

**Assignment Title: Component 1 – Written Report - A
Critical Evaluation of the NHS App as a Digital
Innovation in UK Health and Social Care**

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Module title: Digital Transformation in Health and social Care

Module code: BMHP6026_BIRM

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Submission date: 5/07/2026

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1. Introduction

This report critically considers the NHS App against three themes: patient/service user impact, service delivery impact, and community impact. It considers the advantages and disadvantages of the app in terms of convenience, empowerment, digital exclusion, privacy, safety and health inequalities (NHS England, 2023b; Farre et al., 2023). The digital innovation chosen for this report is the NHS App, a UK based digital health platform, because it enables the public to access NHS services in England. It sits within the broader digital transformation of health and social care - the use of technology to enhance access, communication, service efficiency and involvement of patients (Department of Health and Social Care, 2022; NHS England Digital, 2026c). The NHS App enables people to do routine tasks, such as booking some appointments, accessing NHS information, ordering repeat prescriptions and checking NHS records. These functions are significant as the NHS is currently under significant pressure, with high demand for services, and a need for GP services to be more accessible and convenient for the public (NHS, 2026a; NHS England, 2025).

2. Background and Overview of the NHS App

Accessed via a smartphone, tablet or web browser, the NHS App is a digital platform. It offers an easy and safe way for users to access NHS services, such as repeat prescriptions, appointment services, health records, NHS login, health advice and messages where these services have been enabled in their local NHS area (NHS, 2026a; NHS England Digital, 2026b). The NHS App has several functions, with repeat prescriptions, access to appointments, health records, NHS login, NHS advice, and patient messages being the main ones, as shown in figure 1.



Figure 1: Key Functions of the NHS App

The app was launched to help the NHS transition its wider journey towards digitally enabled care. It is intended to increase ease of access for routine services, to minimise reliance on contact via telephone and to enable patients to undertake simple health related tasks without assistance (Department of Health and Social Care, 2022; NHS England, 2025). The scale of uptake indicates the NHS App is an important national digital health tool. According to GOV.UK, the app has over 30 million sign-ups, demonstrating its popularity and significance for NHS digital transformation efforts (GOV.UK, 2022). The NHS App has evolved into a large scale national digital health platform, as illustrated in Figure 2, with a reported 30 million sign-ups to date by GOV.UK in 2022. But high adoption doesn't necessarily equate with equal benefit. Evidence on the NHS App reveals that uptake and use is uneven across population groups, so digital transformation could lead to increased access for some, and exclusion for others (KC et al., 2023; KC et al., 2024).

