Understanding Care Homes Digital Barriers, Aspirations and Enablers Survey Summary

The Academic Health Science Network North East North Cumbria (AHSN NENC), working with the NHS England North East and Yorkshire (NEY) regional Better Security, Better Care team and key stakeholders across the region, have completed digitally focussed survey research with the region's commissioned care homes to help inform future digital priorities and programmes of work.

The need for the survey was identified by the AHSN NENC led Ageing Well Safely Oversight Digital Subgroup as a key requirement to support the digital progression of care homes in the North East North Cumbria region and Yorkshire.

The main purpose of the survey was to understand care homes' perspectives on perceived need and appetite to adopt digital systems and products. The survey, carried out with care homes in the NEY region between March and May 2022, received 330 responses and gained feedback in 4 areas:

(1) Rating of network connectivity
(2) Usage of NHSmail
(3) Main digitally related issues
(4) Priorities for digital support needed in the next 18-24 months.

A summary of the report for the entire North East and Yorkshire region is provided below against each of the 4 survey questions posed to care homes.

1) How do you rate your network connectivity (e.g. Wi-Fi) in your home?

- **75%** Adequate
- **24%** Needs upgrading
- **1%** No Wi-Fi
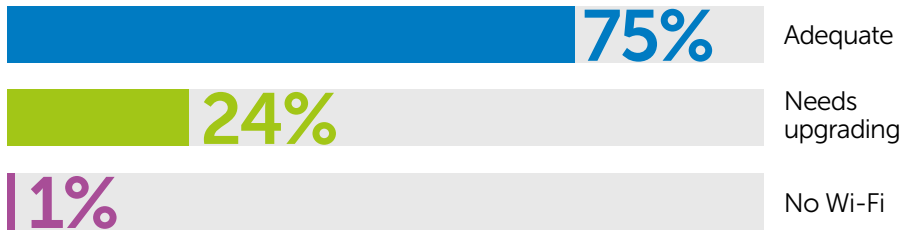
The majority of responses (75%) indicate care homes believe their Wi-Fi is currently adequate, although 25% stated that Wi-Fi needs upgrading or installing.

It is important to note there are many factors to consider with perception of Wi-Fi adequacy and although Wi-Fi is available in almost all care homes the potential increases in bandwidth (mbps) speed and signal strength required for future digital solutions to function effectively may well present a different picture.
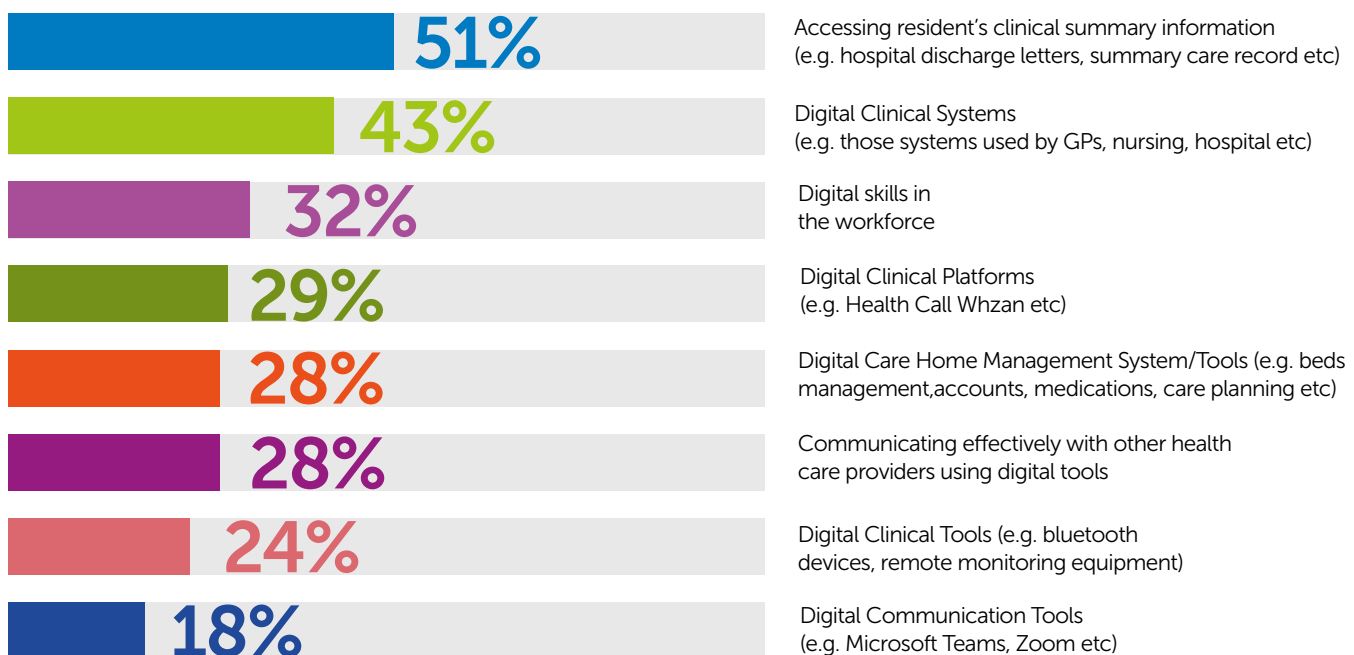
2) What is your current usage of NHSmail?

