



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Changemakers: Creativity and Value Creation

Professions (BMHP5014)

Component 2: Written Assignment (Poster and Pitch)

Student name: Abdul Wakabi - 2333084

Lecturer's name: Bianca Sanfilippo

Innovation: Digital Health Buddies: peer-led digital health support for people aged 65+



Digital Health Buddies

A peer-led service helping people aged 65+ to use the NHS App with confidence, while keeping offline care open to everyone

BMHP5014 Changemakers: Creativity and Value Creation
Component 2 exemplar poster
Example Student (exemplar)



4.7 million

people aged 65+ (more than 1 in 3) lack the basic skills to use the internet successfully (Age UK, 2024)



2.3 million

people aged 65+ do not use the internet at all; 48% of them are aged 75+ (Age UK, 2024)



10 million

adults in the UK lack foundation digital skills (NHS England, no date a)



30%

of people who are offline see the NHS as one of the hardest organisations to deal with (NHS England, no date a)

1. Introduction

Digital Health Buddies is a new community service delivered through GP practices and public libraries. Trained volunteers offer free one-to-one sessions that help people aged 65+ to set up and use the NHS App, borrow a device or free mobile data, and give a trusted relative or carer access to their health services.

What is innovative? It combines peer support, device and data loans, carer (proxy) access and a guaranteed offline route in one service, in places older people already visit.

2. Problem statement

The NHS is shifting from analogue to digital care, with the NHS App at the centre of future services (DHSC, 2025). Yet millions of older people are not confidently online (Age UK, 2024). Barriers include limited skills, poor health, lack of devices, low trust and security fears (Kaihlainen et al., 2022).

The result: older people risk delayed care, loss of independence and social exclusion, widening health inequalities (Mubarak and Suomi, 2022).

3. Target audience and impact

Who: people aged 65+, especially those living alone, on low incomes, with sight or hearing loss, or whose first language is not English; family carers; GP reception teams.

Impact: confidence to book appointments, order repeat prescriptions and view results; shorter phone queues; carers able to help safely.

Common good: promotes equity, dignity and access. Nobody is forced online; offline options remain for those who choose them (Age UK, 2024).

4. Implementation

Who: led by the primary care network (PCN) social prescribing link worker, with a local Age UK and the library service. Link workers already connect people to community support (NHS England, no date c).

Where: weekly drop-ins in GP practices and libraries, plus home visits for housebound patients.

How: referral by any practice staff member or self-referral, then a short digital needs check and up to six 45-minute sessions. Devices and free data come from the National Device Bank and National Databank (NHS England Knowledge and Library Services, no date).

Refer

Check

Sessions

Follow-up

5. Timeline

Months 1-3 | Co-design

Workshops with older people, carers and the patient group; recruit and train 20 volunteers

Months 4-9 | Pilot

Two GP practices and one library; collect usage and feedback data

Months 10-12 | Evaluate

NHS App sign-ups, online requests, missed appointments and user confidence; refine

Year 2 | Roll out

All practices in the PCN; share a free toolkit with neighbouring areas

6. Regulations

UK GDPR: health data is special category data, needing an Article 6 lawful basis and an Article 9 condition (AI and Digital Regulations Service, 2023). Volunteers never record passwords or clinical details.

Proxy access: set up by the GP surgery, which checks identity and safeguarding and obtains consent (NHS, 2026).

Accessible Information Standard: communication needs are identified, recorded, flagged, shared and met (NHS England, 2025).

Equality Act 2010: reasonable adjustments for disabled people. **Care Act 2014:** wellbeing, information and advice.

Volunteers: safeguarding training and DBS checks.

7. Technology integration

NHS App: appointments, repeat prescriptions, records and messages.

Family and carer access: a trusted person can act on the patient's behalf (NHS, 2026).

Loaned tablets with large-text settings and SIM cards preloaded with data.

Secure session log to track outcomes for evaluation.

Why it works: people adopt technology they find useful and easy to use (Davis, 1989), so each session starts with the person's own goal. Routine requests move from phone lines to the App, freeing reception time.

8. Dissemination

- Large-print leaflets and posters in GP practices, pharmacies and libraries.
- Practice text messages, websites, local radio and newspapers.
- Talks at community groups, faith venues and Age UK lunch clubs.
- Social media aimed at adult children and carers.
- Briefings for the PCN, integrated care board and council.

Conclusion

Digital Health Buddies closes the gap between a digital-first NHS and millions of older people who are not online. Trusted peer support, devices, carer access and guaranteed offline options turn digital health from a barrier into a bridge, improving access, independence and equity.

Key references

Age UK (2024) More than 1 in 3 over 65s lack the basic skills to use the internet successfully.

DHSC (2025) Fit for the future: 10 Year Health Plan for England.

Kaihlainen, A.M. et al. (2022) BMC Health Services Research, 22, 188.

Mubarak, F. and Suomi, R. (2022) Inquiry, 59.

NHS England (no date a) Inclusive digital healthcare.

Full Harvard reference list follows the pitch.

Exemplar for teaching purposes. Digital Health Buddies is a proposed service; volunteer numbers and timings are illustrative.

