

Digital Inclusion

(UK)

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Older people should be supported and encouraged to get online, but those who cannot, or do not want to do so should be able to access services and support in a way that suits them.

Key issues

For many older people the internet is an essential part of life and is used for practical tasks (e.g., online shopping, banking and finding information), communication (e.g., email and video calls), and/or following hobbies and interests.

However, not everyone is able or wants to be online, or uses the latest technology.

- In early 2021, 2.2 million (40 per cent) of people aged 75+ and 800,000 (12 per cent) of people aged 65-74 in the UK had not used the internet in the last three months.ⁱ
- The pandemic has not led to a greater proportion of people aged 65+ getting online than would be expected by the trend in increased use over the last decade.
- Not everyone who goes online, stays online – five per cent of people aged 75+ do not use the internet but have done in the past, while some internet users only carry out limited activities online.
- At the start of 2020, 53% of people aged 65 and over in GB used a smartphone.ⁱⁱ

These statistics show that many older people remain reliant on traditional methods to carry out everyday activities and generally live their lives. Yet increasingly there is a move to digital technology which risks those who do not use the internet technology being left behind.

Many older people who are not online say they do not want it, do not need to be online, or feel that the barriers are too great. However, from Age UK's experience of delivering digital inclusion services we know that with the right encouragement and support, many can learn to use the internet safely and confidently. Support generally works best when it is ongoing, tailored to an individual's needs and preferences, and delivered on a one-to-one basis. However, this can be resource-heavy, and funding for schemes needs to be based on quality rather than quantity of delivery to ensure real impact.

Public Policy Proposals

- Older people should be encouraged and supported to get online, if they are able, and wish to do so but those who cannot, or do not want to do so, should be able to access services and support in a way that suits them.
- Central and local government must meet their obligations to provide public services, irrespective of whether or not someone is online. People who are offline should be able to access services without needing to rely on others.
- Consumers who are not online must also continue to manage their accounts and switch (where possible) essential services provided by the private sector, such as banking, energy, water and communications.
- Public and private sector organisations designing websites, equipment and online services should ensure these are easy to use and suitable for those with limited digital skills or who have specific needs. Systems should be tested with users and reviewed on an ongoing basis.
- The Government should give Ofcom the power to require all communication providers to offer social tariffs to customers on low incomes. Communication providers should ensure that these tariffs are well promoted across a range of channels.
- Supporting older people to get online and to extend their digital skills requires significant investment and on-going support and this requires increased funding from Government and others. Savings made from a move to a 'digital first' approach should be used to fund digital inclusion work
- Jobcentre Plus, employers and training providers should ensure that older workers have sufficient digital skills to be successful in modern workplaces.
- Older people who are not online must not be placed in a disadvantaged position when accessing health services.

Want to find out more?

Age UK has agreed policy positions on a wide range of public policy issues. Our policies cover money matters, health and wellbeing, care and support, housing and communities. There are also some crosscutting themes, such as age equality and human rights, age-friendly government and information and advice.

www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policypositions/

ⁱ Age UK analysis of Labour Force Survey Q1 2021.

ⁱⁱ Internet Access – Households and Individuals. ONS, 2020.