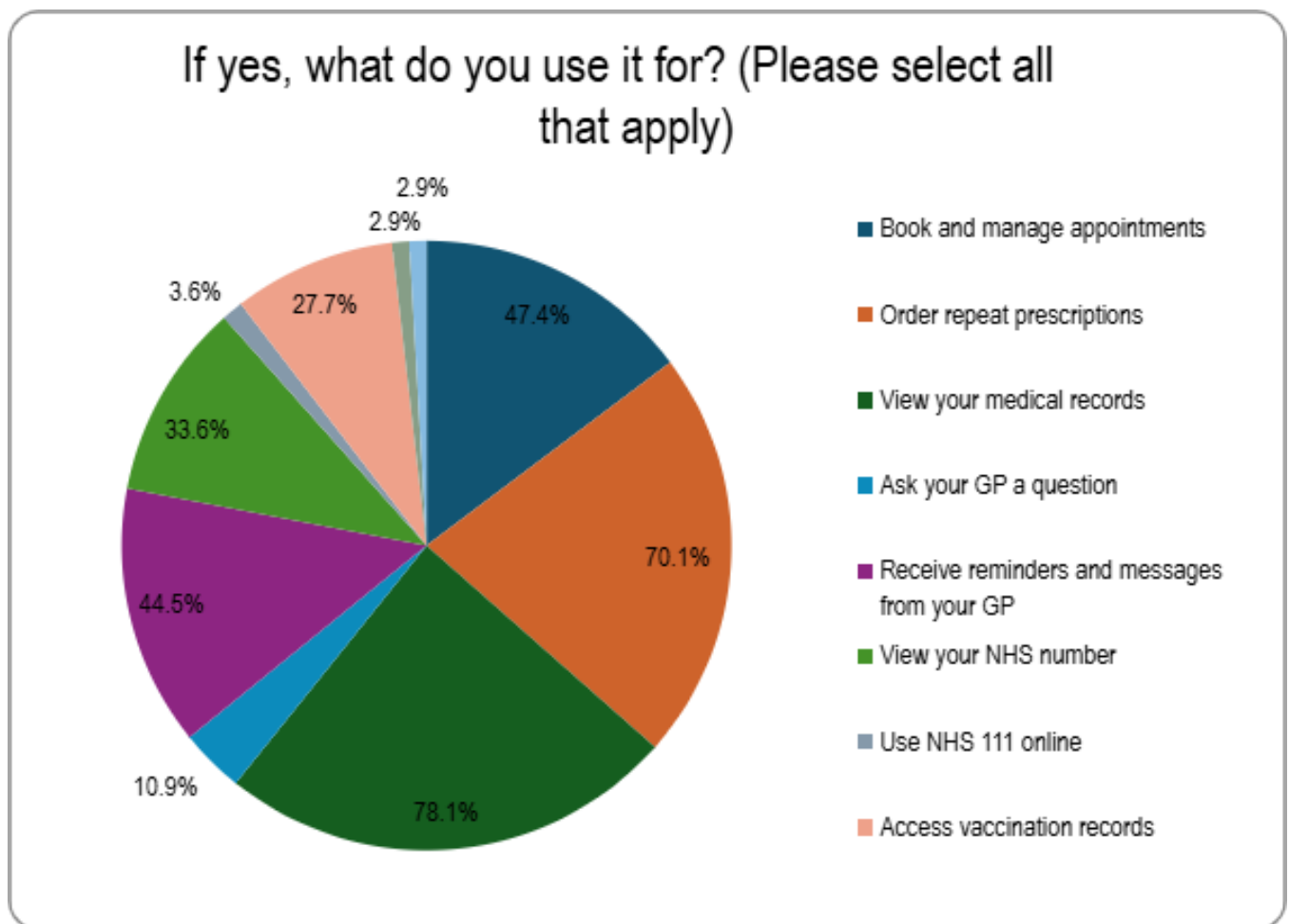
What people told us

A total of 137 people who completed the online survey, confirmed they use the NHS App. 135 of these, access it through their mobile phone, tablet or laptop.

