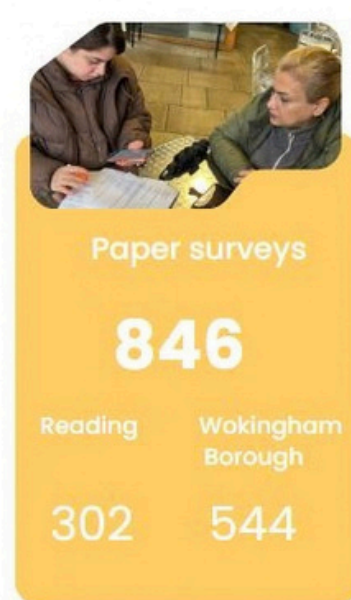


Digital futures: what local voices tell us about the NHS App

Project purpose, context and approach

Healthwatch Reading and Healthwatch Wokingham Borough explored how residents use the NHS App and why some people do not. This matters as the NHS App is expected to become a main access route to services, however, digital exclusion (skills, access to devices/data, accessibility needs, language) risks widening inequalities and making it harder for some people to get care.

Survey at a glance



- 1,436 responses (953 Wokingham Borough; 483 Reading); Oct 2025–Jan 2026 (63 out-of-area excluded).
- Building on our GP access project feedback from 2020–2024, where 19% of people across Reading, Wokingham Borough and West Berkshire said technology, including the NHS App, made accessing services and care harder, these challenges remain.
- Findings will inform local action to improve digital services and reduce inequalities.

Four key headlines

1. **“The NHS App changed my life.”** Two-thirds of surveyed residents use the NHS App: Almost two-thirds (65%) of surveyed residents use the NHS App, including 71% in Wokingham Borough and just over half (53%) in Reading. Usage was highest among people aged 55–74, and viewing medical records and ordering repeat prescriptions were the most popular features across both areas combined.

2. **1 in 3 residents do not use the NHS app:** Around one-third of surveyed residents did not use the NHS App, including nearly half of respondents in Reading (47%) and 29% in Wokingham Borough. The most common reason was a preference for traditional ways of accessing healthcare (54%), followed by a lack of digital skills or confidence (23%). 7% reported barriers relating to technology or internet access.
3. **People rely on family and friends for NHS App help whilst formal support services are rarely used:** 75% of respondents did not need help using the NHS App. Where support was needed (25%), it most commonly came from friends and family (18%), while use of GP surgery support (5%) and commissioned digital cafés (0.1%) was low. Six in ten (60%) residents reported experiencing at least one issue when using the NHS App, most commonly difficulty finding information or missing/incorrect medical information (16%), followed by usability and access issues (15%), in both areas combined.
4. **“One app to rule them all, please”:** During our community conversations and engagement activities, a recurring theme emerged: residents want a simpler and more joined-up digital healthcare experience. People told us they felt confused and frustrated by having to use multiple apps, websites and systems, including the NHS App. Residents also described differences in what they could do through the NHS App depending on their GP surgery or healthcare provider.

Priority actions

1. **Maintain non-digital routes to care:** Ensure people can continue to access healthcare services by phone, in person or through other non-digital channels if they cannot or do not wish to use the NHS App or other digital services, so they can access and manage their healthcare in a way that works best for them.
2. **Strengthen digital inclusion and support:** Provide practical support for people facing digital barriers, including digital skills support, accessible and translated information and support for those without access to suitable devices or internet connectivity. This will help ensure more people can access and benefit from the NHS App and other digital healthcare services.
3. **Increase awareness of available support:** Use national digital resources, promote and expand digital cafés, community support services, training opportunities and device loan schemes, ensuring support reaches those who need it most.
4. **Improve clarity and consistency across services:** Clearly communicate what the NHS App can and cannot do, and work towards a more consistent experience across GP surgeries, hospitals and other healthcare providers.
5. **Simplify and join up digital services:** Make it easier for people to navigate the NHS App and digital healthcare by reducing the need to use multiple apps, websites and systems, and by providing clearer pathways to services.
6. **Improve the user experience:** Address common frustrations, including accessing and managing appointments, navigating systems, updating personal information and ensuring records are accurate and up to date.

Headline infographics

"The NHS app changed my life."

