Parliamentary Briefing: Protecting older people from digital exclusion
June 2025

Summary

In an increasingly online world, many older people are struggling to access essential public services. Those who don't or cannot use the internet are at an immediate disadvantage; missing out on vital information, struggling to book appointments or make applications – often with devastating consequences.

Age UK welcomes the Digital Inclusion Action Plan - many older people want to learn more digital skills, and this will hopefully help them. However, we are worried there is little defined action to help those **who cannot or do not want to get online to be able to access the support and services they need to live well.**

> **What Age UK would like to see:**
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> The Government must ensure that all public services offer and promote an affordable, easy to access, offline way of reaching and using them, to ensure no one is 'offline and overlooked'.
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> The Digital Inclusion Action Plan, a promising initiative, should be developed into a fully-funded strategy with meaningful action to protect offline access to services.
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> The funding for inclusion programmes associated with the Action Plan should support the needs of older people e.g., by funding proven voluntary sector initiatives like Age UK's 'Digital Champions' scheme.

Background

In the digital age, everything from accessing services and shopping, to socialising and entertainment is taking place on the internet. **Yet 4.7 million people aged 65+ don't have the basic skills needed to use the internet successfully.**

The result is everyday tasks becoming really challenging and at times, impossible. At Age UK, we often hear of particular challenges in the following areas:

- **Accessing healthcare** - many older people are struggling to book health appointments without being able to use online systems or smartphone apps.
- **Council Services** - in some areas council services like Blue Badges, social care, financial support and car parking, are only accessible online.
- **Accessing financial help from DWP and local authorities** – people are increasingly encouraged or expected to apply for benefits online, which threatens to leave older people who are offline without essential financial support.
- **Banking** - the move to digital banking and branch closures is making it difficult for people to manage their money if they do not trust online banking or have the necessary skills.

Many older people are keen to learn more digital skills and should be supported to do so. Age UK's 'Digital Champions' programme is just one example of a digital inclusion scheme that supports older people to gain digital skills, build confidence and stay safe online.

There will always be some people who will never be online due to a lack of confidence or skills. Others are worried about scams and fraud, or are simply not interested. Health issues, the cost of equipment and poor connectivity can also be significant barriers.

> **What older people have told us:**
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> *"I do emails because it is very straightforward, but that's as far as I go… Not that I won't do it, I just cannot."* – Delphine
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> *"I began to learn to use the internet, but I was also losing my sight. My teacher would ask me "can you see that?" I said I don't know what you're talking about."* – Eutal
>
> *"I feel vulnerable every time I switch my iPad on. It's just not safe. The fraudsters are always ahead."* - Judith, 72

Whatever the reason, those **older people who cannot or do not want to get online should still be able to access the support and services they need to live well.**

Digital Inclusion Action Plan

In February 2025, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) launched the Digital Inclusion Action Plan: First Steps, which sets out DSIT's approach to digital inclusion.

The Action Plan aims to tackle digital exclusion with a particular focus on five groups of people, including older people. It identifies four areas of focus for the Government's work:

- Opening up opportunities through skills
- Breaking down barriers to digital services
- Tackling data and device poverty
- Building confidence

Age UK welcomes the Action Plan as an opportunity to do more to enable those who want to go online to do so.

However, more must be done to help those people who will never be online. The Action Plan is missing meaningful action to help these people. They shouldn't have to wait for help. No matter what initiatives exist, there will always be some people who remain offline; there must be recognition that exclusion among pensioners is not an issue that can ever be entirely solved. It is imperative that everyone in this position – for now and evermore – is enabled to take a full part in society.

What Age UK would like to see

- **All public services**, including the NHS, council services and other nationally provided public services, **to offer and promote an affordable, easy-to-access, offline way of reaching and using them**. The Government must ensure that it is a clear guarantee that is enforceable.

- **More support to enable people who would like to be computer users to get online**, including by funding voluntary sector initiatives like Age UK's 'Digital Champions' scheme.
- **The Government to develop the Digital Inclusion Action Plan into a fully funded strategy** with meaningful actions to protect access to offline services.
- **The Government to protect access to cash and banking** by:
  - Changing the legal requirements to ensure that banks maintain face-to-face services.
  - Working with the banking industry, retailers and local governments to ensure that consumers can continue to purchase essential goods and services with cash.

Parliamentarians: What can you do now?

Parliamentarians have a key role to play in protecting older people from digital exclusion. We suggest that the following things would have a large impact:

- **Meet with us** to discuss digital exclusion in more detail and learn how our policy recommendations would support your constituents.
- **Support our '[Offline and Overlooked]'** campaign by signing and sharing our [petition] calling for fair and equal access to services.
- **Use the Chamber** to push the Government into thinking more deeply about the measures needed to support those who will never be online.
- **Ask the Minister** for Data Protection and Telecoms about the Government's consideration of the need to protect offline access to services.
- **Champion your local area** by finding out about digital inclusion services and pushing for greater funding.
- **Sign up as one of our Age Champions** and pledge to champion older people in Parliament.
- **Join the APPG for Ageing & Older People** to work on cross-party issues affecting older people.

Get in touch

If you have any questions or would like to meet to discuss the issues outlined in this briefing further, please contact [publicaffairs@ageuk.org.uk].