

## NHS England Board meeting

**Paper Title:** Update on the NHS App and plans for development

**Agenda item:** 6 (Public session)

**Report by:** Dr Tim Ferris, National Director of Transformation  
Emma McLachlan, Director of Digital Experience

**Paper type:** For discussion

---

### Organisation Objective:

NHS Mandate from Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	Statutory item	<input type="checkbox"/>
NHS Long Term Plan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Governance	<input type="checkbox"/>
NHS People Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>		

---

### Executive summary:

The NHS App is now a mainstream part of how people access health and care services in England. It was the most downloaded free iPhone App in the Apple App store in 2021, and has recorded over 28 million sign-ups – the equivalent of 63% of the English adult population.

Plans for adding functionality to the App and associated platforms have recently accelerated in order to leverage the opportunity that widespread usage of the NHS App offers to enhance people's access to care and their relationship with the NHS.

---

### Action required:

The Board is asked to note the progress made in the year since we last presented our customer experience and delivery strategy, and to consider the accelerated roadmap for delivery.

---

### Background and current patient offer

1. Usage of the NHS App has grown significantly since January 2021, from 2 million users to over 28 million registered accounts now. While this has been driven in large part by the availability of the NHS Covid Pass through the App, encouragingly we are also seeing an increasing number of users adopting other services available, such as ordering repeat prescriptions. Just over a third of all users log in in any given month, 1.9m repeat prescriptions were ordered via the NHS App in May 2022 (the largest ever number), and all transactions were on an upward trend in May.
2. Today, the NHS App provides access to:

#### **Universal services available to all users**

- NHS Covid Pass

- Management of organ donation preferences
- Setting and management of data and information sharing preferences
- Management of first hospital or clinic appointment via the electronic referral service (Where this is being used by the provider)

**Primary care services, available to some users where these have been enabled by the GP practice**

- Appointment management (low availability)
- GP record (medium availability)
- Pharmacy nomination and repeat prescription ordering (wide availability)
- Online consultation services (medium availability)

**Locally procured services available to some users, depending on where they live**

- Personal health record for primary and secondary care, which may include access to secondary care appointments, messages and care plans (low availability currently – moving to medium later in the year)

3. We work hard to understand what users think of our digital channels, ensuring we are designing inclusive services that can be used by everyone. We undertake user-centred design processes and significant user research, and we are building out our ability to measure experience of the channels and transactions. We know that when services are well-connected and the elements listed above have been enabled by their local services, people report positive feedback about their experience; however, where these elements have not been enabled the App clearly does not currently provide as useful a service.
4. We have a baseline understanding of usage of the National Digital Channels (the NHS App as well as NHS.uk) and are working hard to evolve this beyond individual transaction usage to understand adoption and retention. For example, it appears that there is a correlation between low registration rates for the NHS App and an area's deprivation score, suggesting we need to do more work to understand barriers to access and the impact on health inequalities. We have a roadmap of work to improve our understanding of how the National Digital Channels are used.

**Plans for improving the patient offer**

5. We have an ambitious, accelerated and reprioritised roadmap for this financial year across both the NHS App and NHS website. This includes a focus on delivering features and functionality that will have the biggest impact on people, most quickly. See Annex A for the full roadmap, which was also set out in the recent [Digital Health and Social Care Plan](#). Highlights of the planned patient offer include:

**Manage my health**

- Start to receive messages sent by my GP in a secure inbox accessed through the NHS App; with in-app notifications to let me know when there is a message to read

- Start to receive notifications and messages via the NHS App for my Covid-19 vaccine appointments
- Start to view and manage hospital appointments (if my local hospital is participating)
- Automatically see new information in my GP record

### **Stay well**

- Access enhanced mental health information about services for children and young people, parents and carers
- Use the online Heart Age tool to calculate my estimated heart age score and get advice and guidance as to how I can improve my score based on managing risk factors such as diet, cholesterol and exercise
- Book my Covid-19 vaccine or booster using the NHS App as well as through the NHS Website

### **Get well**

- Access my GP's online triage and message-based consultation offer (if enabled for my practice)
- See how long I may have to wait for an appointment at my local hospital and access relevant advice to make healthy choices while I wait (if my local hospital is participating)
- Get support for myself and my partner in the perinatal period to find information on what mental health services are available, how to access them and what to expect.