- **13%** Don't use
- **44%** Frequent use
- **35%** Minimal use
- **8%** Not available
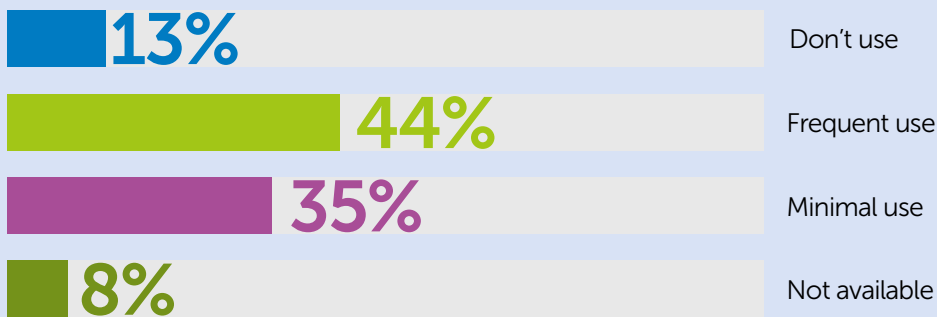
79% of responses indicated NHSmail is in use either minimally or frequently enabling implementation of solutions requiring secure and accredited email as a prerequisite.

Responses also show 35% are using NHSmail minimally and 21% have not applied for or are unaware of its availability. These findings indicate significant work is required to provide care homes with a blueprint for operational NHSmail setup and to support the initial implementation of the secure email system within the care home. Digital skills are outlined as a barrier now by 32% of respondents which is likely to be impacting upon NHSmail usage.

3) Excluding network connectivity, NHSmail and also access to IT equipment (tablets, desktop PCs, smartphones), from the list below, which are the main digitally related areas you are currently unable to access or facing issues with?

- **51%** Accessing resident's clinical summary information (e.g. hospital discharge letters, summary care record etc)
- **43%** Digital Clinical Systems (e.g. those systems used by GPs, nursing, hospital etc)
- **32%** Digital skills in the workforce
- **29%** Digital Clinical Platforms (e.g. Health Call Whzan etc)
- **28%** Digital Care Home Management System/Tools (e.g. beds management, accounts, medications, care planning etc)
- **28%** Communicating effectively with other health care providers using digital tools
- **24%** Digital Clinical Tools (e.g. bluetooth devices, remote monitoring equipment)
- **18%** Digital Communication Tools (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Zoom etc)
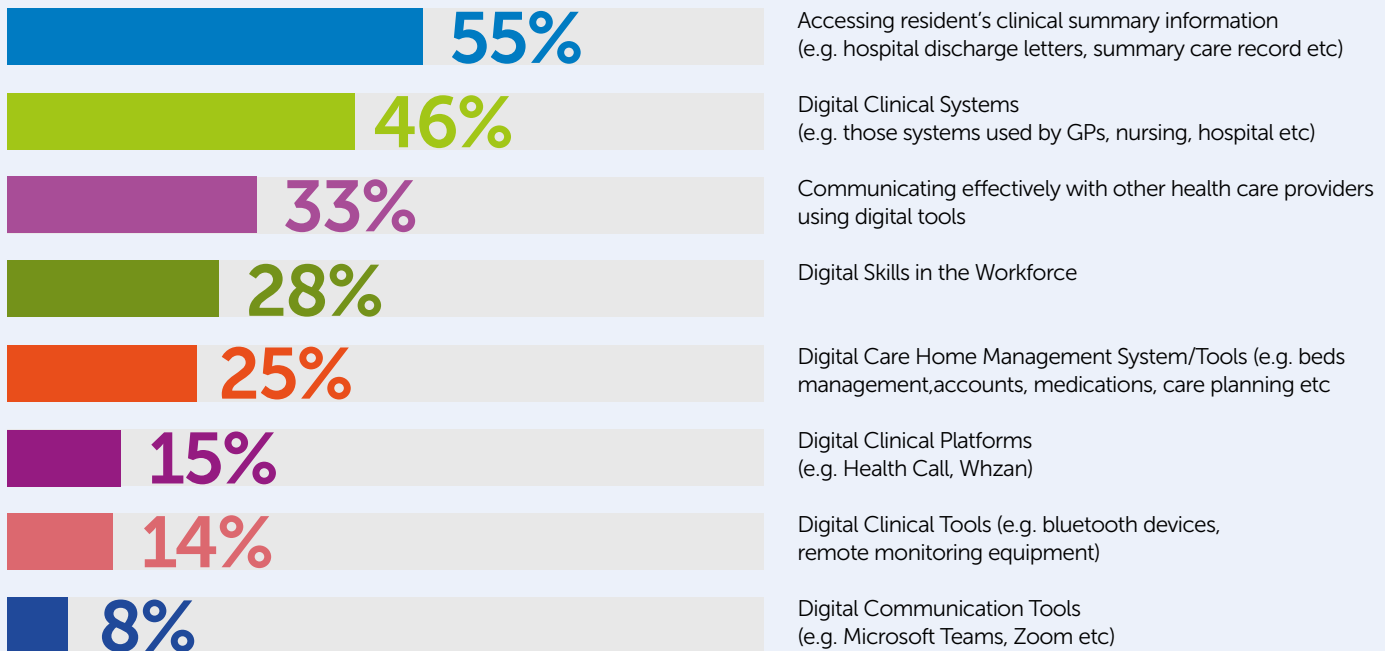
The top 3 from this question were:

