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**POSTER ABSTRACT****Piloting an integrated community approach to increase NHS App uptake and use in Suffolk and North East Essex**

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**Background:** The National Health Service (NHS) App is a key digital tool in the United Kingdom that helps people access healthcare services and manage their own health, with growing importance under the NHS Long Term Plan. As healthcare increasingly shifts from analogue to digital, digital tools must be accessible to diverse communities to avoid widening health inequalities. The NHS App offers significant potential to improve healthcare access in Suffolk and North East Essex, yet uptake varies across communities, particularly in more deprived areas where digital health tools could deliver the greatest benefit. Community pharmacies, libraries, and local groups provide trusted, accessible spaces where people can explore digital health tools and receive support.

This project aimed to increase NHS App awareness and usage through collaboration with community assets, while identifying barriers to inform future development of digital health tools.

**Approach:** Co-production sessions identified community pharmacies as key settings for NHS App upskilling. Coordinated NHS App training was provided for pharmacy staff and community partners, with peer upskilling also supported.

Grant funding enabled 21 Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) and three community partners - Suffolk Family Carers, Suffolk Libraries, and the North Essex Digital Access Support Team - to design and deliver locally tailored engagement sessions for under-represented communities. An eight-week community pharmacy pilot, informed by a South West London pilot<sup>1</sup>, enabled staff to proactively discuss the NHS App with patients and offer support to download and use the tool. Evaluation was co-designed with community partners and the steering group, combining quantitative project data, NHS App metrics and qualitative feedback from pharmacy and community staff.

**Results:** Over 100 pharmacy and community staff were trained in the NHS App for the project. 28 community pharmacies actively delivered over 2,500 interventions to support download and upskill patients in NHS App functionality. Many people reached were previously unaware of NHS

App functions, demonstrating the value of targeted training in the community. Community-based sessions engaged under-represented groups including older people, carers, those with long-term conditions, and digitally excluded populations in rural and deprived areas.

Feedback strongly supported integrated community delivery and cross-sector coordination between GP surgeries, pharmacies, and community assets. However, persistent barriers emerged, including carer proxy access challenges. Ongoing qualitative interviews are examining population-specific enablers and barriers across the region.

**Implications:** This locally led, co-produced approach demonstrates how community assets are essential partners in increasing uptake of digital health tools and reaching those who would benefit most. Sustained investment and support for coordinated community approaches can help bridge digital inclusion gaps and shape more responsive and accessible digital health initiatives.

1. Heffernan C, Richter H, Patel A, Patel N, Thakker D. The role of community pharmacies in reducing digital exclusion among older adults through e-prescribing. *J Prescr Pract.* 2025 May 2;7(5):212-7. Available from: [ *Journal of Prescribing Practice - The role of community pharmacies in reducing digital exclusion among older adults through e-prescribing*]