

Improve digital literacy amongst disabled people.

Top Line

Access to digital technology is uneven, and those with arguably the most to gain from using digital services are often the least likely to be able to do so. The Welsh Government's *Internet use and digital skills (National Survey for Wales) 2018-19* found that only 79% of people with a long-standing limiting illness, disability or infirmity use the Internet, compared with 93% of those without such a condition.¹ This imbalance needs to be addressed.

Key Asks

We are calling for all political parties to commit to Increased funding for the provision of training, ICT and Wi-Fi equipment to disabled people in Wales to improve digital inclusion and tackle loneliness and isolation.

Context

An important part of the response to coronavirus has been the use of online services. More people are working from home, and more public services such as education and healthcare are being delivered online. Digital technology also provides a vital solution to the sense of loneliness and isolation created by the lockdown.

But access to digital technology is uneven, and those with arguably the most to gain from using digital services are often the least likely to be able to do so.

To its credit, the Welsh Government has committed to:

- providing funding to buy at least 1000 new tablets for health and care environments, with the devices to be sent to care homes, hospices and ward settings;
- support the NHS Wales video consulting service, which is being rolled out rapidly across the Welsh NHS;
- provide £3 million to support digitally-excluded learners, with local authorities directed to use the funding to provide digitally excluded learners with repurposed school devices and 4G MiFi connectivity.²

However, these measures need to go further.

¹ Welsh Government, National Survey for Wales, 2018-19: Internet use and digital skills, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-09/internet-use-and-digital-skills-national-survey-wales-april-2018-march-2019-207.pdf>

² Robin Wilkinson (Senedd Research Service), In brief: Coronavirus: digital inclusion, <https://seneddresearch.blog/2020/05/19/coronavirus-digital-inclusion/>

Background info

Disabled people have highlighted to us³ the value of:

- training in terms of raising confidence with financial tasks, such as online grocery shopping; identifying potential scams; remaining safe online; and reporting online hate crimes;
- making ICT equipment available 'on-loan' so that individuals can better evaluate what equipment suits their needs;
- making Wi-Fi routers available 'on-loan' so that individuals who have not previously utilised digital technologies get an opportunity to try it out, and be less daunting.

³ Primarily through feedback around our Swansea-based programme, Go-Digital.