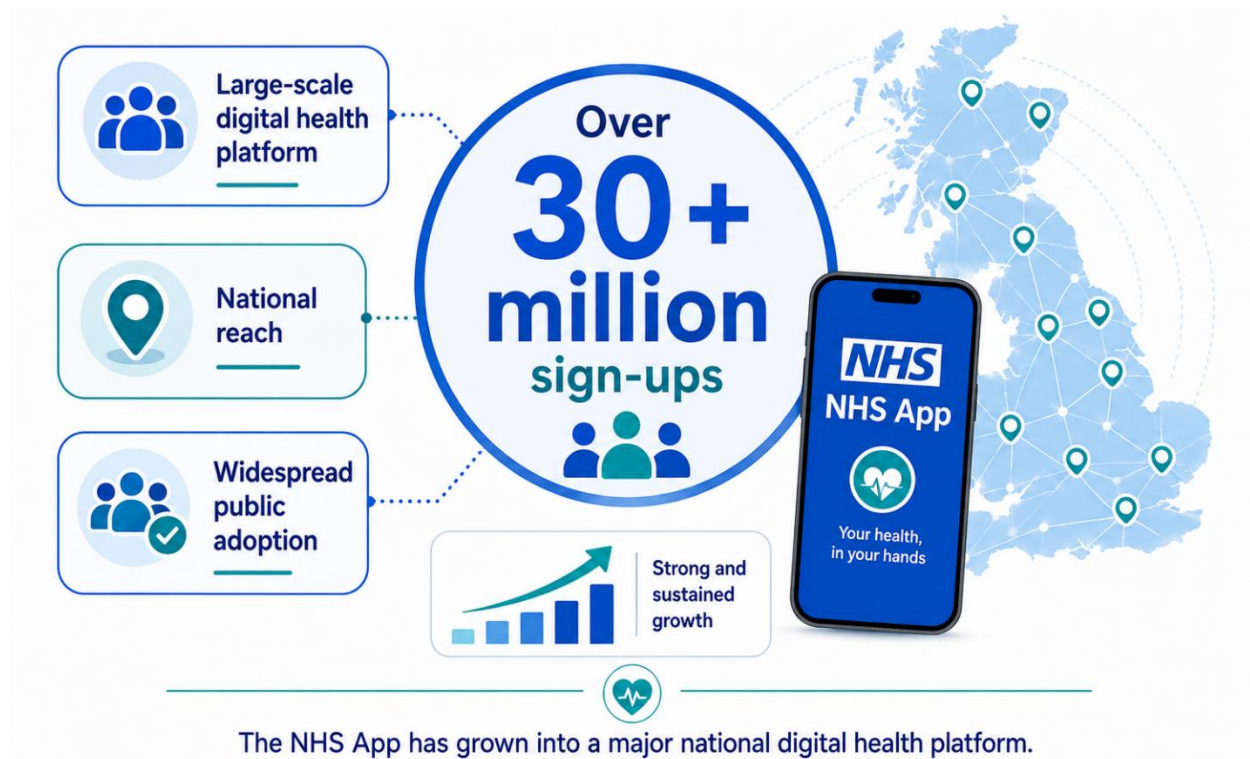


Figure 2: NHS App Adoption and National Reach

3. Patient and Service User Impact

The NHS App can enhance access for the NHS by enabling patients to undertake routine health-related services without the need for a phone call or trip to their GP practice. Such as the app allowing a patient in need of repeat prescriptions to request them, potentially saving their time and frustration (NHS England Digital, 2026b; NHS, 2026a). This helps patient empowerment as they can access the information and do routine things when it will work best for them. Use of records via the NHS App also has the potential to give patients a better understanding of their care, to verify information and to be more involved in decisions about their health (NHS England Digital, 2026a; Department of Health and Social Care, 2022).

Self-management is also possible using the app. For instance, patients with long-term conditions can use the NHS App to keep track of their appointments, repeat prescriptions and NHS information, without having to wait for a call from a GP practice (NHS England Digital, 2026b; NHS England, 2025). But not all patients enjoy the same benefits. Individuals may lack a smartphone, good internet connectivity, digital skills, confidence and/or technology. This may include individuals who are disabled, older adults, individuals on low incomes, and individuals

who speak English as an additional language or live in areas with poor digital infrastructure (Good Things Foundation, 2021; Honeyman et al., 2020).

This is a significant fault of the NHS App – digital exclusion. Digital routes can introduce delays, restrictions on independence and increased reliance on relatives and carers if services are overly reliant on digital routes, and if patients cannot access digital routes, (Farre et al., 2023; NHS England, 2023b). Also important is privacy and trust. Personal health information, such as data sought in the NHS App is special category data. Patients might be concerned about who accesses their records, the security of their information and the security of the digital systems (Information Commissioners Office, 2024; NHS England Digital, 2026a). Table 1 summarises the main positive and negative impacts of the NHS App on patients and service users. The NHS App, overall, enhances convenience of those who are digitally competent, but can also exacerbate social inequalities. As such, it should not be used as a substitute for telephone, face-to-face and assisted access (KC et al., 2024; Good Things Foundation, 2021).

Table 1: Positive and Negative Impacts of the NHS App on Patients and Service Users

Positive patient/service user impacts	Negative patient/service user impacts
Easier access to repeat prescriptions	Excludes people without digital access
More control over routine health tasks	Low digital literacy may limit use
Access to health records and NHS information	Privacy and data protection concerns
Convenient 24/7 access	Language, disability, and confidence barriers
Supports self-management	Risk of over-reliance on digital routes

