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.

"[The internet is] an endless source of information, communication and entertainment, it brings the world to me and I love it".
92 year old woman quoted in *Later life in a digital world*, Age UK

Key statistics

56%

of people aged 75+ have not used the internet in the last 3 months

20%

of people aged 65-74 have not used the internet in the last 3 months

3.7million

people aged 65+ have never used the internet

Later life online and offline

Age UK has long been aspirational and positive about the benefits that digital inclusion can bring, including practical help (e.g. online shopping and finding information), improving the ability to stay connected (e.g. using social media and free video calls), and following hobbies and interests. However, many older people are not online. The latest figures show that 56 per cent of people aged 75+ and 20 per cent of those aged 65-74 in the UK have not used the internet in the last three months, whereas

virtually all (99 per cent) younger people aged 16-34 use the internet. There are also a further 6 per cent of adults aged 75+ who have used the internet in the past, but not in the last three months, suggesting that some give up.[i]

In addition, older people are less likely to be using the internet via the newest technology. Across all age groups, more than four in ten (42 per cent) internet users, including nearly two-thirds of 16-34 year olds and 44 per cent of 35-54s, regard their smartphones as their most important device for accessing the internet. For those aged 55+, fewer (13 per cent) consider smartphones their most important device for internet access.[ii]

When older people are asked why they are not online, the most likely response is that they don't need it, or it's not for someone like them. Other reasons include: security issues, cost, lack of equipment, and lack of skills.[iii]

Age UK's report *Later life in a digital world* provides more information about life for older people who do not use the internet. While many say they do not want it, or do not need to use it, there are times when some feel it is getting more difficult to live in an increasingly digital world.[iv] However, the barriers to getting online can outweigh any perceived benefits.

> "I have a (dial) telephone and I can read and write – totally adequate and without stress and wasting time pushing buttons".
> Man 65-74 quoted in *Later life in a digital world*, Age UK

Access to services for people who do not use the internet

Although many older people are not currently online, public and commercial organisations are increasingly providing services digitally. Those who use the internet often expect to do things digitally and service providers, including local authorities, are also under pressure to find savings and increase efficiency. However, moves to digital access can make it harder for those who are not online. Age UK rang 100 local councils about claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction and found that around two-fifths said this had to be done online, with some only offering limited help to do this.[v]

Under the Equality Act 2010, service providers have a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments enabling customers and staff to access their IT channels and applications. The Equalities Act 2010 also imposes an additional Public Sector Equality Duty on public bodies to eliminate discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity for groups with protected

characteristics (such as age). In practice, this means that public bodies are required to pay due consideration to age equality in making decisions and developing policies, and if they fail to do so they can be legally challenged.

Initiatives to increase digital engagement

A key challenge is ensuring that households in all parts of the country, including rural areas, can access reliable broadband. The Government has delivered its commitment to reach 95 per cent of homes and businesses in the UK with superfast broadband (24Mbps or faster). It is now bringing in a Universal Service Obligation (USO) to give everyone the legal right to request high speed broadband connection (10Mbps or faster) by 2020. This right will be subject to a 'reasonable cost threshold', which means some of the more isolated, rural homes could continue to lack a good connection. Ofcom has reported that 1.1 million premises (4%) do not have broadband connections that meet the minimum level proposed by the USO, rising to 17 per cent of premises in rural areas.[vi] However, not everyone who has the right to request a connection does so. Affordability is not the only barrier, many do not see it as a priority.

> **One Digital**
> Age UK is part of One Digital, a collaborative digital partnership working with four other organisations, recruiting 4,000 digital champions to deliver basic digital skills support to people across the UK.[vii]

Security online

The ONS estimates that in the year ending Dec 2017, adults experienced 1.4 million incidents of computer misuse crime, including computer virus and personal information hacking related crimes.[vii] Given that older people are less likely to access the internet regularly and are less likely to have the IT skills required to keep them safe online, preventing the exploitation of older people online should be a government priority.

Public Policy Proposals

- Older people should be encouraged and supported to get online, if they are able to and can afford to do so.
- Central and local government must meet their obligation to provide public services, irrespective of whether or not someone is online. People who are offline must have the same opportunities and should be able to continue to access services in a way that suits their needs without needing to rely on others.
- Consumers who are not online must also continue to have access to essential services provided by the private sector, such as banking, energy, water and communications. Industry regulators should meet their Public Sector Equality Duty and ensure that moving services online does not disadvantage those who are digitally excluded.
- 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 continue to work with consumer organisations to ensure appropriate assisted digital support to access government services
- Access to the internet should be treated as a utility service. The Government must recognise the significant cost of getting and staying online for some older people and ensure that nobody is digitally excluded on cost grounds.
- Older people should be supported to get online and stay online and also to extend their digital capability. This will require significant investment and on-going support; Government must provide grant funding for programmes to promote digital inclusion. Savings through moving to digital services are a possible source of funding.
- Employers and training providers should ensure that older workers have sufficient digital skills to be successful in modern workplaces.
- Older people must not be placed in a disadvantaged position when booking GP and hospital appointments if they cannot access an online booking system.

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

Further information

[i] Internet Users ONS, May 2018 https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/internetusersintheuk2018

[ii] Communications Market Report, OFCOM, August 2017

[iii] https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/media-literacy-research/adults/adults-media-use-and-attitudes.

[iv] Later life in a digital world, Age UK, 2015, accessible at www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Research/Later_life_in_a_digital_world.pdf?dtrk=true

[v] https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb_may18_everything_is_online_nowadays.pdf

[vi]http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-8146

[vii]
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2017#computer-misuse-offences-show-year-on-year-fall