



Cheshire and Merseyside

Press release

From: Improving Me, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside women's health and maternity programme

Date: Monday 15 September 2025

Subject: Addressing digital poverty to unlock health equity

Improving Me, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside women's health and maternity programme welcomed the publication of the new FREE comprehensive Liverpool City Region guide to help people get online and build digital confidence.

This new resource, is the latest initiative from the [Liverpool City Region Digital Inclusion Network](#). It covers everything from device setup to digital healthcare. The guide was published to coincide with End Digital Poverty Day, which highlights the barriers to education, health, employment and social inclusion for those without digital access.

Crucially, it provides a timely opportunity to build a discourse about the relationship between, digital poverty and the gender health gap, at a time when the NHS is forging ahead with its own digital transformation efforts through Fit for the Future, the new NHS blueprint.

We know around 15% of adults and 20% of children across the UK live in digital poverty, with an estimated 127,000 residents offline in the city region alone. However, we also know big data sometimes obscures the detail behind the headlines and digital poverty affects some groups more than others. Women and girls are up to 22 % more likely to experience digital poverty than men. That is why we want to take this opportunity to remind everyone that gender and sex also play a significant role in shaping digital inequalities which in turn, can and do, hinder progress to reduce the UK gender health gap.

As a member of the digital inclusion network Improving Me Director Catherine McClennan said,

'Improving Me recognises that *digital poverty*, and particularly its impact on women and girls, as a critical societal issue that demands urgent, system-wide cross sector action.'

She adds,

'Addressing the digital gender gap is not only a matter of digital equality but a strategic opportunity to close the gender health gap and contribute to progressing the first ever women's health strategy. The women's health strategy aims to ensure women and girls know more about women's health issues, so they can speak up and make decisions about their own health and in turn know how to get help and to look after themselves and others.

The gender health gap reflects clear differences in the prevalence of disease, in health outcomes and disparities in access to healthcare for women. This is because the health system has historically been designed by and for men, leading to women's health needs being overlooked. Women therefore endure longer waits for diagnosis and treatment, are less well represented in medical trials and often display a lack of trust in the health system which they see as failing to listen to them all too often.

By improving digital access, skills, and confidence among women and girls, we can unlock the full potential of digital health solutions—not just for better disease management, but for proactive health creation and early intervention through preventative care.

While technology alone cannot resolve the gender health gap, it remains a powerful enabler. Ignoring the digital exclusion of women and girls will only widen existing disparities, leaving them behind in access to care, health education, innovation, and outcomes—further entrenching long-standing health inequalities.'

Catherine McClennan Director Improving Me, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Womens Health and Maternity Programme.

Improving Me recognises that collaborating with the Combined Authority consistently delivers valuable results, and this new digital resource is a strong example of what effective partnerships can achieve. Addressing the gender health gap through efforts to reduce digital poverty is both strategic and meaningful, with clear benefits for local communities and the wider economy. Improving Me commends the Digital Inclusion team and network for their great work.

END

Notes to editor

Improving Me is an integral part the Integrated Healthcare System in Cheshire and Merseyside as the NHS women's health and maternity programme. Improving Me campaigns tirelessly to reduce health inequalities and address the gender health gap.

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