1. 51% of respondents selected 'Accessing resident's clinical summary information (e.g. hospital discharge letters, summary care record etc)'

2. 43% of respondents selected 'digital clinical systems (e.g. those systems used by GPs, nursing, hospital etc)' as barriers now

3. 32% chose Digital Skills as a key issue

It should be noted that the top 2 responses are also the top 2 for future support indicating a clear need for these areas to be considered in future digital plans.

Digital skills are identified as a barrier by 32% of respondents which reinforces the importance of programmes offering resources and incentives to upskill care homes digital capabilities, as well as providing substantial 'wrap around' implementation support..

4) Regarding future support in the next 18-24 months, from those covered in the previous list, which would be your ideal 3 choices?

55%	Accessing resident's clinical summary information (e.g. hospital discharge letters, summary care record etc)
46%	Digital Clinical Systems (e.g. those systems used by GPs, nursing, hospital etc)
33%	Communicating effectively with other health care providers using digital tools
28%	Digital Skills in the Workforce
25%	Digital Care Home Management System/Tools (e.g. beds management,accounts, medications, care planning etc
15%	Digital Clinical Platforms (e.g. Health Call, Whzan)
14%	Digital Clinical Tools (e.g. bluetooth devices, remote monitoring equipment)
8%	Digital Communication Tools (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Zoom etc)

The top 3 areas outlined below:

1. 55% of respondents selected 'Accessing resident's clinical summary information (e.g. hospital discharge letters, summary care record etc)'

2. 46% of respondents selected 'digital clinical systems (e.g. those systems used by GPs, nursing, hospital etc)'

3. 33% chose 'Communicating effectively with other health care providers using digital tools' as one of three ideal choices for future support in 18-24 months.

These responses provide a good indication of what areas care homes have an appetite for. In particular the need to access hospital discharge letters has often been raised in care home forums. Digital clinical systems (Bluetooth, remote monitoring) are identified as a barrier by 24% of respondents and 14% identified them as ideal future support in 18-24 months. This could have significant implications for programmes implementing remote monitoring solutions. A contributing factor to these results could also be based on the current status of existing implementations such as Health Call and Whzan. In practice, a period of extensive engagement and investment in a strategic communications strategy may be required to improve appetite amongst the care home user group.

A comprehensive report and analysis has been compiled detailing results for the NEY regions as a whole, along with breakdowns for NENC and the other Yorkshire areas (South Yorkshire & Bassetlaw and West Yorkshire and Harrogate). The full report is available on the AHSN NENC website. In summary, the results from the survey should be considered for future digital support plans for care homes in the region.

The AHSN NENC and NHS NEY Better Security, Better Care teams would like to thank all the care homes who took the time to provide their feedback, along with CCG and council teams who helped disseminate the surveys, especially under the very challenging circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic.