Grantmaking
Powered by SCVO

Digital Health & Care Scotland

Digital Pioneers Progress Fund 2024

Fund Impact Report
July 2024-March 2025

The Fund

The Scottish Government's Digital Health and Care Division Digital Inclusion programme, delivered in partnership with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), focuses on digital inclusion in mental health and housing.

The Digital Pioneers Progress Fund provided continuation funding to organisations supported by the Digital Pioneers Fund. The fund focused on strengthening and developing pathways and referral routes with health and care services, and expanding existing digital inclusion models to enable people to connect with health and care supports digitally.

Funded organisations were expected to meet the following fund outcomes:

- People will have increased awareness of digital options for self-care, self-management approaches and community supports and connections that can benefit their health and care needs.
- People will have improved digital skills and confidence, enabling them to access and connect with digital services and resources appropriate to their health and care needs.
- Mental Health/Housing organisations will be better equipped to connect with health and social care services through digital inclusion support (for example this may include but is not limited to: understanding referral routes and pathways into digital health and care services/supports; understanding digital inclusion models specific to the health or care service and the people supported; building partnerships with health and care services to support awareness and prioritisation of digital inclusion in service/organisational policy).
- Organisations will contribute learning to better understand the value of digital inclusion in supporting access to mental health/housing/health and social care services/supports and the impacts for individuals and services/organisations.

Maximum grant award available

£27,500

Organisations could apply for up to £25,000 over 6 months, working with people at risk of digital exclusion and participating in a Community of Learning (COL) to explore sustainable and best practice models for digital inclusion. Awardee's received a £2,500 contribution for engagement within the required COL in addition to their awarded amount. The maximum grant award available was £27,500.

Funded Projects

In total, 12 applications were awarded funding with the total requested amount of £302,477. The total amount awarded was £307,477, inclusive of the £2,500 payment for each organisation to cover the cost of participating in the monthly Community of Learning sessions.

Funded projects

12

**Total amount awarded**

£307,477

Average amount awarded

£25,623

Project Delivery

In total, 12 funded projects delivered activity across 8 local authority areas in Scotland. Of these, 3 projects operated across more than one local authority area. Delivery spanned 6 NHS Health Board areas and 7 Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) areas.

Find out about each funded project in our interactive Google map here
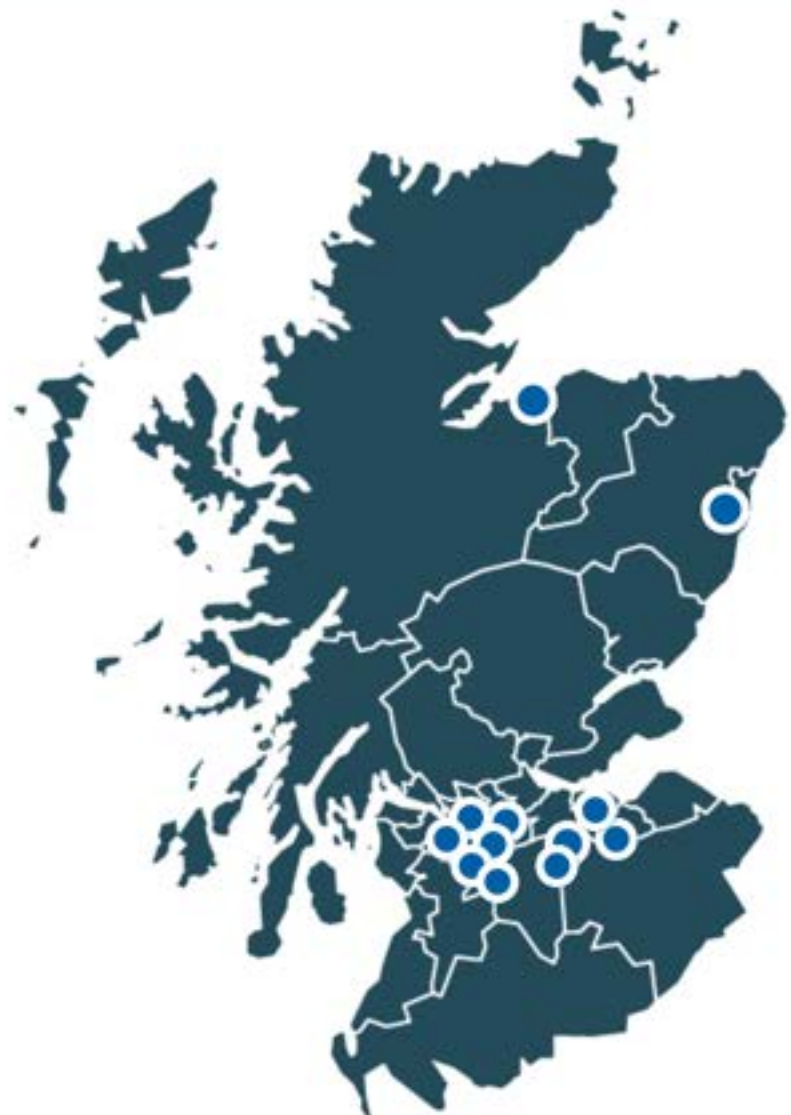
Beneficiaries and Device Distribution

Projects delivered activity between July and December 2024, with some organisations receiving no-cost extensions to continue delivery and follow-up support through to March 2025.

In total, 12 projects reported that 250 staff and volunteers supported 1,426 people through digital inclusion activities. Projects collectively distributed 96 laptops, 89 tablets, and 72 phones, alongside 195 connectivity packages and 7 other digital devices. These resources enabled individuals to build digital skills and confidence, improving their ability to access and engage with health and care supports digitally.

The Beneficiaries

1426

Direct beneficiaries estimated to be supported

250

Staff and volunteers estimated to be supported

Devices Distributed

72

Phones

96

Laptops

89

Tablets

195

Connectivity

Types of Projects

The table below provides a project summary and awarded amount for each organisation.

The Progress Fund supported projects delivering practical support to improve people's ability to access health services digitally and also gained a deeper understanding of barriers faced by those most digitally excluded groups.

Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
Aberdeen Foyer	Aberdeen Foyer's Foyers Connect project explored embedding Digital Inclusion support across its services linked to health and care in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. Partnering with GP surgeries and integrated health services, they offered Digital Inclusion support through outreach, self-management programs, personal development initiatives, and Virtual Reality. The project aimed to enhance digital skills, improve access to digital health tools, streamline referral pathways, and upskill staff, leveraging existing community knowledge and connections. The project supported 114 people and 31 staff and volunteers.	£27,500
Carr Gomm	Carr Gomm's Bridge or Barriers research project aimed to deepen understanding of vulnerable adults' experiences and perceptions of digital health and care. Through focus groups and one-to-one conversations, the project explored attitudes, demonstrated digital platforms, and gathered insights to shape guidance and improve accessibility and engagement with digital health services. The project supported 27 people and 25 staff and volunteers.	£25,903

Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
Cyrenians	Cyrenians' Digital Inclusion Health and Care project aimed to expand current digital inclusion support for people living with moderate to severe mental health conditions in Edinburgh. The project helped people to access a range of digital health and care tools, resources, and services. The project increased awareness and use of self-management tools, improved digital access to health and care benefits, and enhanced referral routes through Community Link Workers and GP practices. The project supported 21 people and 5 staff and volunteers.	£27,199
LinkLiving	LinkLiving's Edinburgh Digital Support Service provided young people in supported living with devices and digital inclusion support, improving access to financial, employment, health, and wellbeing resources. Through collaborating with referral partners in health and care the project improved access and support, which allowed young people to better engage with relevant health and care services digitally. The project supported 33 young people and 4 staff members.	£27,450
Mhor Collective	Mhor Collective's Mind the Gap: Saheliya Partnership Support began to develop a digital inclusion model that supports female refugees and asylum seekers impacted by trauma. The project assessed and developed essential digital skills across Saheilya's Glasgow service, provided digital skills training, co-designed a digital champion programme and handbook for Saheliya, provided digital mentoring support and an introduction to digital inclusion work for the senior leadership team to support longevity and sustainability. The project supported 21 people and 5 staff and volunteers.	£19,700

Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
Moray Wellbeing Hub	Moray Wellbeing Hub's Digital Inclusion Pathways to Health and Social Care project provided devices and digital support to those affected by ill health, carers, people experiencing homelessness, and victims of crime and abuse in Moray. Partnering with Health and Social Care Moray, See Me, and SACRO, the project offered digital training for staff, peer-led support, and signposting to digital health services. The project supported 604 people and 31 staff and volunteers.	£27,462
Prospect Community Housing	Prospect Community Housing's Link Up project supported tenants and residents in Wester Hailes living with disabilities or long-term health conditions by partnering with the local GP practice, the Health Agency, and Community Link workers. The project offered digital inclusion activities through one-to-one and drop-in sessions at local venues, aiming to boost digital skills and confidence. This improved access to self-management tools, eConsult, and other digital health resources. The project also expanded referral pathways and leveraged partnerships within the Living Well Wester Hailes network to explore additional referral routes. The project supported 33 people and 26 staff and volunteers.	£19,354
Queens Cross Housing Association	Queens Cross Housing Association's Digital Spaces in Community Places project partnered with Won Connect to expand digital inclusion activities. The project offered training and support to improve access to online health services and resources for digitally excluded people in Glasgow. Collaborating with local health centres and pharmacies, the project improved access to digital health tools, provided digital inclusion training for health service staff, and enhanced referral pathways for digital inclusion support. The project supported 50 people and 30 staff and volunteers.	£25,298

Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
Saheliya	Saheliya's Mind the Gap project collaborated with female refugees and asylum seekers impacted by trauma to address digital inclusion barriers. The project gathered evidence on challenges in accessing health services digitally, explored best practices, and enhanced referral pathways and available digital inclusion support for marginalized women. The project improved mainstream understanding, highlighting community-specific needs, and provided digital skills training for staff supporting women to enhance uptake and access to appropriate health and care services, supports, and resources. The project supported 17 people and 11 staff and volunteers.	£27,387
Scottish Action for Mental Health	Scottish Action for Mental Health Digital Mental Health Self-Care project supported the development of digital self-care plans for people living with severe and enduring mental health conditions. The project allowed staff to explore plans with service users which included mood tracking, resource libraries, and self-assessment tools, promoting digital self-care and community support awareness. The project aimed to continue to improve digital inclusion support, track user engagement, and link technology-enabled care to proactive mental health support and care plans. The project supported 311 people and 92 staff and volunteers.	£27,387

Organisation Name	Project Summary	Amount Awarded
Shettleston Housing Association	Shettleston Housing Association and Fuse Youth Café's "Shettleston Does Digital" project offered digital inclusion support to tenants and residents at risk of exclusion. Building on their existing programme, the project developed activities to provide essential digital skills for self-management of health conditions, access to online health information, and use of digital health tools. The project improved routes to health and care services digitally by developing new connections with local health services. The project supported 88 people and 10 staff and volunteers.	£26,940
Simon Community Scotland	Simon Community Scotland's Get Connected Health Project supported street-focused individuals experiencing homelessness in accessing health and care services. Partnering with The Access Place Edinburgh, the project enhanced their digital inclusion model to address the unique needs and challenges faced by this population. A digital link worker collaborated across services to provide both in-person and digital health and care support. The project supported support 20 people and 4 staff and volunteers.	£26,897
		£307,477

Project Insights

Across the Digital Pioneers Progress Fund, projects demonstrated how digital inclusion can become a catalyst for improving health and wellbeing, especially for those facing multiple and complex barriers. The collective learning from the fund revealed several key outcomes:

Improved awareness of health and care supports
People became more aware of trusted online resources like NHS Inform, Near Me, Sleepio, and Breathing Space, supporting greater health self-management.

Increased digital confidence
Participants reported enhanced skills and confidence in booking GP appointments, managing prescriptions, joining online wellbeing groups, and using mental health apps.

Stronger cross-sector partnerships
Projects built new referral pathways with health services, Community Link Workers, social care teams, and local authorities to embed digital access into wider care journeys.

Embedded digital support models
Organisations shifted digital inclusion from standalone training into an integrated part of mental health recovery, tenancy sustainment, employability, and wellbeing services.

Highlighting system gaps
Projects surfaced critical challenges, including the need for simpler, more accessible digital health platforms, culturally sensitive approaches, and consistent device/connectivity access.

The insights gathered through the Fund reinforce that trauma-informed, relationship-based models are key to sustainable digital health inclusion and that community-rooted organisations play a vital role in bridging digital health inequalities.

The reflections below capture this learning in the words of the funded organisations:

Aberdeen Foyer
Building Skills Through Trauma-Informed Support

"Through patient, trauma-informed support, we helped participants access GP services through eConsult and digital mental health tools like the Stress and Anxiety Companion. One participant shared that having these resources 'gave them a sense of control' over their health for the first time. We learned that blending emotional support with practical skills is critical for sustainable digital inclusion."

Simon Community Scotland
Community and Connection as the Foundation

"The greatest success for us was building community through digital connection. Convening a small group tackling specific needs around health and wellbeing helped participants trust us to introduce digital tools. While the project timeframe was short, the work around digital health checks and appropriate device provision is already showing longer-term impacts for individuals tackling isolation and addiction recovery."

Moray Wellbeing
Theme: Building partnerships and resources locally

"Creating informal, easy-access spaces like Foggies drop-in completely changed engagement levels. People told us they wouldn't have walked into a job centre or formal digital session but felt comfortable asking for help over a coffee. We have seen participants using NHS Inform, setting up Google Maps for safer travel, and connecting to peer supports, proving the model's wider wellbeing value."