The main reasons people gave for using the app were to view their medical records, order repeat prescriptions, book and manage appointments and

receive reminders and messages. Some of the other reasons, included viewing NHS Number, accessing vaccination records and asking the GP a question.

Many people are confused about what services the NHS App can offer them and how they vary depending upon which GP practice you are registered with.

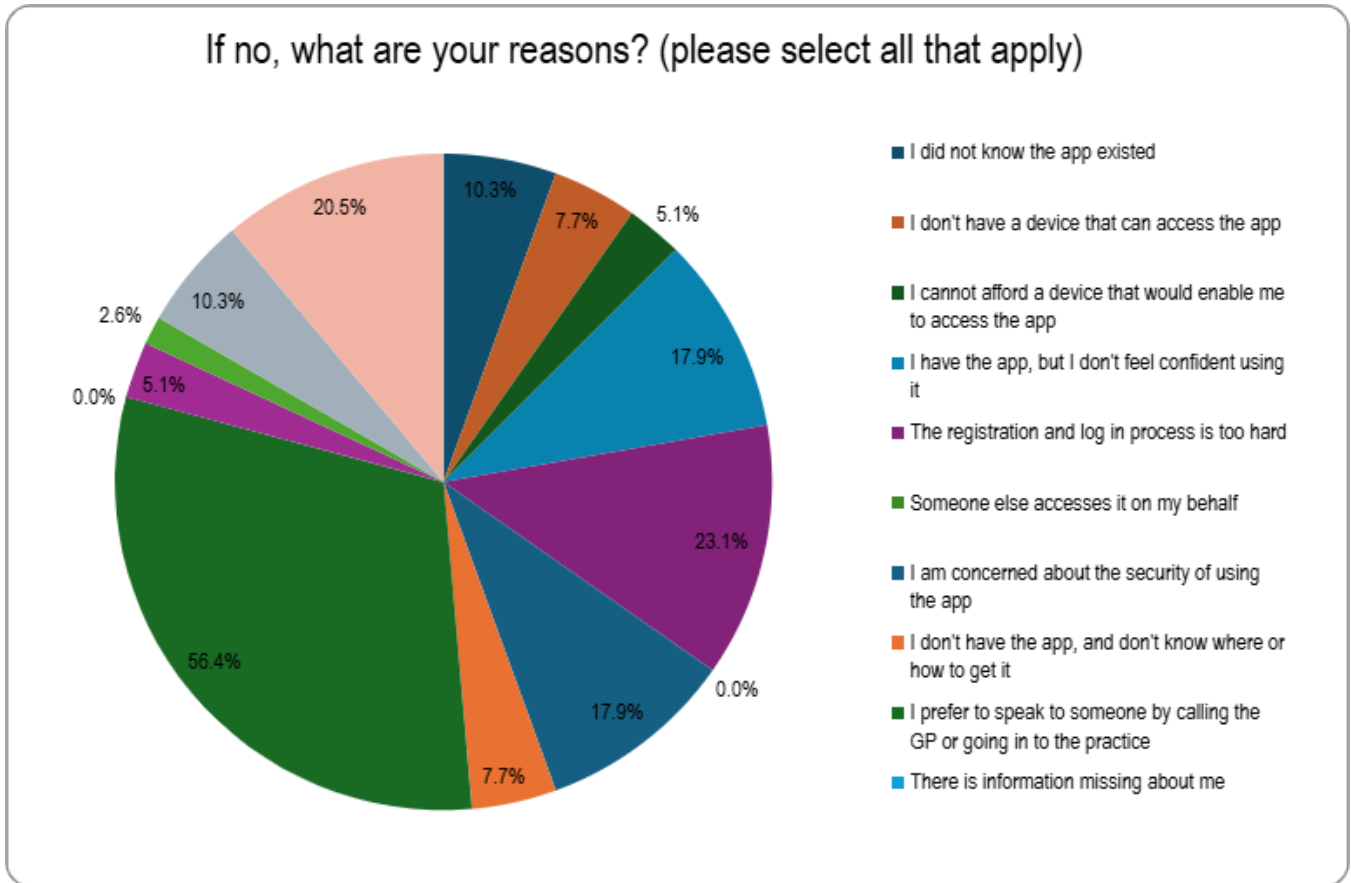


39 people who completed the survey, stated they do not use the NHS App and 56% of them said one reason was because they prefer to speak to someone by calling or going into the GP practice.