Poster: Digital Health Buddies

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Part 2: The Pitch

Introduction

Digital Health Buddies is a peer-led service that helps people aged 65 and over use NHS digital services with confidence, while ensuring those who cannot or choose not to go online continue to receive equal care. The NHS is becoming increasingly digital, but more than one in three people over 65 lack the basic skills to use the internet successfully (Age UK, 2024). This creates a gap between how services are designed and how many older people live. Digital Health Buddies bridges that gap with trained volunteers, free device and data loans, and support to set up carer access in the NHS App. Those who benefit most include older adults at risk of being left behind, their families and carers, and GP teams that currently handle the additional demand by telephone.

Background

The 10 Year Health Plan commits the NHS to three major changes, including moving from paper-based services to digital ones. It describes the NHS App as a 'doctor in their pocket' (Department of Health and Social Care, 2025). NHS App registrations rose from 2 million in 2021 to 30 million in 2023 (NHS England, no date a). However, not everyone has benefited equally. About 7% of households have no internet at home, and around 10 million adults lack basic digital skills (NHS England, no date a). The gap is wider among older people: 4.7 million people over 65 lack basic internet skills, and 2.3 million do not use the internet at all. Almost half of those who do not use it are aged 75 or older (Age UK, 2024).

Research shows that the problem is about more than access. Mubarak and Suomi (2022) say the grey digital divide is now mainly caused by differences in people's digital skills and the quality of their devices. This can lead to social exclusion. Kaihlanen et al. (2022) found that vulnerable groups faced difficulties using digital health services due to limited skills, poor health, lack of suitable devices, low trust, security concerns, or limited support. These barriers have real effects: 30% of people who are offline say the NHS is one of the hardest organisations to contact (NHS

England, no date a). Without action, digital services could increase the health inequalities the NHS aims to reduce.

Innovation Description

Digital Health Buddies is a support service built around each person, not a new app. Each primary care network recruits and trains volunteers called Buddies. They hold weekly drop-in sessions at GP practices and libraries, and visit people who cannot leave home. At the first meeting, they check the person's digital skills, devices, eyesight, hearing and confidence. The person chooses a goal, such as ordering a repeat prescription or checking test results, and can get up to six 45-minute sessions.

Four features make the service new. First, support is peer-led: volunteers offer patient, jargon-free help in familiar places. Second, practical barriers are removed by lending refurbished tablets and SIM cards with free data through the National Device Bank and National Databank (NHS England Knowledge and Library Services, no date). Third, Buddies help people to request family and carer access in the NHS App, which the GP surgery sets up after checking identity and safeguarding and obtaining consent (NHS, 2026). This allows a trusted person to book appointments or order prescriptions on the patient's behalf. Fourth, every participant is guaranteed an offline route, so the service never becomes another barrier.

The design follows the Technology Acceptance Model, which suggests that people use technology when they see it as useful and easy to use (Davis, 1989). Starting with each person's own goal makes usefulness obvious, while repeated practice builds ease of use.

Impact on Health and Social Care

The main beneficiaries are people aged 65 and over, particularly those living alone, on low incomes, with sensory impairments or whose first language is not English. For them, the service improves access by turning the NHS App from an obstacle into a practical tool, reducing time spent in telephone queues and making it easier to manage medicines and appointments. Carers benefit because proxy access gives them a safe, legitimate way to help, rather than sharing passwords.

Quality of care improves because patients who can see their records and messages are better informed and more involved in decisions. The service also supports staff: GP reception teams would spend less time on routine telephone requests, freeing time for people with more complex needs, and link workers gain a practical offer for patients whose isolation is linked to digital exclusion.

Most importantly, Digital Health Buddies contributes to the common good. It treats digital inclusion as a matter of equity and dignity: older people are supported to take part in a digital NHS on their own terms, and nobody is excluded because they cannot or will not go online, reflecting Age UK's (2024) call for offline options to remain available. By reducing the risk of social exclusion described by Mubarak and Suomi (2022), it also supports wellbeing beyond health care, as new skills help people to stay in touch with family and community.

Public and Stakeholder Involvement

Older people will help shape the service from the beginning. During the first three months, workshops with older patients, carers, the practice patient group and a local Age UK will help decide what the sessions cover, where they take place and how the printed guides look. Volunteers will come from the same communities, so they understand people's concerns. After each group of sessions, participants can share feedback through cards and a short survey. Two older people will also join the steering group. Diffusion of Innovation Theory says people are more likely to adopt new ideas when they see clear benefits and the ideas fit with existing practices (Rogers, 2003). Trusted local champions and early successes will help encourage others across the network to take part.

Policies, Services and Professional Links

The service supports the Care Act 2014, which places a duty on local authorities to promote individual wellbeing and to provide information and advice. Under the Equality Act 2010, services must make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, and the Accessible Information Standard requires providers of NHS and adult social care to identify, record, flag, share and meet people's communication needs (NHS England, 2025). Because health information is special category data, any records the service holds need an Article 6 lawful basis and an Article 9 condition under UK

GDPR (AI and Digital Regulations Service, 2023). The service builds on existing roles: social prescribing link workers are based in primary care networks and accept referrals from health services, social care and local charities (NHS England, no date b), while GP receptionists, practice nurses, community nurses and social workers can all refer.

Conclusion

As NHS services move online, millions of older people risk being left behind. Digital Health Buddies offers a realistic, low-cost response that uses existing link workers, volunteers, libraries and national device schemes. By combining practical support with an offline guarantee, it improves access, independence and equity, ensuring that innovation in the NHS benefits everyone.

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