Prospect Community Housing
Embedding Digital Health Locally

"Within the limitations of six months, we were able to strengthen understanding of digital inclusion's value among our two health and social care partners. By embedding a weekly drop-in at the Healthy Living Centre, we made digital support more accessible to vulnerable clients. The drop-in is now a sustainable resource that health agency staff continue to signpost to, keeping digital support physically close to services people trust."

LinkLiving

Trust First, Digital Confidence Second

"Our relationships with young people were key. Because support workers already had trust, young people opened up about digital barriers affecting their health engagement. By meeting them at home and supporting them on their own terms, we saw service users move from embarrassment about accessing online counselling to setting up appointments independently."

Cyrenians

Personalised Support Creates Digital Health Access

"One-to-one, tailored support was vital. Without it, none of our clients would have had the skills or confidence to make the digital health connections they now use to manage GP, dental and mental health appointments. We also built stronger relationships with Community Link Workers, opening new health-related digital referral pathways."

Carr Gomm
Challenging Assumptions About Digital Readiness

"Our 'Bridge or Barrier?' research highlighted that frontline staff often underestimated the interest people had in digital health options. Staff training and signposting platforms like NHS Near Me and We Are Undefeatable have made a huge difference to building confidence on both sides, but system-level change is urgently needed."

Mhor Collective
Peer Support and Cultural Sensitivity are Key

"Training language support staff first meant we could deliver culturally sensitive workshops at Saheliya. Service users accessing NHS Inform in their own languages, supported by someone they trust, made a huge difference. The peer-support element of having a known, friendly face supporting digital learning was crucial."

Saheliya
Personalised Support Creates Digital Health Access

"The existing models of digital inclusion just don't work for our service users. Trauma, gender-based violence, illiteracy, and cultural barriers need a tailored approach. Our workshops revealed the huge potential digital access offers for health, but only if services address translation errors, navigation complexity, and ongoing support needs."

Shettleston Housing Association/Fuse
Integrating Digital Skills with Wellbeing Support

"Despite strong efforts, the lack of available digital health services like online GP bookings limited what we could offer. However, linking digital inclusion with our wellbeing activities like walking groups and yoga showed that building social connections around digital literacy still made a big impact."

Queens Cross Housing Association
Embedding Digital Inclusion into Primary Care

"Embedding digital inclusion into the health centre opened doors we could never have accessed before. Through social prescribing from GPs and staff casually promoting our drop-ins, we engaged isolated people who wouldn't have sought out digital help otherwise. Digital skills were just the starting point — the real success was broader social and wellbeing connection."

SAMH
Integrating Digital Into Mental Health Recovery

"Building digital inclusion into everyday mental health recovery work changed everything. Service users setting their own digital goals in their care plans increased motivation and ownership. Staff confidence also grew, and in some cases, we saw people move on to independent living because digital access removed barriers to housing and healthcare."

The Challenges

While the projects achieved some successes in exploring ways to embed digital inclusion into health and care support, they also faced consistent and significant challenges that impacted delivery and highlighted areas for wider system improvement.

Common challenges experienced included:

Engaging health partners
Difficulty securing engagement from NHS and health sector partners, limiting direct referral pathways into digital health services.

Short delivery timescales
The six-month project window limited the ability to embed sustainable system change or fully establish digital pathways and partnerships.

Addressing language, literacy and trauma barriers
Standard digital inclusion models often did not meet the needs of people facing complex barriers linked to trauma, gender-based violence, literacy, and cultural factors.

Device access and connectivity affordability
Despite distributing devices and data, ongoing cost and access challenges remained for many service users, especially those on low incomes. Concerns about sustainability once funding ends remain a significant challenge.

Staff confidence and capacity
Staff digital skills and confidence varied widely across organisations, requiring more investment in workforce training and ongoing support.

Shettleston Housing Association
Struggles with referral pathways

"We knocked on every door we could — meeting with health improvement teams, practice managers, community link workers — but still struggled to get meaningful NHS referrals into the service. Without buy-in from health partners, we couldn't fully realise the health access aims we set out to achieve."

Queens Cross Housing Association
Persistent Engagement

"Initially, trying to engage the local health centre was frustrating — emails went unanswered, and no one seemed sure if we were even allowed to deliver support in the building. It took persistence and pre-existing relationships to get one surgery on board. But the time it took meant we reached far fewer people than we could have."