Other main reasons given included the registration and log in process being difficult; having a lack of confidence around using it; security concerns and feeling more confident using anything other than digital.

Some people shared their concerns that people are being forced into using digital services, when they don't want to, and feel they are being discriminated against for not doing so.

“I don't like being forced to use digital means. But it seems to me if you don't go digital you are and will be disadvantaged”.



What people told us would help them to use the NHS App

- Training which is easy to understand and follow
- Easier registration process with clear and precise instructions
- Information on the benefits of using it
- Ability to access in different languages
- Clearer pathways to navigate around the app

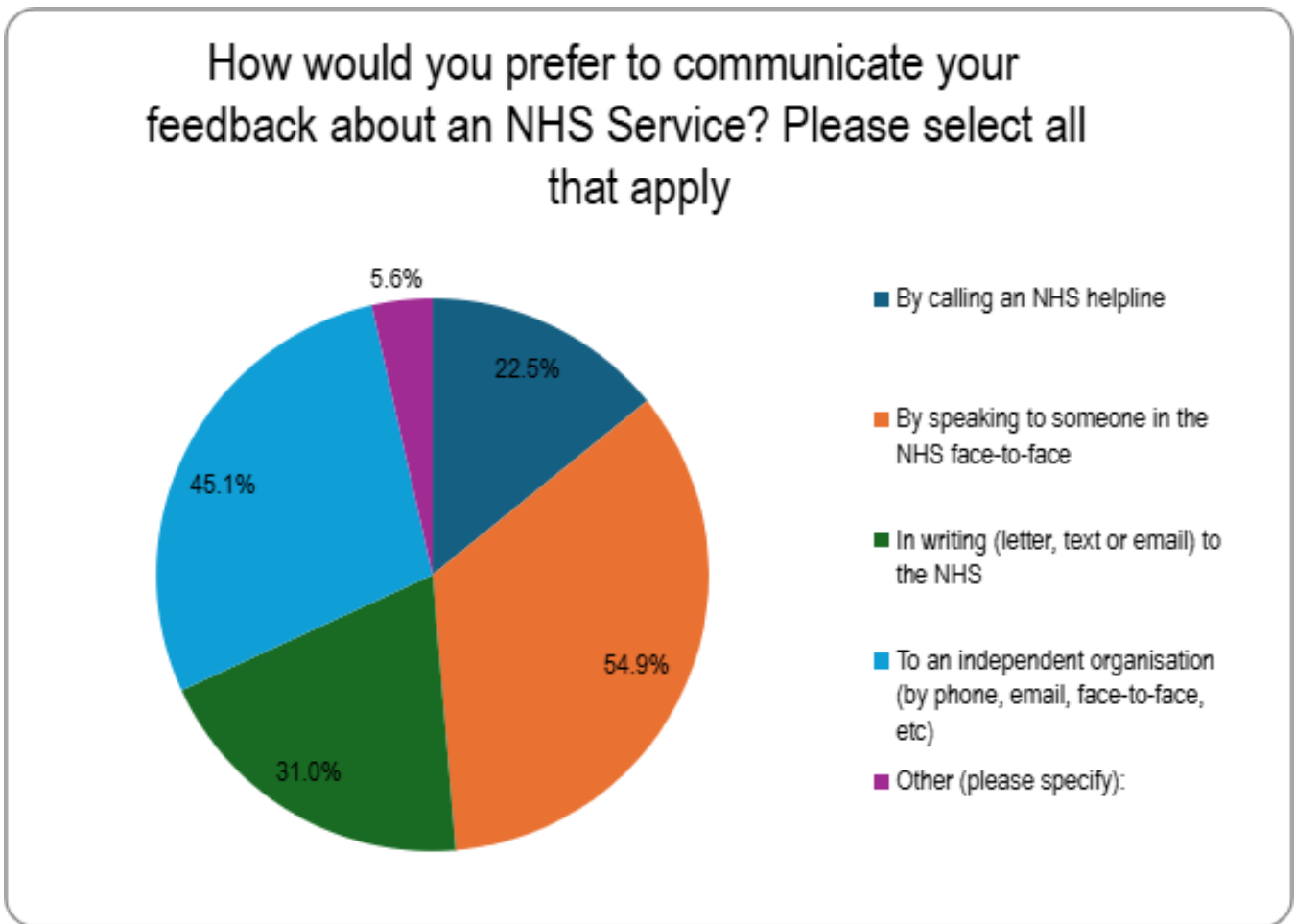
Some people have tried to use the NHS App but have been locked out for various reasons and shared their frustration at how difficult this is to overcome.

