

mhabitat

#FutureMe2026

**How can digital technologies support future health and
care in 2026?**

#FutureMe2026

This paper summarises conversations which took place in two workshops as part of the HealthWatch Leeds #FutureMe2026 event on 13 July 2016. The workshops were part of a wider debate about the future of health and care services which emphasised re-imagining the future from the point of view of patients and citizens as well as third and public sector organisations in the city.

We asked the question:

How do we equip ourselves to make the most of digital technologies and create the future we want for ourselves, our families and citizens of our city?

What followed was a deep and nuanced conversation that recognised the potential of digital whilst also cautioning against unintended consequences. Participants deliberated the balance between a vision of the future and the current reality of siloed systems and basic deficiencies in infrastructure. Most importantly, our conversation was concerned with how we use digital technologies to build on our strengths and assets and how we avoid deepening inequalities between patients, carers and citizens.

Whilst the conversation focused on the city of Leeds, it has a wider application to other health and care economies which are similarly grappling with how digital technologies may enable the future.

Getting the basics right

We need free and reliable wifi in health and care settings and in wider public spaces in our city so that we can get online easily

We need public spaces where people who can't afford smart devices can access the Internet at no cost so they are not left behind

We need systems that connect across organisational silos so we can choose to share our data to enable more joined-up care and support

We need to equip practitioners with smart devices so they can make use of digital technologies in their day to day work. We need to consider whether we should do the same for people who are less likely to be able to afford smart devices

“ Let's do less and do it well ”

We should make it as easy as possible for people to transact with health and care services so that they are as accessible as possible and so that we remove barriers

We need the right joined-up policies in place across the city to support and enable the use of digital technologies in health and care

We need the right checks and balances so that health and care practitioners can discharge their duty of care to patients and citizens and avoid inadvertently increasing vulnerability

Fairness and equality

There must always be a non-digital alternative to accessing services for people who can't or don't want to use technology so they are not left behind

We should always consider how a digital technology may increase inequality - if it increases the gap between the better and less well off then it is not an innovation

We must involve people with different experiences and backgrounds so we are confident we aren't excluding anyone

“ Just because you can doesn't mean you should! ”

Including people who are the furthest away from digital technologies

We need to offer help and support to people who want to use digital technologies so they are not left behind

We can help people decide whether technology can make a positive difference to their lives by finding out what is important to them and exploring how technology may be able to help

“ Digital technology is the world's biggest double-edged sword ”

We need to provide the right help when and where people need it to reduce the barriers to using digital technologies

Designing good digital technologies

We should always start with needs and problems people are trying to solve so we make sure we are designing useful digital technologies

We need to invest time in co-design with people who we hope will benefit from digital technologies to make sure we are helping solve the right problems

We shouldn't assume digital is the answer - it might not be!

We should test assumptions about the benefits of digital technologies with diverse experiences and points of view to make sure we are meeting people's needs

We should design digital technologies that give more than they take - both for patients, citizens and health and care practitioners - so that people want to use them and they add value

We need a shared approach to digital technologies across the city so that citizens can expect consistency and barriers to take up are reduced

We should ask ourselves who we are creating work/labour for and is it fair so we avoid creating an unnecessary burden for vulnerable people

We should caution against overwhelming ourselves or creating too many demands on people's time so that digital technologies avoid having a negative impact on our lives

We should always avoid creating more tasks for practitioners and aim to reduce workload where possible so we avoid putting more pressure on people

“ No one size fits all! ”

We should blend online and offline ways to communicate so that we can choose what works best in each situation

Privacy and security

People need to feel safe using digital technologies and confident that their privacy is protected

We need to find the best ways to share data so that we maintain public trust and confidence whilst making use of data to improve health and care

“ Even if it shouldn't happen it may happen anyway ”

Good use of public money

We need to weigh up the benefits of digital technologies compared to other options so that we avoid wasting money

Our public services should be an intelligent and informed customer of digital technologies so that we make the most of the limited resources we have

Our relationship to digital technologies

We found that many of us have mixed relationships with digital technologies. Here are some of the things people said

I love being able to keep in touch with family overseas easily and cheaply

It can be a great timesaver - online banking is brilliant

Information overload is a problem

I like how I can express my views online

I hate how I rely on it so much

It feels like there's never a time to switch off

Digital technology creates a gap between the young and old

I can't bear it when it doesn't work

I love that I can work anytime and anywhere

Digital technology is seen as the panacea to all our ills and I think that's wrong

Digital technology has made my life more comfortable