Prospect Community Housing
Longer term investment

"Six months was enough to get people interested, but not enough to embed lasting pathways. We laid the foundations for better digital health support, but real system change needs longer-term investment to flourish."

Saheliya
Addressing Language, Literacy, and Trauma Barriers

"For many of our women, digital health resources were technically available but practically inaccessible. Translation errors, complex navigation, trauma, and literacy challenges meant standard models didn't work — they needed ongoing, culturally sensitive, one-to-one support."

Mhor Collective
The Power of Trusted, Language-Based Support

"Even basic digital skills training took double the time when working across different languages and literacy levels. But the trust built through familiar language support staff made it possible — it just needed patience, flexibility, and much more hands-on help."

Simon Community Scotland
Connectivity Worries Undermining Digital Skills

"Most of our participants needed support not just with devices but with affordable connectivity — and even then, worries about what happens when the free data runs out were constant. Without a long-term solution to affordability, digital skills can be built but easily lost."

Moray Wellbeing Hub
Ongoing Costs as a Barrier to Essential Digital Access

"People still see digital access as a luxury, not a necessity. Ongoing costs for devices and connectivity are major barriers, especially for the most vulnerable in our community."

SAMH

Building Staff Digital Confidence Alongside Service Users

"Many of our staff didn't see themselves as 'digital experts'. We had to build their confidence to support digital inclusion alongside mental health recovery. Training and peer support models helped, but it's clear this needs to be an ongoing part of workforce development."

Carr Gomm

### Unlocking Staff Potential to Support Digital Health Conversations

"Frontline staff often underestimated how interested people actually were in using digital tools for health and wellbeing. With training and better resources, they felt more able to start those conversations — but initially, lack of staff confidence was a real barrier."

Simon Community Scotland

Limited Impact Reporting

"Because of the short window, some participants only engaged for four to six weeks before the funding ended. We could see early impacts but didn't have enough time to really build long-term digital confidence and habits."
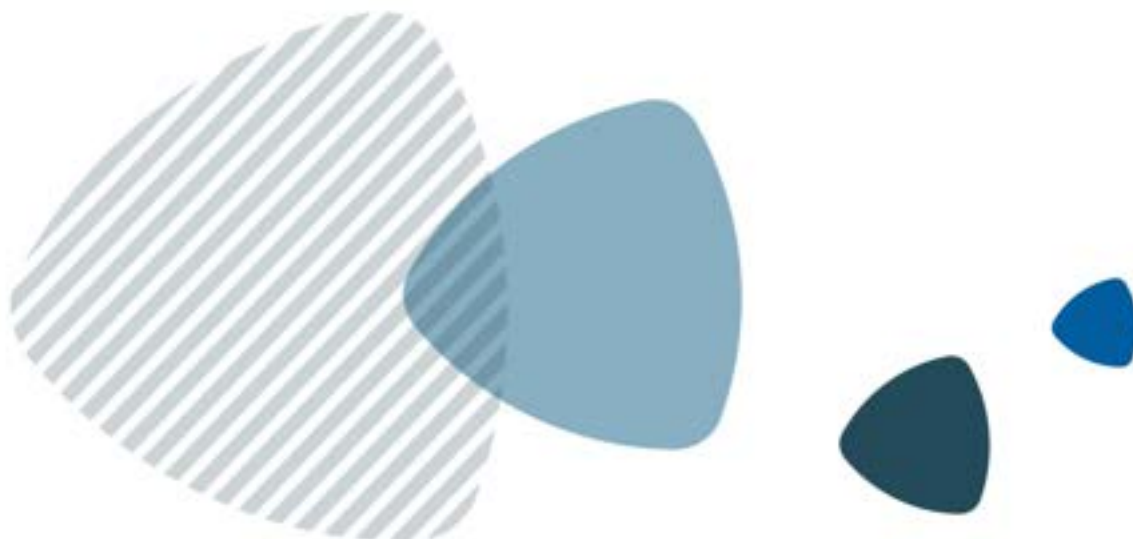
Individual Impact

Awarded projects completed baseline and follow-up surveys with individuals they supported to understand the programme's impact on digital confidence, health access, and wellbeing. These surveys explored digital skills such as managing money online, finding reliable health information, using wellbeing apps, and staying safe online. The results reflect how digital inclusion support affected participants' confidence, independence, and connection to services.

219
Impact Surveys

123
Baseline Surveys

96
Follow - up Surveys*

*Follow-up data included both second and third survey rounds.

To assess change, we analysed data from 60 individuals who completed both a baseline and at least one follow-up survey, resulting in 144 usable surveys.