Two-thirds of surveyed residents use the NHS app

NHS App findings

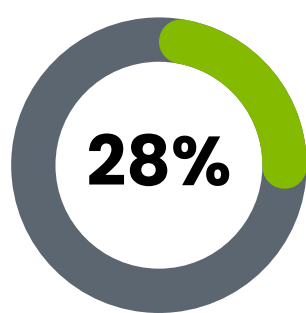
53%

of survey respondents in Reading use the NHS App*

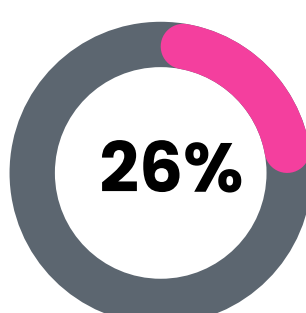
71%

of survey respondents in Wokingham Borough use the NHS App*

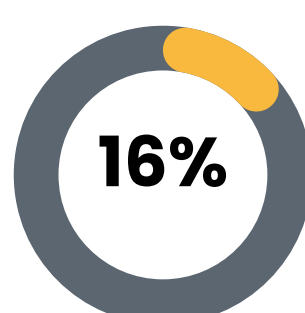
Reading's top NHS App uses*



Repeat prescriptions

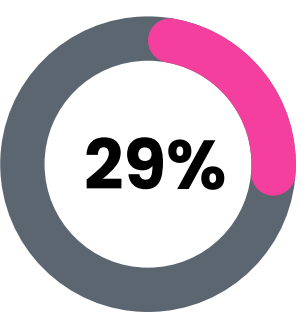


View medical records

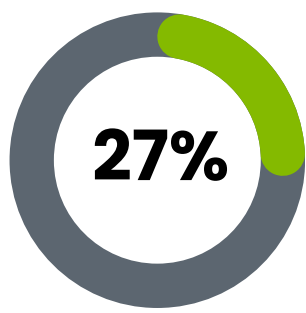


GP appointments

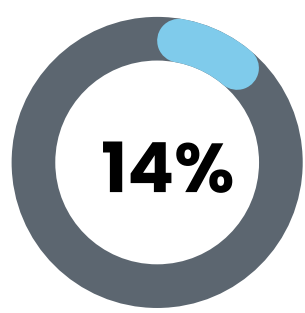
Wokingham Borough's top NHS App uses*



View medical records



Repeat prescriptions



Vaccination information

"The NHS App changed my life. As I order my repeat prescriptions on the App and could set my pharmacy preferences so that they deliver to me, I never run out of my medication. This has improved my independence and I no longer have to rely on anyone to pick up my prescription."

"It is a brilliant tool. I have multiple health issues, and this makes it very easy to keep track of everything. I will recommend it to everyone though it will be good for the NHS to show those who need the help how to use and the benefit."



Who uses the NHS App?*

1% 16-24 yrs | **5%** 25-34 yrs | **10%** 35-44 yrs
10% 45-54 yrs | **21%** 55-64 yrs | **27%** 65-74 yrs
12% 75-79 yrs | **8%** 80 + yrs

Insights

- ✓ Adults aged 55-74 are the largest NHS App user group combined across both areas (48%), primarily citing convenience and related benefits as key reasons for use.**
- ✓ Across both areas, viewing medical records and ordering repeat prescriptions are the most popular NHS App features, accounting for over half of all options selected.
- ✓ Wokingham Borough respondents were more likely to check vaccination information, while Reading respondents were more likely to use the app to manage GP appointments.
- ✓ Overall, most respondents use the NHS App monthly, while Reading respondents reported more regular weekly and daily use than those in Wokingham Borough.

*Notes: Based on a survey of 1436 residents (953 in Wokingham Borough, 483 in Reading and excluding out-of-area respondents 63) conducted between Oct 2025 - Jan 2026; fewer people were surveyed in Reading than in Wokingham Borough so differences between the areas should be treated with caution; survey respondents were able to select multiple answers to some survey questions; demographic data may not represent total number of survey respondents as these are not mandatory questions; percentages are calculated on the number of answers to that question, blanks omitted. **This is a combined total for age range (Reading and Wokingham Borough)

1 in 3 residents do not use the NHS App

Across Reading and Wokingham Borough

NHS App findings

47%

of survey respondents in Reading **do not use** the NHS App*

29%

of survey respondents in Wokingham Borough **do not use** the NHS App*

Top 3 reasons why people do not use the NHS App (across both areas)*

Preference for non-digital access

Includes people who do not use apps, prefer to speak to someone directly, want face-to-face appointments, use telephone access, or prefer postal communication.

54% (850 people)

Lacking digital skills and confidence

Includes people who need help with the app, find it too confusing to use, find registering or logging in difficult, do not understand the information on the app and do not feel confident using technology etc.

