Technology: Emerging insights

What are we learning about the role and use of technology across social care during COVID-19?

BUILDING OUR COLLECTIVE CARE FUTURE

1 Technology has played a central role in supporting connection and communication in a range of ways and contexts:

By enabling connection between care home residents and their loved ones during lockdown through video technologies. Social media has enabled connection to be maintained with the community and provided an opportunity to share the continuation of care home life.

"I would superspread the use of social media, [...] because it's just, it's brought people together in a way that even face to face they haven't been before"

- Care Home Perspective

By providing reassurance to families and building trust between families and staff through means of sharing information and updates.

"It's [technology] played a role in keeping them [family] calm about everything, and helped to develop trust ... doing things like video calling and frequent emails and phone calls ... the trust improved quite dramatically"

- Care Home Perspective

By supporting collaboration with wider health and social care partners to enable virtual assessments and consultations, communication among staff and access to information and support.

"I think the benefits [of technology] definitely outweigh the challenges in terms of how you are actually able to hear everybody's voice and I think it changes the dynamics which has been quite refreshing"

- Partner Perspective

2 Access to devices has been important in supporting connection and communication.

Many services have experienced donations of devices and access to resources through local or national initiatives. Further support is required to provide access to devices. Connectivity continues to be a challenge across many areas of Scotland. Investment is required with infrastructure, training and support to ensure equality of access and suitability of devices.

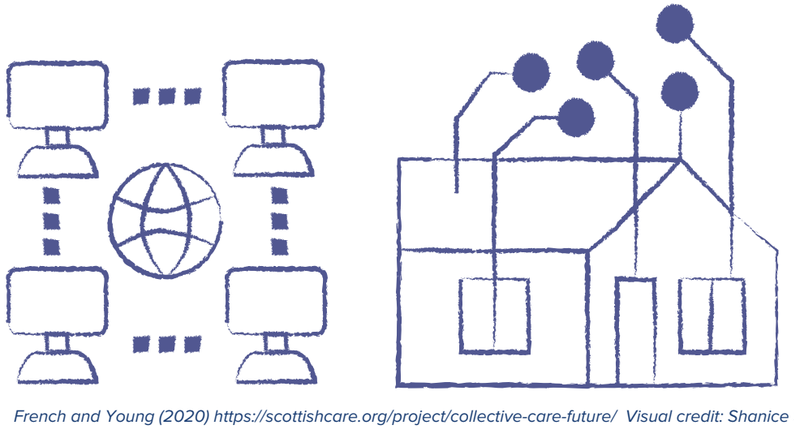
3 Technology has impacted ways of working across the social care sector.

In everyday care practice, forms and frequency of communication have been supported using technology (such as Teams, Zoom, Facetime). There are also specific examples of ways technology has enabled real time access to information about services, through virtual tours (within care homes) and recruitment processes through virtual interviews and induction. Where digital care planning has already been in place (predominantly in care at home), this has been beneficial in supporting the sharing of information among staff, relatives and people supported. There is motivation to develop this, particularly in ways that enhance sharing of data and information with different groups and organisations to reduce duplication of data requests and to enable different forms of information to be shared as appropriate.

4 The use of technology has supported the sector to be flexible and responsive with direct impacts on productivity.

Meetings have taken place virtually which has been more focused and inclusive and have supported relationship building across different organisations. This has also reduced the need to travel which has been positively received. However, this has led to higher intensity and demand in working patterns and requires balance especially in environments that are not exclusively desk based. Virtual forms of communication may not be appropriate for all settings and meeting conditions in different contexts.

5 There are also specific examples of ways in which technology is supporting wellbeing of both staff, through the use of online resources and additional opportunities to connect with colleagues and wider networks of support, and care home residents through activities and online entertainment.



6 The pandemic has 'pushed' people towards technology and this has required everyone to embrace this change at an unprecedented pace.

Previous cultural and attitudinal barriers and resistance have been largely overcome which has led to increased confidence and a willingness to learn. The potential of technology across the sector has been recognised through this experience and there is enthusiasm to continue to use technology and further explore innovative application. This requires a similar shift in mindset across the wider health and social care system with a shared commitment to effective and sustainable partnership. In addition, individual choice must be respected as technology is not a substitute for face to face or suitable for all people and situations.

"I'm surprised at how user friendly it is [technology] and I'm surprised at how well I coped and now I'm very much for it so you're speaking to the converted"

- Care at Home Perspective

7 Going forward, technology needs to provide flexibility and options within social care settings to allow for consistency and choice.

Across the sector, people are using a vast range of technology for many different purposes. There is a desire for further support and direction around evaluating technology options to understand their appropriateness and longevity within specific social care environments and services, and for individual needs (enabling personalisation and choice). There is an imperative to facilitate access to funding and dedicated innovation opportunities for the sector.

Acknowledgement:
Thank you to all our participants for sharing their experiences on the theme of technology as part of our Collective Care Future Programme.
These insights are emerging themes from our findings to date. These will be further explored and refined on completion of this phase of the project.

French and Young (2020) https://scottishcare.org/project/collective-care-future/ Visual credit: Shanice Shek