4. Service Delivery Impact

The NHS App can be used as a tool for service delivery, as it reshapes some of the tasks into a digital format. Repeat prescriptions, appointment management and access to information can help to alleviate some pressure on reception teams and allow patients to undertake simple tasks without having to interact with staff (NHS England, 2025; NHS England Digital, 2026b). This is significant because there is a lot of pressure being placed on NHS services, particularly those of primary care. A digital tool can help with more efficient management of demand, but it needs to

be integrated in the local NHS systems and be used correctly by both patients and staff (House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2023; Reidy et al., 2025). Integration is a key issue. The success of the NHS App will rely on integration with NHS login, GP systems, electronic health records, pharmacy systems, and local settings. The patient experience may differ depending on the area if the GP practice does not provide some of the functions, as indicated by NHS England Digital (2026c) and Reidy et al. (2025). The NHS App can transform the service delivery by shifting some routine requests from patients to their phones, which are then accessed by NHS staff, as demonstrated in Figure 3.

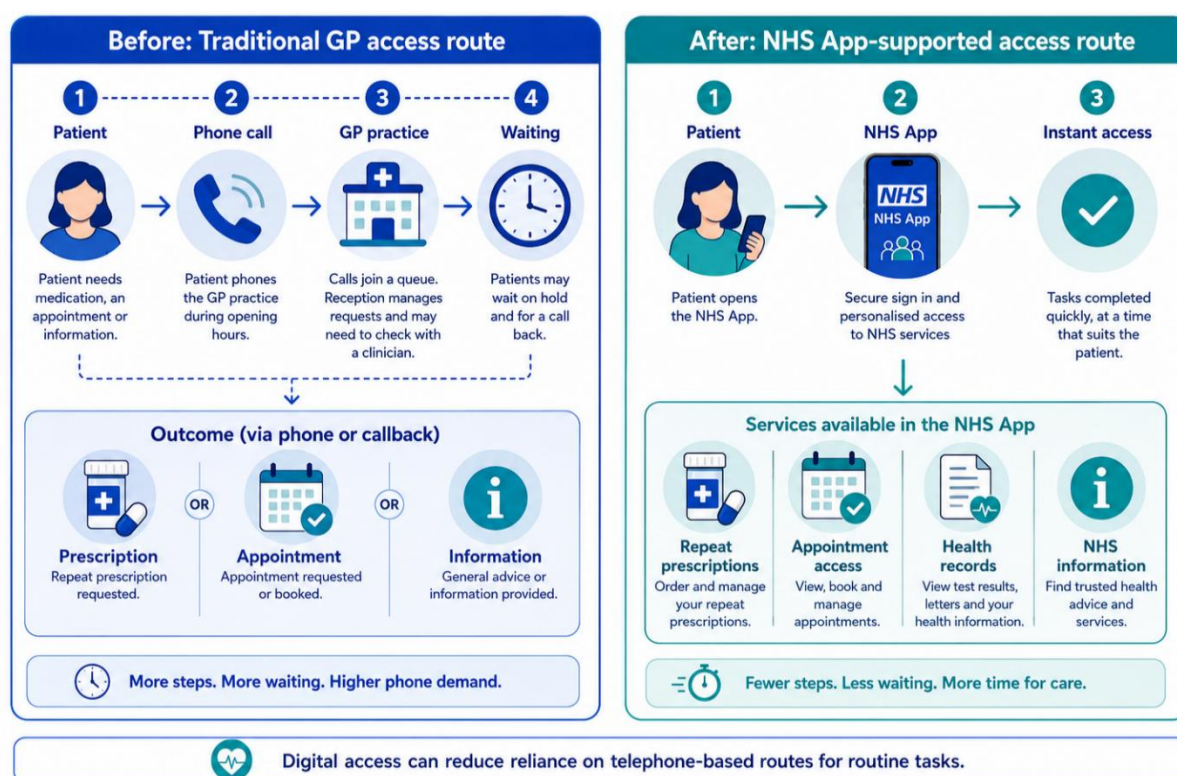


Figure 3: Service Delivery Before and After NHS App Use

Quality and safety must also be considered. Digital health tools must be clinically safe, reliable, evidence-based and accessible. NICE's evidence standards are relevant as digital tools should show value, safety, usability, and effectiveness before they are used for providing care (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), 2022). While the NHS App can help to enhance the quality of services, providing more rapid access to information for patients, it cannot replace clinical judgement. However, a patient might still need direct professional assessment, for example, if they have complex symptoms, concerns about safeguarding, mental health needs, or unclear test results (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2018; NHS England, 2023a). Another danger

is that digital tools can simply be a way to move workload instead of reducing it. Staff should still be required to respond to requests online, assist the patient with using the app, rectify any errors, explain records and deal with queries that are made digitally (House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2023; Reidy et al., 2025).