23% (358 people)

Access to technology

Includes people who do not have access to a phone or laptop, have technology issues i.e. signal or phone issues, and people that do not have an email address etc.

7% (103 people)

What people told us

"I cannot use the app because of the language barrier. If there was the option to translate the information, then maybe I will use it."

"I am very concerned about the elderly population [...] facing digital exclusion. If they're only able to book a GP appointment online they may end up sitting with their health concerns. [...] Many of our Link Friends don't want to cause trouble or make a fuss so would be reluctant to complain."

"Our memory is weak, our hands [are] shaking. Simply, we cannot use the NHS App. Why does the NHS not allow us to do what we have been doing all our lives? It worked well – we ring the GP, fix an appointment and meet with the doctor face to face. We are not young anymore!"

Priority actions

Protect choice in how everyone accesses healthcare

- **Ensure people have a choice** in how they access healthcare, so no one is excluded because they are unable or choose not to use digital services.
- **Protect face-to-face, telephone** and other non-digital routes alongside digital services, so everyone can access care in a way that works best for them.
- **Clearly communicate and promote** all available options, so people understand their choices and feel confident accessing and managing their healthcare.

Build digital skills and confidence

- **Connect more people** with existing digital skills schemes helping residents develop the skills and confidence to manage passwords, use smartphones, the internet and digital services such as the NHS App.
- **Promote more widely** local digital support schemes through trusted community settings and marketing campaigns so residents know where and how they can get practical help.
- **Make support accessible** to different needs, including appropriate translated and accessible information.

Expand access and connectivity

- **Expand and promote local device reuse schemes:** build on existing schemes in Wokingham Borough and learn from West Berkshire Council's approach to increase access to devices for residents in need across both areas.
- **Increase donated devices:** work with local businesses, larger organisations and technology companies to donate surplus smartphones, tablets and laptops for refurbishment and redistribution to residents in need.
- **Expand device lending and connectivity:** learn from Reading Libraries' approach to providing access to devices, including laptops with mobile data for use at home and promote the scheme widely.

*Notes: Based on a survey of 1436 residents (953 in Wokingham Borough, 483 in Reading and excluding out-of-area respondents 63) conducted between Oct 2025 – Jan 2026; fewer people were surveyed in Reading than in Wokingham Borough so differences between the areas should be treated with caution; survey respondents were able to select multiple answers to some survey questions; demographic data may not represent total number of survey respondents as these are not mandatory questions; percentages are calculated on the number of answers to that question, blanks omitted.

People rely on family and friends for NHS App help, while formal support services are rarely used

NHS App findings

75%

of survey respondents in both areas did not need help using the NHS App*

25%

of survey respondents in both areas needed help using the NHS App*

6 in 10 people experienced issues*



60% of NHS App users experienced at least one issue.



40% of NHS App experienced no issues with the app.

- **1 in 10** had issues booking or managing appointments
- **16%** experienced usability or access issues
- **15%** couldn't find the information they needed or their medical information was missing or incorrect on the NHS app

What people told us



"Missing information [and] very poor quality 'help' with issues."

"I couldn't register on the app. The doctor surgery said they would help but never did."

"My husband finds this app very difficult and needs alot of help."

"I do not need help but my children and my parents need help so I have to look up stuff for five people including myself as our GP surgery is now mostly online."

"I was waiting for a hospital appointment letter for sometime and I could not remember the exact date of the appointment. I called the GP surgery to check and was told to check the NHS App. I tried to open the app but my access was blocked. I don't know anyone to help me, so I decided to take two buses to Royal Berkshire Hospital to ask the receptionist when my appointment was. I was told my appointment was the following Wednesday. I'm very disappointed."

When people needed help with the NHS App, they turned to:**



Friends and family

18% (176 people)

Most common source of help



GP surgery

5% (49 people)

Less often



Digital cafes

0.1% (1 person)

Rarely used

Priority actions

A need for more local, accessible information and resources

- There is a clear need for accessible and locally relevant NHS App information and resources. No local resources were identified during this project, including Easy Read and translated materials.
- The lack of local NHS App information meant that Healthwatch had to develop its own information and advice webpages to support residents using the app.
- To fill this gap, resources had to be sourced from NHS organisations, integrated care boards (ICBs) and charities from across England, highlighting the need for locally produced information and support materials.

Build on existing national resources

- National NHS App resources already exist through NHS England and the National Health Literacy Partnership, providing guidance to help library staff support people to find trusted health information and use the NHS App and NHS website.
- Guidance is also available to support volunteers so they can directly help people use the NHS App.
- There is an opportunity for local providers and partners to build on these established national resources and tailor NHS App support to meet the needs of local communities.