## **Considerations for delivery**

6. We presented to the Boards last May and July, discussing and gaining advocacy for:
  - i. A vision of a 'digital NHS' – accessed via a single front door that enables people to get well, stay well and manage their health. We will give them easy access to their information, services they are eligible for, tools to help with prevention and act as a trusted communication tool between people and the NHS.
  - ii. The potential of a 'customer experience' approach – as outlined above – to contribute to efficiencies in delivery of care, improved health outcomes and improved patient experience.
  - iii. Some of the main challenges to swift delivery, including; how we prioritise and deliver the strategy, how we embed a digital culture in leadership and make digital a first thought, rather than an afterthought, how we create a stable workforce with the right skills and capabilities, how we govern and fund our delivery, how our approach to data needs to change; and how we set ourselves up most effectively for delivery.
7. Since then, we have made good strides and in addition to the ambitious roadmap of work summarised above and outlined in Annex A, we have addressed the following challenges previously outlined:

- i. **Leadership** – Professor Jonathan Benger has been appointed as Portfolio Lead for Citizen Health Technology and he will have greater visibility of delivery timelines and roadmaps across other programmes of work, upon which the national channels are dependent to be successful.
  - ii. **Governance** – We have set up a Digital Citizen Board, that will set the vision and proposition for citizen experience across all digital channels; review, validate and prioritise new commissions; agree shared outcomes and monitor progress; identify common components and synergies to achieve common goals; identify and mitigate risks, and manage dependencies across and between programmes
  - iii. **Priorities and strategy** – we have aligned with OHID, the NHSE & NHSD SLT around the citizen experience vision, and are working to enhance our definition of this
  - iv. **Data** – We now have an ambitious roadmap of work dedicated to data & management information, gaining a deeper understanding of our channels and their impact on long term health outcomes. There are some structural and operational issues we need to resolve to get access to this, but these should be worked through this financial year.
  - v. **Delivery** – We have agreed our roadmap of work for this financial year and beyond, and are organising our teams to enable the most effective delivery.
8. The development of the National Digital Channels will enable us to meet the obligations set out in the Long Term Plan and the objectives set out in the Digital Health & Social Care Plan. Effective delivery is critical to giving people more ready access to their health information and care.
9. There remain some areas of challenge that need to be worked through in order to enable swift delivery of a connected, digitised health service for people:
- i. **Clarity around the role of the national channels:** We will establish the future proposition (3-5 year view) for the App (and the NHS website) in supporting a range of service types and user needs including pathway management, standardised communication, personalised prevention, access to information and records, personalised medicine, clinical research and more.
  - ii. **A clear view of delivery and dependent programme timelines:** This will be helped by the Digital Citizen Board, and should enable a more streamlined view of digital service transformation, and what we can make available through the national digital channels; and when.
  - iii. **An improved model for digital access to primary care services,** that takes account of the requirement for GP practices to be able to triage and manage capacity. Steps have been taken towards this, such as the agreement to provide prospective access to GP record by November 2022, but further work needs to be done to optimise the use of digital channel to enhance access to primary care.
  - iv. **Creating stability and continuity for our workforce:** all organisational and functional mergers carry risk of creating uncertainty, so as we bring together NHS England and NHS Digital teams we will continue to

- communicate and engage extensively with staff across both organisations.
- v. **Clarity on how locally commissioned services should best be integrated in order to provide consistent access for people nationally.** The Platform and Integration strategy underway will go some way to address this, but we need to continue discussions around how we implement a scalable solution(s) that meets the needs of people and the system.
  - vi. **National marketing campaigns.** Ensure the NHS App (and NHS website) are front and centre of all future outward-facing communications where there is a clear national benefit to embed ease of access to a range of NHS services via our national channels in the public mind e.g. Covid boosters or flu vaccinations each winter

### Next steps

- 10. We will continue to work through the items above in order to be able to fully leverage the opportunity that an almost universally adopted NHS App provides.