‘Knowing that it was easy and convenient and would be helpful for me.’

'Less of the required information to access it! It's still quicker to make a phone call or even attend the surgery.'

56% of respondents confirmed they would provide feedback on services through the NHS App.

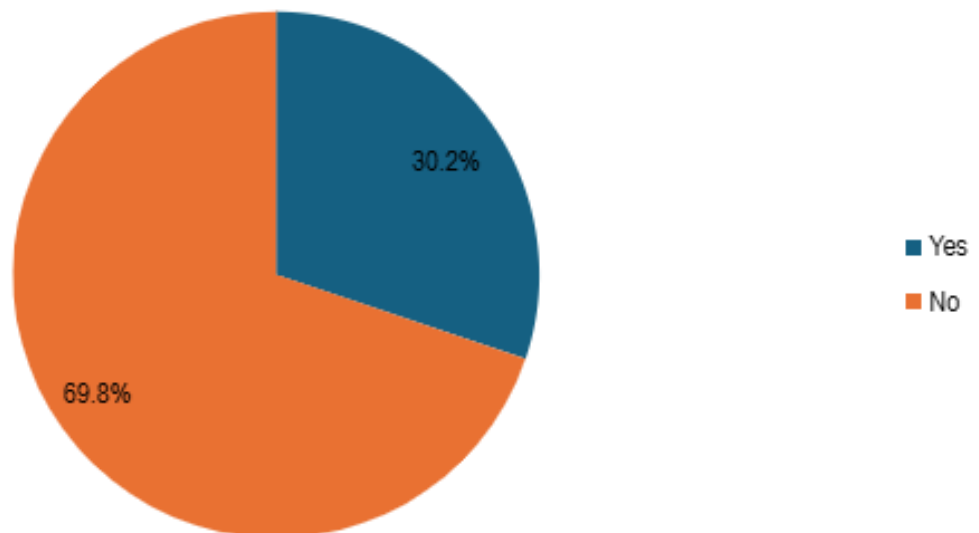
Other people stated they prefer to speak to someone, rather than use a digital feedback form.



When asked if they were aware of the Digital Hubs around the county, almost 70% of respondents said they were not aware of this service.

Within the survey, we gave the respondents the opportunity to find out more about digital support in their area. As a result, 86 people were signposted directly to information about the Digital Hubs around the county and how to contact them.

Are you aware that there are Digital hubs around the county that can help you to access and use the NHS app (as well as providing other digital support)?



Is there anything else you would like to say about the NHS App?

In total 100 people shared their thoughts on this question with a variety of responses, both positive and negative. 24 respondents had very positive experiences, with using the app, whilst a further 24 expressed their frustrations.

- It's easy to navigate and an excellent addition to my GP's own website.
- I have found it very useful and speeds up booking GP appointments compared to phoning. The repeat prescription feature works well.
- I find the App really useful and it makes accessing my GP much easier - I use it to order my prescriptions and to share any health concerns with my GP surgery in a way that avoids me using up their valuable time in surgery appointments unnecessarily.
- Works fine for most things but can't access vaccination record.
- It's helpful for some things but isn't kept up to date and doesn't have all my records.