What we learned

Digital confidence unlocks access
Participants showed the biggest gains in overall digital confidence and ability to access services, especially online health information, forms, and local resources, demonstrating how small skill improvements unlock wider access to care.

Wellbeing and connection improve alongside skills
As skills improved, people felt more connected to others and reported better mental wellbeing. Digital inclusion supported both practical and emotional needs.

Trusted, supported learning makes a difference
The greatest progress came when learning was personalised and consistent. Trusted relationships helped people feel safe and supported as they built digital confidence.

Individual Impact

The impact survey data highlights a positive effect on participants' digital skills and personal wellbeing. Individuals reported increased confidence in using digital tools to access health information, connect with others, and manage everyday tasks online. Improvements were notable in connecting with people online and the ability to find and use trusted health resources . In a few areas, small dips in confidence were observed in later follow-up surveys. These often reflected changes in people's wider life circumstances — including periods of crisis or instability — rather than a decline in digital ability. This reinforces the need for flexible, person-centred digital support that can adapt to people's changing needs over time.

Experience

Baseline
Follow-up

My overall digital skills and confidence
Confidence connecting with people online
Confidence finding important information
Confidence engaging with services online
Confidence accessing health service
Confidence keeping safe online
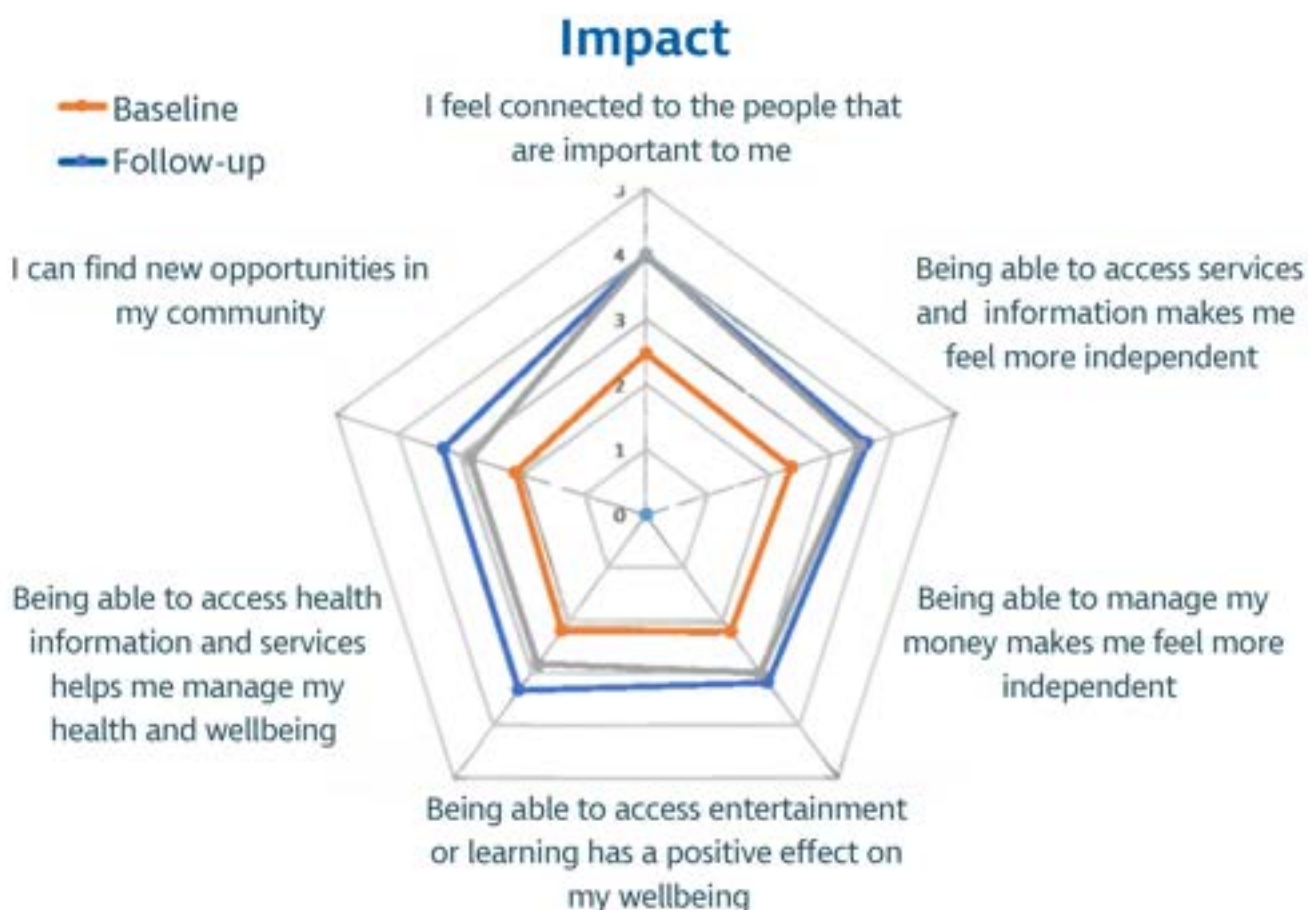
Moray Wellbeing