## **Annex A: National Digital Channels Roadmap**

### **Manage my health - I can:**

From June 2022

- See an enhanced range of services my local pharmacies can offer me

From September 2022

- Start to receive messages sent by my GP in a secure inbox accessed through the NHS App; with in-app notifications to let me know when there is a message to read
- Start to view and manage hospital appointments (if my local hospital is participating)

From December 2022

- Start to receive notifications and messages via the NHS App for my Covid-19 vaccine appointments
- Start to be alerted by my GP that my prescription has been dispatched to a local pharmacy
- Find my way around the NHS App more easily with an improved design
- Access my online NHS profile where I can manage my contact details
- See new information in my GP record and request my historical information directly from my practice

From March 2023

- Register with a GP practice online (if my practice is participating)
- Find more information online about what sexual health services are nearby and the choices available to me.
- Start to access hospital correspondence - including clinic letter and pre-consultation questionnaires (if my local hospital is participating)
- Start to receive alerts, messages and notifications regarding secondary care appointments through the NHS App (if my local hospital is participating)
- Access my child's health record online, if I'm a parent or legal guardian

From March 2024

- Access my NHS vaccination history online
- Start to make enhancements specific to me on my online NHS profile, including the ability to update my postal address
- Access the health record of the person I care for, where I have the correct authority
- Register with the NHS App, even though I'm not registered with a GP
- Give feedback on my experience when accessing NHS services
- Share my health and care information with trusted individuals

From March 2025 & beyond

- View all my test results easily and consistently
- Review how my data has been used to plan services and contribute to medical research

- Exercise greater control over how my data is used by being able to opt out of specific uses of my data if I choose, once I have been informed of the potential benefits
- Access services that are relevant to me, including video consultations

### **Stay well - I can:**

#### From June 2022

- Find more information on women's health including new menopause content
- Access enhanced mental health information about services for children and young people, parents and carers

#### From September 2022

- Use the online Heart Age tool to calculate my estimated heart age score and get advice and guidance as to how I can improve my score based on managing risk factors such as diet, cholesterol and exercise

#### From December 2022

- Book my Covid-19 vaccine or booster using the NHS App as well as through the NHS Website
- Access more health services using my NHS login (up to 100 services nationally)
- Find enhanced information online about my local dentists and opticians and see what services they can offer me.

#### From March 2023

- Access digital tools to help me track my blood pressure and share this with my GP
- Access more information and support for new parents

#### From March 2024

- Book a flu vaccination appointment using the NHS App or NHS.uk
- Receive alerts and notifications regarding health checks and screening services through the NHS App
- Be signposted to NICE approved digital health products that might be relevant to me - for example to help me stop smoking or manage a long-term condition
- Access a digital health check that highlights my risks of getting the biggest preventable conditions, such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, and points me to tools, support and actions I can take to reduce my risks

#### From March 2025 & beyond

- Be invited to use novel diagnostics to detect cancer early
- Access public health digital tools - and, where I choose to, have this linked back to my online NHS profile
- Link my wearable devices and other health-related data to my online NHS profile

## **Get well - I can:**

From June 2022

- Access my GP's online triage and message-based consultation offer (if enabled for my practice)
- Find, in one place, information on perinatal mental health services available near me including those I can use for crisis support
- Get support for myself and my partner in the perinatal period to find information on what mental health services are available, how to access them and what to expect.

From December 2022

- See how long I may have to wait for an appointment at my local hospital and access relevant advice to make healthy choices while I wait (if my local hospital is participating)

From March 2023

- See more ratings and reviews of local NHS services

From March 2024

- Be notified that I might be eligible to take part in a clinical trial and access more information about it
- Be supported at critical moments of transition when I might need to start to access social care - for example following a stroke, bad fall or a dementia diagnosis
- Use my NHS login to access NICE approved digital health products that my GP or care team have recommended to me, for example to help my anxiety and depression, or to better manage my diabetes or cardiovascular disease

From March 2025 & beyond

- Book into direct access diagnostic clinics, through integration with 111 online
- Order an at-home diagnostic for a range of blood or urine tests
- Choose to access 111 online through the NHS App, so the clinical triage has a rich picture of my health history - including my recently uploaded latest health data from my wearable device
- Join registers of people willing to participate in clinical trials so I can be contacted proactively
- Share my genomic profile so this can be taken into account by my care teams
- Have a joined up view of key my health and social care information accessible through a single log in