- I would like to see all my records on the app including hospital appointments and treatments.
- Despite Digi Hubs, which are very useful for people who are motivated to use the NHS App, there are still a lot of people who are not confident or don't have access to digital technology. They would rather see or speak to medical professionals in person.
- There is too much expectation that all have hardware and capability to use IT and there are too many hacking risks.
- I end up having to uninstall and reinstall it on a regular basis to enable it to work – I don't think it's my phone as no issue with other apps.
- The app is great but GP surgeries don't appear to know how it works anymore than the public. Better training for those who can help others would be beneficial.
- This has its place, but it does not take away from speaking to someone face to face.
- The app does not keep the records up to date, particularly when you have lived in a different area. I have been waiting for details of a hospital appointment for months and was advised by my previous GP that moving wouldn't affect anything because it would all appear on the app. This is not the case and no one in Gloucestershire seems to know anything about it. I find it annoying I am not able to speak to anyone about this and sometimes only a human will do.

Some people spoke about the NHS App not being easy to navigate

- I think the App is really good, although it could be a bit more user friendly, by having a dashboard, rather than a list and making the access easier, as lots of people struggle with this.
- It could be simpler to navigate as it is not always easy to find what you are looking for
- Not suitable for everyone. Help was needed to help me to access and learn how to manage it.
- I find it very useful for my needs, but can understand why others struggle to navigate it. I would like to know where I can go to ask questions about how to use it.
- I find the App ok to use, but not easy. Currently it cannot be accessed in any other languages, which makes it a problem for some of my older relatives.

Other people shared their frustrations at:

- Logging in process
- Language restrictions
- Terminology used
- Systems not speaking to each other

Where people were able to share their own comments, one recurring theme was around the access given, depending upon which GP practice an individual is registered with. Some examples being those who can access their full medical records, those who have only limited access and those who can see hospital appointments, whilst others do not have this facility.

It appears that GP practices can decide on the level of access provided to patients and this can vary hugely.

Other individuals can access GP appointments and ask questions, whilst others must use a different system all together.

“These fundamentals need to be sorted first because you have to get the foundations right. I think it could be great, but it needs quite a lot of work.”

Feedback from focus groups

7 of the 9 focus groups we gathered information from, are individuals where English is not their first language, and the data gathered, varied from group to group.

Almost everyone uses a smart phone, with only a handful of people not having one and using it purely to make and receive calls.

Overall, very few people from these groups use the NHS App, although for those who do, they appreciate:

General use and benefits

- Ordering repeat prescriptions
- Viewing their medical records
- Checking test results
- Occasionally booking appointments

Those who use it regularly find it helpful, informative and timesaving.

Some users particularly appreciate not having to wait on the phone and value having their information in one place.

Barriers: language & digital literacy

The single, most common and significant frustration individuals shared was the language barrier.

Many of the older adults within the ethnic minority groups cannot read English well enough to use the NHS App confidently.

- They expressed a strong need for:
- Multi-language support
- Step-by-step guidance
- Easy read resources

A lack of confidence with technology is also a major barrier, even among smartphone users.

“I can speak and listen in English, but I cannot write or read it, so the NHS App is not accessible to me.”

Navigation and usability challenges

Many users find the NHS App difficult to navigate and not intuitive

Examples include:

- Difficulty accessing certain features (e.g., children’s records, documents requiring downloading)
- Not knowing what the app is capable of
- Confusion due to unclear instructions or complicated wording

People feel more videos, demonstrations, and clear instructions would help.

“We have to embrace it, but to be able to, we must be able to access it.”

“I want to know if you say it is going to work, then it works”.

Preference for in-person contact

Many participants, particularly older adults, still prefer:

- Speaking to someone in person

- Booking appointments at the surgery

Some feel the app reduces the “human element” and contributes to declining personal relationships with GPs.

“The NHS App takes away the human element, and you just become a number”.

Concerns include:

- Loss of choice
- Feeling “just a number”
- Technology replacing face-to-face contact

“If I have a question, I go to the GP counter and I know I will receive an immediate response. I cannot ask the App any questions, nor can I change an appointment through it.”

Awareness of digital hubs and support

Across all sessions, very few people had heard of the Digital Support Hubs. When explained, many said they or their community would use this support, especially if it included language-appropriate help.

Training and support

Across all groups there was a strong agreement that training is needed if the expectation is for more people to access and use the NHS App. Ideas included:

- Training within GP practices, led or supported by the Digital Hubs
- Group training sessions led by the Digital Hubs
- Community-based role models
- Repeated, age-appropriate training throughout the year
- Printouts or Easy Read how-to guides would help those with memory or literacy challenges
- Thought should be given on how to engage with those who do not leave their homes, to ensure everyone is included.

