Digital record systems: achieving good outcomes for people using adult social care services

Good quality records underpin safe, effective, compassionate, high-quality care. They communicate the right information clearly, to the right people, when they need it. They are an essential part of achieving good outcomes for people who use services.

A good digital records system has more benefits than a paper-based record system. It helps providers to:

- capture information more easily at the point of care
- support staff to respond more quickly to people's needs
- share important information quickly, safely and securely between care settings
- minimise risks to people's safety.

Digital records will increasingly replace paper records. This means digital systems will be vital to capture and share information. This is essential for truly integrated services that work for people.

The Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England lead the NHS Transformation Directorate's [Digitising Social Care programme](#). CQC supports the programme, which aims to encourage and support adult social care providers registered with us to adopt digital social care records.

Our guidance reflects the developing best practice around digital record systems, particularly where it helps to improve the quality and safety of care.

The benefits of a good digital records system

For people using services:

- It's easier for people to access their own records.

- People will be able to spend more time with staff and engage in meaningful interactions with them.

- When people's needs change, services will be able to respond quickly and share information with partners in their care, making care safer.

- Risks such as medication errors, dehydration or missed care visits will be minimised.

For providers and staff:

- Recording information in real time will allow people in different locations to access and update it wherever they are.

- Staff will be able to do their job more effectively and efficiently.

- Digital systems will support effective quality monitoring of the service, enabling services to share and compare data to improve people's care.

- Storing information digitally is easier and needs less physical space.

- People's information will be handled more securely through automatic back-up of data, the cyber security of cloud-based services, and by using multi-factor authentication.

For the wider health and social care system:

- People's information can be used across the local health and care system to make sure their care is joined up and to support the needs of the local population.

- There will be better use of resources across the local health and care system, which can help to support other important health and care functions, such as service management, planning and research.

Principles for providers to support good outcomes for people

Here, we identify 4 guiding principles that support good outcomes for people when you use digital record systems.

Each principle describes what people should be able to expect and how you can achieve this.

1. Person-centred

Your digital record system supports staff to put people at the centre of their care and treatment, promoting and enabling good outcomes for them.

People using services should be able to expect:

- to be as involved as much as possible in making decisions and planning their care and support

- care and support that is personalised and responsive to their needs

- their care records to reflect their needs, choices, preferences, interests and aspirations.

This is because:

- the information you record about people reflects what is important to them, including their preferences and choices, their needs and how these will be met

- people can access and contribute to information recorded about them in a way that meets their needs. This includes when someone is acting on their behalf

- you involve and support people to understand what the digital system means for them. This includes being aware of any devices that staff use when supporting them

- the system enables people to have access to the right care, support and treatment when they need it.

As a good provider, you can demonstrate:

- how the digital system meets the individual needs, preferences and choices of the people using your service and how it supports you to deliver their care, support or treatment

- how you involve people in planning their care and that care plans meet and reflect people's individual needs, including their communication needs. This includes how the digital system enables you to meet the Accessible Information Standard

- how you have involved people using your service and the people who matter to them, so they know what to expect and what the digital system means for them

- you have involved your staff in setting up the system and they understand how the system enables and supports them to provide person-centred care.

2. Availability

The right people can access information when they need to. Your system does not create unnecessary barriers to recording, accessing or sharing information.

People using services should be able to expect:

- to have access to their care records in a way that meets their needs and preferences

- to be involved in the decision to share their personal information when needed

- to be supported by staff who have access to the information they need to fully understand their needs, preferences and choices

- continuity in their care and treatment from the different staff, teams and services involved.

This is because:

- people understand what information is recorded about them, who it is shared with and why, the importance of their consent to share information with others and their rights

- the right people have access to essential recorded information, which can be shared when needed so people don't have to 'keep repeating their story'

- everyone involved in a person's care can access essential information about them to work well together to understand and meet their needs, preferences and choices

- someone legally acting on behalf of a person using a service can access the information they are entitled to see to support decision making

- staff know how to operate the digital systems they are working with to carry out their role effectively

- misunderstanding data protection legislation does not create a barrier to appropriate and legal data sharing.

