

## What we know about digital inclusion in North East London

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many healthcare, social care and community services started to offer an online provision; either complementing or replacing their face to face services; post-pandemic, there are lessons to be learned about maintaining and sustaining this change without leaving anyone behind.

### The opportunities

- ➔ Online provision can **streamline services**, make them ore efficient and more likely to share resources (for example, in a GP hub)
- ➔ Online services may be **more accessible to some** disabled people (e.g. mobility impaired, housebound, extremely immunosupressed etc.)

### The risks

- ➔ Some local residents don't have **the knowledge** to access online services.
- ➔ Some local residents don't have access **to devices** they need to access online services.
- ➔ Some local residents don't **trust** online services.

## Focus on opportunities

Reduced commuting time may reduce the overall amount of time patients need to spend on accessing the care they need.

*"NHS communications during the Covid-19 pandemic have all been satisfactory and saved me long journeys."*

*"You can make bookings online and order prescriptions online which makes life so much easier."*

Use of online technologies allows for the possibility of visual diagnosis, unlike phone consultations.

*"Had to have a telephone consultation during Covid and the lady Doctor was lovely; had to video call to see the area that needed treatment and was prescribed something. Now I hopefully have a plan going forward."*

Digitisation reduces and simplifies the bureaucracy around processes such as viewing medical records or reducing repeat prescriptions; making them easier for patients.

Use of online booking and e-consult can reduce dependency and pressure on phone lines, making the booking process more accessible and user-friendly, providing that it works as intended.

*"It's an absolute nightmare phoning any surgery at 8 am. I hate it. So I found out about e-consults and the surgery has been prompt and replies within 48 hours sometimes next day. Thank you to my GP for keeping on top of your workload and replying to e-consultations on time and effectively."*

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# Focus on risks

KNOWLEDGE  
AND  
ACCESSIBILITY

Beyond knowing how to use the internet in general, ability to use health and care services depends on level of English, general literacy, knowledge of how services work bureaucratically.

Patients whose understanding of online services is limited are less likely to trust them.

*"I do not get on with computers ad technology. I would prefer to see a doctor face to face and preferably one who knows my history and does not use up my 10 minutes appointment talking them through my medical history"*

Patients who experienced difficulties accessing the healthcare they need may feel that introduction of online services is just another barrier or a way of cutting costs at the expense of access and quality.

*"Stop believing technology improves services. Stop telling me I'm on a waiting list for my hearing aid and then nothing happens."*

The extent to which patients would be willing and able to learn to use online services varies based on individual circumstances.

*"Digital services are great ie online portals etc, however, this really excludes the older generations who are not technically able. There must be more local classes to support them in being able to use technology."*

Patients who are not confident in their ability to access online services may feel discouraged from accessing them at all.

*"Older people tend not to trouble GPs when they really should. Making blood test appointments difficult as they don't have the technical knowledge or facilities"*

The cost of living crisis and housing precarity affect people's access to internet and devices

