

**DRAFT DIGITAL APPROACHES IN CARE HOMES ACTION PLAN
SCOTTISH CARE SUBMISSION – November 2020**

Scottish Care welcomes this opportunity to inform the engagement process for the draft action plan Digital Approaches in Care Homes. Scottish Care are pleased to have representation on the Digital Approaches in Care Homes group and to have been involved in supporting the engagement process to ensure this includes the perspectives of both our membership and more widely across the care home community and partnership contexts. Through our recently established 'Technology Advisory Group' and our 'Building our collective care future programme' we are able to provide a robust insight into the aspirations, experiences and priorities for technology and digital in care homes. This submission is informed by our member engagement and our significant body of knowledge including our recently published 'Vision for Technology and Digital in Social Care', our 'Tech Rights' report and our 'Human Rights Charter for Technology & Digital in Social Care'.

Digital Foundations

We would like to reinforce the urgency and prioritisation of supporting connectivity in care homes and enabling access for staff, residents and family. Connectivity is a key barrier which has been repeatedly highlighted by our members across different parts of Scotland. It is the underpinning of all other aspects of the action plan and will require a national response, working with the sector to identify needs and provide the support mechanisms to ensure availability of connection to all. Going forward, we hope to see much more infrastructure around connectivity in the design, planning and resourcing of care homes in order to achieve parity with other settings. Connectivity to enable digital access should be supported and enabled in a non-discriminatory way, irrespective of age, setting or wider circumstances.

The challenges of data sharing are historic and systemic. Care Homes receive multiple requests for the same information in different formats by various parts of the system. Attempts to streamline information sharing are welcomed, however in the example of the Turas tool there are mixed responses around the benefits to care homes given that in many areas this continues to be an additional requirement on top of existing reporting mechanisms and does not currently guarantee effective feedback to care homes themselves to support reflection, continuous development and planning processes.

There is also potential to take a transformative approach to data sharing by exploring opportunities available through the use of person-held data where the person is the owner of the data held about them and can choose which information they share and with whom. Scottish Care are supporting this exploration through hosting a Data Forum bringing together perspectives from across health and social care, academia, industry and other stakeholders.

Digital Services

Scottish Care welcomes the focus on co-design and co-production of services with residents, families and staff but crucially this also needs to involve the wider parts of the system, collaborating with partners to identify new ways of working enabled by technology and digital. Digital services must not be developed in silos as this work will require involvement from all to make it a success and ensure it is fully embedded in practice. Where this hasn't been the case, care homes report challenges of using systems such as Near Me or of consistent application and awareness across different key partners, for instance GPs. This highlights that as well as engagement and partnership working to design and implement these services, they must also be supported by a collaborative communications strategy to ensure wide awareness across all parts of the systems, and to make clear the associated expectations on different partners.

The ability to engage in digital services is premised on addressing the barriers of connectivity and digital literacy but crucially, any plan to develop or implement these must always present choice and provide time to support rollout, uptake and effective use given technology and digital will not be the preferable or most appropriate option for everyone.

The action plan could be strengthened through a focus on enabling care homes' capacity for digital, both in terms of opportunities to support engagement in digital innovation and through support to care homes around investment in digital and technology.

There is also scope to develop the action plan by adopting a broader understanding of digital services and their relationship to care practice by considering the complementary role of, for example, sensors and other technologies. This requires further consideration of how staff can be enabled through the right combination of digital tools that can support them to enhance the relational care they already provide. In addition, more opportunities for care homes to be fully included in wider partnership planning around the use of technology and digital can help to ensure that plans and approaches are appropriate for the care home context.

Digital Leadership and Skills

We welcome the focus of supporting digital skills of both staff and residents and believe this to be an essential element to enable the realisation of a successful digital plan for care homes. It is important that a holistic approach to this is adopted, providing opportunities for support from and for a broad range of organisations which are cognisant of the realities of social care and existing barriers to skills development, learning and training. For staff, this includes the need to work with regulatory bodies to ensure that systems and supports relating to digital and technology are flexible, consistent and inclusive of a broad range of experiences and existing skill levels. Support and learning opportunities must also be sensitive to the fact that staff time to engage in these within their working week is often extremely limited, requiring them to make use of their own time outside of work to develop their skills. Opportunities to build in training and peer support which can more effectively be embedded in working time would be welcome. For residents, it is important to reflect the diversity that exists in terms of skill levels, needs and choice.

There is also a need to focus on supporting friends and relatives of residents, particularly in the current situation where a lot of communication and connection with care homes is happening through digital means. It is important to give consideration to the range of skills and confidence levels that exist and recognise that these forms of communication may not be familiar to all.

Scottish Care welcomes the development of an action plan for care homes, primarily in response to COVID-19. However we want to reinforce the need for longevity and continued investment in the future exploration of digital and technology, and the sustainability of the technologies explored. In addition, we also wish to stress the critical need for human rights to underpin any exploration of technology and digital in care homes and the need for a rights-based approach to its design, development, implementation and scale.

As we outline in 'A Vision for Technology & Digital in Social Care' (2020):

"It is essential that the developments of technology and digital in health and social care move away from a continued focus on the needs of the service and system. Defining, designing and developing the role and use of technology and digital in social care needs to be framed by the aspirations of the person, the care context and situation, and the intention, outcomes and appropriateness of the role of technology and digital before considering the functionality and form of the resulting technology/digital enabler or support. Specifically in the context of social care, we also call for more design and development that begins with social care at the outset, emerging from a process of understanding, identification and exploration to meet the needs, challenges and aspirations of the people and the sector, rather than be ported, modified or adapted from an initial health context focus and perspective. In addition, implementing and embedding technology and digital in the context of social care involves exploring the infrastructure, dynamics and rhythms of care practice to establish where technology and digital can augment and empower, and in what situations it is appropriate or not."

We also look forward to being involved in the development of an action plan for Care at Home and Housing Support, which we hope will be considered with equal priority. It is critical that this is contextualised and tailored to the technology and digital needs and opportunities within a homecare context, both of people who access this form of support and the services and staff who provide it.

For further information, please contact:

Becca Young – Policy & Research Manager, Scottish Care – becca.young@scottishcare.org

Dr Tara French – Technology and Digital Innovation Lead, Scottish Care – tara.french@scottishcare.org

6th November 2020