5. Community Impact

The NHS App could make it easier for individuals to get access to services at a community level who are having issues with accessing services through traditional means. This refers to working adults, carers, individuals with mobility challenges, and those who prefer using digital communication methods as they can access some services at a convenient time (NHS England, 2025; Department of Health and Social Care, 2022). The app could also enable access to trusted NHS information. This is important as many communities have been misled online and a platform from the NHS can help direct communities to safer and more reliable health information (NHS, 2026a; NHS England Digital, 2026b). The impact though, on the community must be considered carefully, however. Digital services have the potential to create or deepen health inequalities if communities are not all equally able to access devices, broadband, language support, digital confidence, or accessible design (NHS England, 2023b; Farre et al., 2023). Barriers to the use of the NHS App may include a lack of digital devices, poor internet access, low digital literacy, accessibility needs related to disability, concerns around privacy and language barriers, as demonstrated in Figure 4.



These barriers may limit equal access to the NHS App across communities.

Figure 4: Common Barriers to NHS App Use

Good Things Foundation has associated digital exclusion with health inequalities, demonstrating how the inability to access digital services can affect people's capacity to access information, undertake health-related tasks and interact with services. Thus, community-based digital inclusion programmes (Good Things Foundation, 2021; Honeyman et al., 2020) should support the NHS App. Trust of the community is also critical. Digital services are more likely to function effectively if users are engaged in design, feedback and improvement. If patients perceive it as being forced upon them, without support, the level of trust may drop, particularly among groups who are already under-resourced in health care settings (KC et al., 2024; Reidy et al., 2025).

6. SWOT Analysis of the NHS App

Table 2 is a SWOT analysis of the NHS App, which outlines the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the NHS App.

Table 2: SWOT Analysis of the NHS App

Strengths	Weaknesses
Trusted NHS brand	Digital exclusion
Convenient access to services	Unequal use across groups
Supports prescriptions and appointments	Privacy and trust concerns
Allows access to health records	Local variation in app functions
Opportunities	Threats
Better integration with NHS systems	Cybersecurity and data risks
More personalised digital care	Public mistrust
Improved prevention and communication	Wider health inequalities
Stronger inclusive digital support	Over-reliance on digital access

The key to the NHS App is that it offers a trusted and convenient pathway to access NHS services. Its high uptake (more than 30 million sign-ups) demonstrates high public reach and policy relevance (GOV.UK, 2022; NHS, 2026a). The main problem with it is unequal access. The evidence indicates that there is variation in the use of NHS App across sociodemographic groups, and that people with poverty, disability, age-related issues and lower digital literacy levels may be less likely to benefit from its use (KC et al., 2024; Good Things Foundation, 2021). The primary opportunity is to leverage the app as a component of inclusive digital healthcare, encompassing improved integration, personalised care, prevention and community support. The principal risks, however, are data risks, mistrust and increased inequalities if non-digital routes are cut back (Department of Health and Social Care, 2022; Information Commissioners Office, 2024).

7. Policy, Legal, and Ethical Considerations

The NHS App fits within UK policy aims for digital health and social care transformation. The national plan for digital health is centred on digitally enabled services, access and better use of information for health and care systems (House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2023; Department of Health and Social Care, 2022). Under the law, the app must safeguard personal health data. Health data is special category data and requires robust safeguards for lawful processing, confidentiality, security and patient trust (Information Commissioners Office

2024; NHS England Digital 2026a). The NHS App can be considered ethically problematic because of issues of fairness and choice. The patient should not be disadvantaged if he or she is unable to use digital technology. People, safety and effective working are core professional standards (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2018; NHS England, 2023b) and supporting safe and inclusive digital care is part of this.