"This has helped me gain more knowledge on how to manage my mental health and where to go for support. I've been able to find mental health support groups and check their opening times online. It's helped me connect with services that really support my health and wellbeing."

LinkLiving

"The phone has helped my mental health a lot — I can now stay in touch with family abroad, make plans with friends, and organise my online therapy. I couldn't have done all this without a phone and data."

Individual Impact

The greatest impact reported by participants was feeling more connected to the people who are important to them, with consistently strong improvements sustained over time. Participants also experienced notable benefits to their wellbeing and increased confidence in managing their health through digital tools. Early gains were seen in areas such as finding new opportunities in the community and using digital access to support health and wellbeing, though these areas showed some decline in later rounds. However, despite these fluctuations, participants still reported an overall improvement after engaging with digital inclusion support.

Impact

Legend:
- Baseline
- Follow-up

Axes:
- I feel connected to the people that are important to me
- Being able to access services and information makes me feel more independent
- Being able to manage my money makes me feel more independent
- Being able to access entertainment or learning has a positive effect on my wellbeing
- Being able to access health information and services helps me manage my health and wellbeing
- I can find new opportunities in my community

Cyrenians

"I feel much more confident using online services now, especially for managing my health, which is really important because of my epilepsy and sight issues. I can stay in touch with my family abroad, which helps with feeling less isolated, and I've been using my digital skills to look for better job opportunities."

Impact Story

Scottish Action for Mental Health
Embedding Digital in Mental Health Recovery

When we began our Digital Pioneers Progress Fund project, our focus was clear: we wanted to support people with severe and enduring mental health problems to become more digitally included — not just by giving them devices, but by making digital tools an everyday part of their mental health recovery.

Building Digital into Everyday Support

We focused on two key strands of activity to embed digital into our everyday mental health support:

Providing Tablets and Data to Service Users
We equipped individuals with devices and data, giving them the means to explore wellbeing tools in line with their personal goals. These included:
- Sleepio for sleep management
- Daylight for anxiety and stress reduction
- STOPP for cognitive and emotional regulation

Using Staff Tablets for Co-Produced Care Planning
Staff used tablets to support service users in co-creating digital goals directly within Access Care Planning (ACP), our existing care planning system.
- This strengthened service user voice and autonomy.
- Staff also gained hands-on experience integrating digital tools into personalised recovery journeys.

Shifting Mindsets Through Everyday Use

We didn't treat digital inclusion as something separate, we wove it into everyday support. Staff used digital tools in natural ways, whether looking up GP information, finding local walking groups, or helping someone apply for a job. This approach helped service users view digital not as a barrier, but as a tool to support their wellbeing and independence. These early activities also began to shift mindsets, laying the foundations for deeper organisational change and shaping the future of how we approach digital in mental health support.

Learning, Shifting Culture, Growing Confidence

We quickly realised that building digital inclusion into care conversations helped shift the culture. It wasn't about delivering something separate, it became part of how we supported recovery. With the help of a dedicated ACP Coordinator, we trained staff across multiple locations, including Glasgow, Edinburgh, Fife, Moray, and North Lanarkshire. As confidence grew, so did the possibilities. One individual used their tablet to search and apply for jobs and now uses it at work. Another was able to track their fitness goals and explore local walking groups, with digital support forming a core part of their care review.

But the real shift came when we reflected on the wider impact. Staff told us they didn't initially see themselves as "digital people," and some were hesitant. But once they saw the difference digital could make in confidence, ownership and outcomes that changed. The Digital Pioneers Funds became the spark that helped us think much bigger.

What's next?

A Turning Point: From Project to Strategy

Thanks to the learning from this project, we've now committed to embedding digital accessibility into our new 4-year organisational strategy. In 2025, SAMH will launch Scotland's first network of walk-in mental health hubs, where people can drop in without referral and get digital support alongside face-to-face care. These spaces will be safe, welcoming, and supported by trained digital champions. Devices and data will be available, and we've co-designed a new digital system — low-bandwidth, psychologically informed, and easy to use — that removes many of the barriers our service users told us they face.