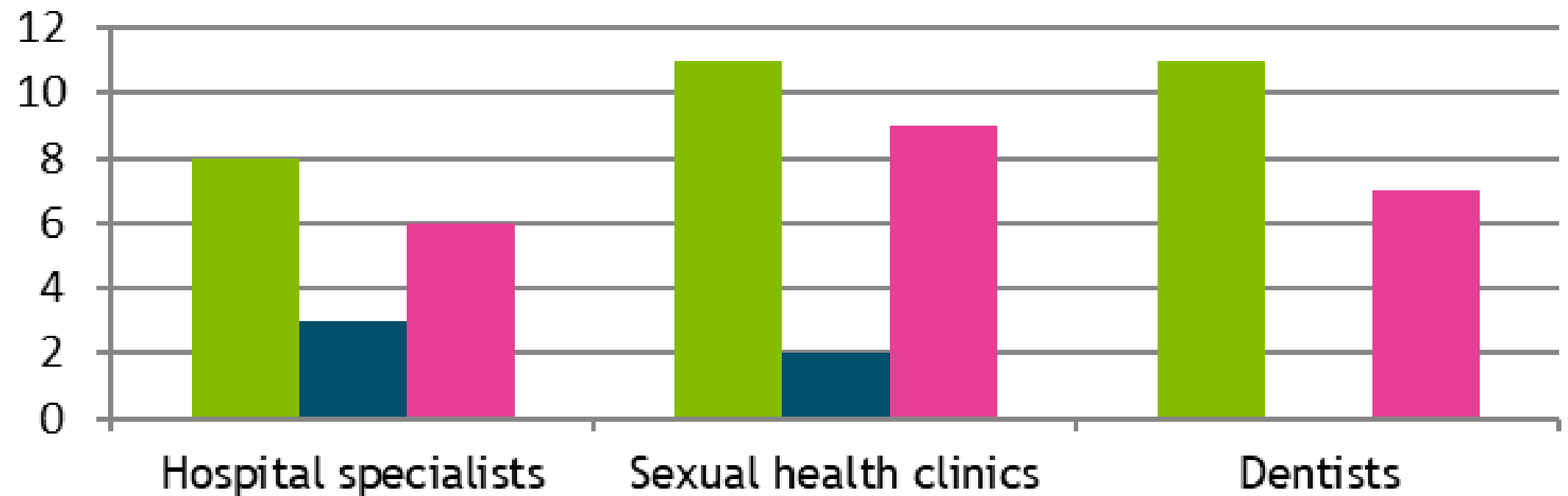
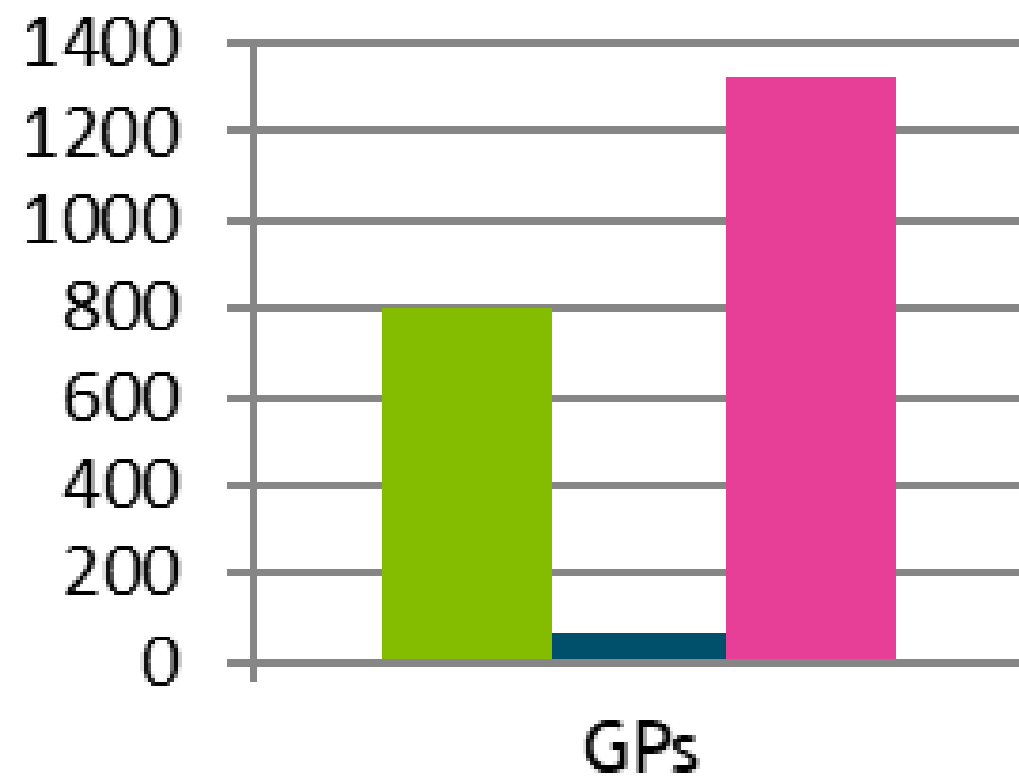
Some local people may have concerns about data security/ privacy. This is especially a concern for those who don't have their own devices/ connection/access to a private space

ACCESS  
TO DEVICES/  
INTERNET

QUALITY  
THE  
TRUST IN

# Experience of online systems

## Most comments we received were about GPs



■ positive ■ neutral ■ negative



Where it is available and functional, patients find it easy and convenient to book online primary care or specialist services (such as routine dental appointments, medication reviews or blood tests).



Online booking is not always available; even when it nominally should be in place, there are no slots available- this issue is particularly affecting GPs.

