

Cafodd yr ymateb hwn ei gyflwyno i'r ymgynghoriad ar y cyd a gynhelir gan y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#) a'r [Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus a Gweinyddiaeth Gyhoeddus](#) fel sail i'w [gwaith craffu ar Iechyd a Gofal Digidol Cymru](#)

This response was submitted to the joint consultation held by the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) and the [Public Accounts and Public Administration Committees](#) to inform their [scrutiny of Digital Health and Care Wales](#)

SDHCW 06

Ymateb gan: | Response from: Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales



The level of digital exclusion in Wales is higher than in the UK, with as many as 7% of the adult population not using the internet. That percentage rises to 12% of the Welsh population for those with limiting long-standing illness, disability or infirmity and 32% for those who are 75+ ([National Survey for Wales 2021/22](#)). The current cost of living crisis is only going to exacerbate this with more and more people falling into data poverty. It is important to remember that this is not just an issue for the “general public”. As the largest employer in Wales the NHS has amongst its staff of all types many who are not digitally confident at work or in their personal lives or who have accessibility issues.

As explained in the [Digital Inclusion Guide for Health and Care in Wales \(2019\)](#), the digitisation of health and care services in Wales means that *“there is a real danger of a new, digital, inverse care law where those citizens most in need of accessing new digital services will be left behind again, due to their lack of digital skills and access”*. Yet with effective support for users who are digitally excluded, digitalisation could help to close the widening health inequality gap in Wales and could improve the safety of digital tools within the NHS too.

The [Digital Inclusion Alliance Wales \(DIAW\)](#) includes over 85 organisations working to support Digital Inclusion. In our [‘Agenda for Digital Inclusion: From Inclusion to Resilience \(2021\)’](#) we called for Digital Health and Care Wales (DHCW) to be an exemplar for our NHS and social care; making the applications, websites and products it is responsible for accessible, inclusive and user-centred. The voices of people who face barriers to using digital must be heard and acted upon at all stages of development and operation.

DHCW set out their main vision in their [Annual Plan 21/22](#) which is to *“deliver to the people of Wales first-class digital health and care services which will enable more effective, efficient, safer decision-making by providing access to content-rich, person-focused health and care data and information.”*. DIAW would question whether this aim is achievable when a significant proportion of the population who most need these services are not able to access them.

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) has completed a pilot of their Digital Capability Framework for Healthcare in Wales which was developed in partnership with DHCW. Social Care Wales has worked with Digital Communities Wales to create an e-learning platform for their workforce. Understanding the digital skills levels of the health and care workforce is a key part of the work that needs to be done in order to achieve DHCW’s vision for first class digital health and care services.

There are a number of encouraging signs coming from Health Boards and social care services across Wales that the importance of digital inclusion is being recognised by them and many are working with the Digital Communities Wales programme to achieve this. For example, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has published their new strategy, which embeds digital inclusion into their work. They recognised the impact of digital exclusion on the delivery of health services. This new strategy was created with the engagement of public, patients carers and staff. DHCW should play a crucial leadership role in ensuring that digital inclusion is embedded in all digital strategies in health and social care organisations across

Wales, including their own. It is essential that progress is consistent across Wales so that every citizen is able to access care in an inclusive way that maximises the benefits of digital technology.

It is not always clear what role DHCW has played in any of these projects and programmes. As the digital organisation for health and social care in Wales, DHCW should take the lead role in promoting digital inclusion for the population and also championing digital inclusion across the rest of their peer Health Boards and NHS Trusts. They should also lead by example in ensuring that their own digital products are fully compliant with the accessibility legislation*, designed with users and developed with accessibility considered from the outset.

There is not only a moral and legal justification for DHCW to prioritise the digital inclusion of its product users but a financial one. There is substantial investment proposed by digital health and care in Wales. The value of that public finance investment will not be seen if a significant proportion of intended users are unable or unwilling to use the applications that are deployed.

DIAW calls for DHCW to recognise the importance of digitally including the Welsh population, not just patients but staff and carers as well, and their role in doing this. They must become more involved in how their "first-class digital health and care services" are going to be used by the population of Wales including the disadvantaged and hard to reach. We would propose that they could begin to do this by:

1. signing the Digital Communities Wales Digital Inclusion Charter, to show their commitment to it, as promised in the DHCW Annual Plan;
2. embedding digital inclusion into all areas of their IMTP with measurable plans for action;
3. identifying an Executive Director whose portfolio explicitly includes responsibility for promoting digital inclusion within and outside the organisation. Ideally this would be the Accountable Officer given its importance and reach;
4. identifying an Independent Member who will hold the organisation to account for its responsibilities for Digital Inclusion;
5. reviewing all of its digital products against WCAG AA accessibility standards and the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 and addressing any areas of non-compliance
6. including specific consideration of how digitally excluded users will be supported in every business case for investment in new digital products or services;
7. encouraging all Health Boards and NHS Trusts to appoint a Digital Inclusion Manager and appointing one itself; and
8. establishing strong partnerships with organisations that are experts in Digital Inclusion and accessibility In Wales.

*: Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018