For us, this wasn't just a project. It was a turning point. Digital inclusion is no longer something we "add on", it's something we see as core to delivering mental health support that's accessible, equitable, and future-facing.

Spotlight: Carr Gomm
Exploring How Digital Health Supports or Excludes People

Exploring How Digital Health Supports—or Excludes—People We Support
Carr Gomm's Bridge or Barrier? project set out with a clear question: "Do digital health tools support people's independence—or do they create new barriers?" With the rapid growth of digital services like NHS Inform and Near Me, Carr Gomm wanted to better understand how people they support actually experience these platforms.

Through workshops, interviews and reflective practice, the team engaged 27 people who use services and 25 frontline staff. They explored whether digital health improves access to care—or whether systems are too complex, impersonal, or inaccessible for people facing disadvantage.

At the heart of the project was a belief that people's real experiences should shape digital transformation—and that frontline workers need the tools and confidence to help make digital inclusion meaningful.

Findings

- Many staff assumed people wouldn't want digital services. But when asked directly, people were open and curious—they just needed the right support.
- Emotional reassurance and relationship-based guidance mattered just as much as technical instruction.
- Some platforms felt too complicated or inconsistent, especially when navigating across different local NHS systems.

What Worked

- Staff-led exploration that built confidence and challenged assumptions
- A focus on real-life situations, not hypothetical use cases
- Creating safe, inclusive spaces for people to ask questions, try tools, and reflect

Resources

The full Bridge or Barrier? report shares grounded insights from people with lived experience and frontline staff, offering practical learning for those designing or delivering digital health tools. It highlights what's needed to make digital services more inclusive, accessible, and effective.

Carr Gomm's work shows that digital health can be empowering—but only when people are seen, heard, and supported to learn at their own pace.

> "I didn't think I'd be able to use this. But now I can see my doctor without needing a lift. That's a big deal."

Spotlight: Saheliya and Mhor Collective Partnership
Mind the Gap

Saheliya's Mind the Gap project tackled a crucial question: how do we support women facing language, literacy, and trauma-related barriers to access essential health information online?

Working with Mhor Collective, Saheliya trained language support staff -women with lived experience from the communities they serve- to guide participants through NHS Inform in a safe, trusted environment. Seventeen women took part in group sessions delivered in multiple languages including Arabic, Somali, Swahili, Amharic, Tigrinya, and Kurdish Sorani.

The project revealed that traditional digital inclusion approaches often fall short for women with complex needs. Many participants had never used online health tools before, but showed strong motivation when support was delivered in a way that felt safe, informal, and culturally relevant.

What made it work

We focused on two key strands of activity to embed digital into our everyday mental health support:

- Peer-led delivery through trusted language support staff
- Women-only, trauma-informed space
- Printed visual guides with step-by-step instructions
- Bespoke workshops tailored to community needs and devices

What they created

Saheliya produced a suite of practical resources:

- Mind the Gap Project Report
- NHS Inform Report
- Essential Digital Skills Report
- Case Studies: Real-life experiences from service users

Saheliya's model shows that digital health access isn't just a tech issue—it's a human rights one.

"Without the support, I wouldn't have known what to do. Now I can find health information in my language and feel more in control."

Conclusions

Digital inclusion is not a standalone intervention, it's a foundational enabler of equitable care

Projects that saw the most sustained change integrated digital support into everyday practice. From mental health recovery planning to supported housing, digital tools became part of how care was delivered, not an add-on.

Trusted relationships are the bridge to digital confidence

Participants reported the biggest improvements when digital support was delivered through trusted people and in safe, familiar spaces. Trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approaches were vital in building confidence and trust.

System change takes time, but seeds were planted

While six months was not long enough to fully embed new systems or partnerships, many projects established strong foundations. New referral routes, staff confidence, and organisational shifts are beginning to pave the way for longer-term transformation

Connectivity, affordability, and sustainability remain pressing challenges

Even where digital skills improved, worries about data costs, device loss or damage, and what happens after funding ends continued to affect participants. Sustainable solutions—particularly in connectivity—are essential for lasting impact.

The voluntary sector plays a central role in closing the digital health gap

Community-based organisations were uniquely placed to reach people furthest from digital and health services. Their ability to adapt, build trust, and work across systems shows the value of resourcing these groups as core partners in digital inclusion strategies.

Grantmaking

Powered by SCVO

Contact

For more details on the Digital Pioneers Progress Fund email:

Laura Scott

Funding Development Manager

laura.scott@scvo.scot

Illustrations credit: Tessa Mackenzie