There are also reports of GP econsult forms going unanswered; when this happens patients often use urgent care services such as 111 or A&E.



# What we know about digital inclusion



## Online NHS services are particularly helpful to:

- Parents of young children, particularly working parents;
- People aged 25 to 39 (Millennial generation);
- Patients with well-managed, relatively stable long-term conditions, who require routine appointments and repeat prescriptions.
- Patients with mobility issues who may struggle to travel.

## They may be less suitable for:

- Older people aged 65+;
- People with lower levels of English fluency, IT literacy, familiarity with the NHS or general literacy.
- People struggling financially, who may not afford devices.
- People with sensory impairments or learning disabilities.
- Patients experiencing new and unexplained symptoms or requiring extensive investigations; particularly if their illness is severe.


North East London residents of non-White ethnicities, particularly Black and Bengali, may be more likely than their peers to experience digital exclusion.

# Focus on online GP services

These quotes are fictional, but are based on the aggregated experience of patients we have heard from.

## WHEN THINGS WORK WELL

## WHEN THINGS DON'T WORK WELL




I am entirely comfortable using online GP services and would like to do as many things online as possible.

I am able to book routine GP and nurse appointments online rather than having to wait on the phone queue; when I need to be seen urgently I use e-consult and get a reply promptly, either by telephone or video call. I can also use automated forms to order repeat prescriptions, view my test results and medical records.

My mobility is impaired; it's easier for me to not travel to the surgery, and during the Covid-19 pandemic I feel safer. I believe we should keep doing this after the pandemic ends.

Booking online appointments is no longer available. When I try to use the e-consult form, I answer 30 questions, only to be unable to send it: instead, I am told to call the surgery. The phone queue is very long and frustrating. If I manage to send the e-consult form, I wait multiple days for the doctor to get back to me by telephone. I don't have the option of an online consultation instead, so I can't show anything visual to my doctor without physically coming in.

The website is often down and there are technical issues.



I don't know that much about online GP services. I have some reservations, but with the right advice I could use at least some.

Reception staff helped me set up my online account, and showed me how to use online services, so I am more confident. The applications are simple, straightforward and user-friendly. As a result, I started using online access regularly and I am happy with it.

I have a sensory disability, but the website is optimised for accessibility software and I have support from surgery staff, so I am able to use it.

I don't understand how to register for online access and no one tells me anything. I tried doing it once, but it required some paperwork that I was never able to communicate with reception about- they don't have time for me.

The appointments are very confusing and there are no tutorials explaining what to do. I have a sensory disability, and there is no support for people like me to access them.



I never use the Internet at all. I need to be able to access all the GP services I need without going online.

Because a lot of other people use online services, the telephone lines are less busy than in other surgeries. I can book appointments, request repeat prescriptions or receive my test results over the telephone or in person.

I can't book an appointment over the phone- they keep telling me to use the e-consult form. Because I don't have internet and can't do that, I started calling 111 or going to A&E when what I really need is a GP appointment.

Even when I clearly need to be seen in person and physically examined, I'm still only given online appointments.

# What local people are saying about online GP services

## Feedback from people satisfied with online GP access

*I used an e-consult form. Very efficient - completed the e-consult form and had a call back within two hours. Had to provide a sample to the practice and had initial results within another two hours. Would be happy with this service in normal life as well!*

*(Tower Hamlets patient)*

*Made an online booking and received a call from the GP, who then set up an online consultation through a text message. Everything happened very quickly and I am very pleased with it.*

*(Hackney patient)*

*While it's overall harder than before to access my GP, I have noticed some improvements-booking blood tests online for example.*

*(Havering patient)*

## Feedback from people dissatisfied with online GP access

*The e-consult facility is often a waste of time. I have completed endless e-consults and half the time I get nowhere because they ask me to ring the surgery instead. When I ring the surgery they ask me to complete an e-consult. Many times I have gone round and round in circles getting nowhere.*

*(Redbridge patient)*

*Had my annual diabetic review virtually, it is impossible to do feet checks that way.*

*(Tower Hamlets patient)*

*E-consult is very difficult to complete with a visual impairment. Telephone lines are extremely busy.*

*(Tower Hamlets patient)*

*I have had to contact the surgery six times in last two months for my 8 year old son .. they can't offer a face to face appointment which I find so strange! I have been told this is how the surgery will continue to be.*

*(Tower Hamlets patient)*