8. Recommendations

Firstly, there is a need to enhance digital inclusion support within NHS services. This can be in GP practices, libraries, community centres and voluntary organisations, particularly for those who are older or have low incomes and limited digital confidence (NHS England, 2023b; Good Things Foundation, 2021). Secondly, there should be the option of non-digital routes. For those unable to use the NHS App, and for patients with complex, urgent and/or sensitive needs, telephone, face-to-face and assisted access are still required (Farre et al., 2023; House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2023). Figure 5 illustrates that the NHS App should be used as part of a blended model of care, alongside telephone, face-to-face and assisted support. Thirdly, the NHS needs to have better access, better communication around the privacy and better local implementation. Having regular and clear information on records, data protection and the security of logins can enhance trust, and regular local use may help mitigate variation in patient experience (Information Commissioners Office, 2024; Reidy et al., 2025).

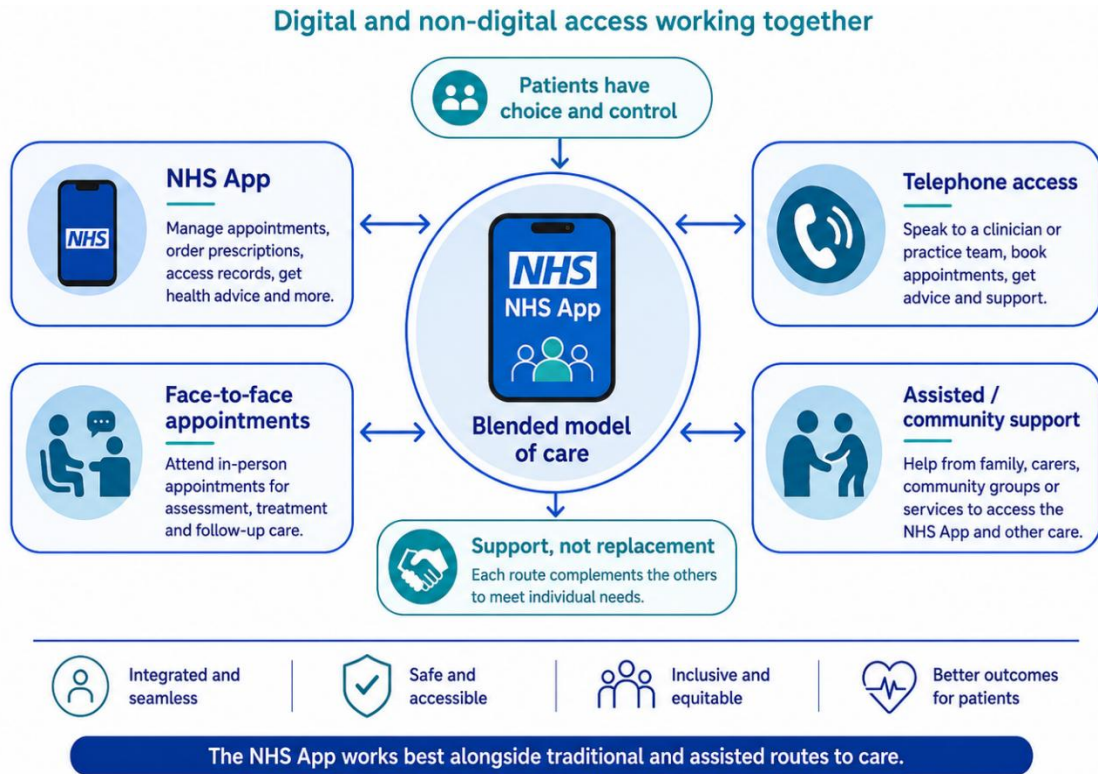


Figure 5: Blended Model of Care for NHS App Use

9. Conclusion

The NHS App is clearly a significant digital health innovation in the UK, which has benefits for convenience, patient empowerment, accessing patient records and providing routine health services. It mirrors the NHS's broader journey towards digital transformation and has made a major impact nationally (Department of Health and Social Care, 2022; KC et al., 2023). Digital exclusion, privacy concerns, uneven uptake, variation at a local level, and new staff workload all constrain its effectiveness. The app may increase access for some, but hinder access for others (KC et al., 2024, NHS England, 2023b). Accordingly, NHS App should be used as blended model of care. It should complement, rather than supplant, traditional NHS pathways for access – via telephone, in person and community-based support (Reidy et al., 2025; Farre et al., 2023).

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