Improve awareness and access to local commissioned NHS App support

- Only one respondent (0.1%)* reported using the Integrated Care Board (ICB) commissioned Digital Café service for help with the NHS App.
- Digital Café sessions currently take place once a month at two locations only: Emmanuel Methodist Church. Reading and Wokingham Borough Library.
- Consideration should be given to improving promotion of the service and increasing the availability and locations of community-based support to ensure residents can access help when and where they need it.

Notes: *Based on a survey of 1436 residents (953 in Wokingham Borough, 483 in Reading and excluding out-of-area respondents 63) conducted between Oct 2025 - Jan 2026; fewer people were surveyed in Reading than in Wokingham Borough so differences between the areas should be treated with caution; survey respondents were able to select multiple answers to some survey questions so figures may not add up to 100%; percentages are calculated on the number of answers to that question, blanks omitted. **Other sources of support were also reported but not all shown.

“One app to rule them all, please!”

NHS App findings

During our community conversations and engagement activities, a recurring theme emerged: **residents want a simpler and more joined-up digital healthcare experience.**

Many described confusion or frustration when trying to use multiple healthcare apps, websites and systems.

The quotes below are a selection of the comments and experiences shared with us by residents across Reading and Wokingham Borough.

01 Too many apps/platforms and no single system

“My main concern is about the plethora of such apps. In the last year, I have accessed a number of websites [and apps]; the NHS App, my GP's site and the Royal Berks site; Patient Access, Accurx Patient Portal (recently replacing Anima), My Doctor and SwiftQueue. It's not always easy to know which one to use and when, and I've worked in IT for over 48 years.”

“The NHS app is fine, the main problem is that pharmacies, GP practices, carers, social all use different systems! One app to rule them all please!”

“Never sure which of many systems to use; message texts which contain content, message texts which give links to start of a long journey etc.”

“Confusing when to use the NHS App, website and Anima.”

“Hospitals don't use NHS App so I end up having to use multiple apps.”



Some residents felt frustrated that there was no single joined-up system for managing their healthcare. Having to switch between multiple apps and platforms is creating confusion or frustration for residents, making access to healthcare more difficult for some.

02 Understanding the NHS App and other systems/platforms

“I don't understand the point, I use the online form at my GP surgery for appointments and to order my prescriptions, isn't the NHS App just the same?”

“My GP surgery uses a different app so there is little use in using the NHS App for me.”

“I don't really use the NHS App as I can book GP appointments using my GP website.”



Some residents were unsure what the NHS App does and how it differs from other healthcare systems. In some cases, people thought they were already using the NHS App when they were actually using a different platform, highlighting a need for clearer information and awareness about the app and its benefits.

03 Different systems, different experiences

“Inconsistent use of the NHS App by healthcare professionals means my records are now inaccurate.”

“The NHS App conflicted with the 'My GP' app and I had to go to the GP surgery for a paper prescription.”

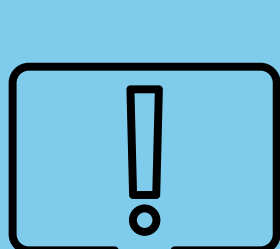
“Absolutely impossible to actually change basic info such as a phone change or email change! And doctors tell you to find your record on the App! SOOOO frustrating – and I am a Councillor – I deal with difficult stuff like this all the time. The NHS App has locked me out and DEFEATED ME!”

“Frustrating that some things are available in the NHS App but some aren't. I can see GP information but not hospital letters.”

“Our GP surgery don't use the NHS App but the hospital do. I use it for hospital appointments and letters.”



Some people told us that the NHS App functionality varies between GP surgeries and service providers. Some people can access services and features that others cannot, leading to confusion, frustration and inconsistent experiences. For some, this can reduce confidence in the NHS App and digital healthcare more broadly.



When digital systems do not work as expected, some residents told us they reverted to telephone or face-to-face access. More concerningly, others described disengaging from healthcare altogether.

“The NHS App is useless. It's very difficult to get an appointment so you have to use the online form. I needed a blood pressure review, completed the form and never heard anything back, so I stopped taking my blood pressure meds.”

Notes: This infographic presents qualitative feedback gathered from residents who shared their experiences with Healthwatch Reading and Healthwatch Wokingham Borough during community engagement activities across both areas.

Healthwatch NHS App project 2025 – 2026