“It must hit the right platforms and communication is key”.

Concerns around the NHS App

Many individuals shared their concerns about using the NHS App and these included:

- Some have struggled to log in or verify their identity, which leads to frustration and in some cases, abandoning the app entirely.
- Not being able to access all their medical records
- Trust in where their data is stored
- Missing information and records not being accurate and not knowing how to resolve this.
- Concerns on digital systems being imposed without proper consultation
- Different systems not 'speaking' to each other and therefore records not being kept up to date.

Some people expressed concern that there should always be another option for those who are not used to using technology and struggle with it.

"Technology is good, but not everyone can use it"

"It is important for individuals to maintain their independence as much as possible and this includes having suitable options to ensure we can look after our own health for as long as possible."

"The App should be promoted as being beneficial to everyone where each person can take control of their own health."

Across all groups, people see clear benefits to the NHS App but experience significant barriers—especially around language, usability, and lack of clear support. The app is most successful for digitally confident users. Those with limited English, lower digital skills, or a preference for human contact struggle most.

The other Focus Groups we visited were with individuals who are homeless, have no fixed address, or attend a trauma informed rehabilitation hub.

Everyone we spoke to uses a smart phone and there was general positivity about the NHS App, with many of the users finding it helpful for:

- Managing appointments
- Receiving reminders

- Viewing past records
- Ordering prescriptions
- Booking appointments

There were also some concerns and these included:

- Multiple users believing their records are missing information, particularly for those who have moved location on multiple occasions.
- Inaccuracies in their records that have been impossible to correct.
- Missing hospital results which lead to frustration and mistrust.
- Struggles in logging back in after being locked out
- Poor flow between sections on the app.
- Medical terms and abbreviations being confusing and not knowing how or where to go to find out more.
- Terminology being too technical

Some users are aware of the Digital Hubs and appreciated being signposted to them.

For those who are homeless, or have no fixed address, there were concerns that this impacts the app functionality and frequent lockouts with no easy route to recover access.

“The app does not allow for any emotional support or services for those who are homeless.”

There was, however, praise for the help and support offered by the Nelson Trust and Gloucester City Mission, together with the support given by the staff from the Homeless Healthcare Team at the Rikenel in Gloucester.

Across these groups, the NHS App is valued as a tool for managing healthcare, but its limitations in usability, clarity, data accuracy, and accessibility create significant barriers. Homeless individuals and those who frequently move are particularly affected, often leading to frustration, disengagement, or complete abandonment of the app.

Provider response

Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board



NHS Gloucestershire welcomes this report on the NHS App and supports Healthwatch's national recommendations to improve the App's usability, particularly for people who may experience digital exclusion. NHS Gloucestershire recognises the importance of equitable access to the NHS App and the disproportionate impact digital exclusion can have on people with differences and disabilities.

We continue to foster strong partnerships with DigiHubs to help meet patients and citizens where they are, and to work with system partners to signpost healthcare colleagues to NHS App resources, including training and promotional materials. NHS Gloucestershire's digital team is also working in co-production with General Practice teams to understand how the NHS App is currently used across different surgeries, with the aim of supporting practical approaches to patient access and functionality of the NHS App across the county. In addition, training for General Practice teams on the use and configuration of the NHS App is a key consideration for future digital training offers.

As the NHS App is a nationally developed and managed product, there is limited ability for NHS Gloucestershire to directly influence its design, functionality or development roadmap. However, NHS Gloucestershire has strong local relationships with the national NHS England NHS App team. They are already aware of some of the issues highlighted within the report, and we will ensure that Healthwatch Gloucestershire's findings are shared with them. We will continue to advocate on behalf of Gloucestershire residents through our established national relationships.

Thank you

Thank you to every person who attended one of the focus groups and shared their experiences, thoughts and ideas. Thanks also to those who completed the survey online. Finally, thanks to all the staff and volunteers who welcomed us to the various groups, translated where necessary and helped ensure we were able to capture all voices.



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