As a good provider, you can demonstrate:

- a clear understanding of your role and responsibilities around providing appropriate access to the information you hold about the people you support or the service you provide. This includes where someone is legally acting on behalf of a person using the service, for example when they have [power of attorney](#)

- how you support people to understand the information that is recorded about them and to give their informed meaningful consent to share this with others, when needed

- your system does not create a barrier to working with essential partners as it enables people to access information and share it when needed

- you actively seek out and use other appropriate data sources to support people who use your service

- the information recorded about a person is clear and easy to understand for the people who access and use it

- your staff have the skills, support and confidence they need to use the system appropriately for their role

- your staff have the equipment and connectivity they need to access and use the system effectively.

3. Security

People who use services can trust that information about them is kept safe.

People using services should be able to expect:

- that information about them is stored securely

- to be treated with dignity and respect and their privacy and confidentiality are protected

- to be protected from avoidable harm.

This is because:

- information is shared appropriately and safely. Only the people who should be able to see a person's information can see it

- if privacy or confidentiality has been breached and this puts people at risk, they are told what this means for them and what will happen next

- information about people is being used in their best interests and that of the wider population.

As a good provider, you can demonstrate:

- staff understand their roles and responsibilities around keeping people's information safe, including when they need to share information about a person and how they can do this safely and legally

- records are kept, used and shared in line with Data Protection legislation, including UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements and the common law duty of confidentiality

- you understand the importance of appropriate data sharing with other health and care partners. This enables joined up care across the health and care system and minimises data collections for providers

- you comply with the Data Security and Protection Toolkit (DSPT) or equivalent, as a minimum. This also applies where you use a combination of digital and paper record systems

- you have a clear plan to deal with the risk of:

  - data breaches or loss

  - cyber-attacks

  This includes how you are assured that your digital system has appropriate protections to guard against this, your contingency plans, and what action you will take to respond.

- you have contingency plans to ensure essential information is available if the digital system is inaccessible. This is to ensure that if you cannot access the digital system it does not negatively affect the safety or standard of care a person receives.

4. Governance

The system supports the service to be well-led. It enables the provider to assess, monitor and minimise the risks to people and improve the quality of their care.

People who use services should be able to expect:

- people in charge of services are open, honest and act with integrity

- support from a service that understands and manages risks to their safety

- support from a service that improves the quality of care it provides.

This is because:

- the digital records system helps to keep them safe, experience good quality care and to have good outcomes

- the quality of information recorded about them is accurate, complete and up-to-date.

As a good provider, you can demonstrate:

- your system supports effective quality assurance, helping you to provide evidence of good outcomes, identify risks and quality issues and take action to improve the service

- your system supports information to be as accurate, complete and up-to-date as possible. Where you use digital and paper systems, the information in both systems aligns and is accurate

- you work with digital social care record suppliers to continuously improve how your system works. This includes maintaining devices and ensuring software is updated appropriately.

What do good digital social care records look like?

We refer to [Regulation 17 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014](#). This sets out the minimum requirements of the records a registered provider must keep for:

- each person using its service

- the employment of staff

- the overall management of the regulated activity.

This applies to paper and digital records. Records must be accurate, complete and up-to-date.

We routinely look at a provider's records as part of our inspection activity, focusing on:

- the information in the records

- how that information is used

- the security measures to store and share the information.

We do not endorse or recommend a specific digital social care record system. You need to assure yourself that any digital record system you use enables you to meet the needs of the people using your service, deliver the regulated activity you carry on, and enables you to meet the regulations.

The [Digitising Social Care](#) programme provides resources to help you when choosing a digital social care record system.

Assessing and inspecting

As with all aspects of care, we will assess records against our new single assessment framework.

We consider digital record systems under our well-led key question, specifically under the [Quality Statement for Governance, management and sustainability](#).

In particular, we expect providers to demonstrate compliance with the Data Security and Protection Toolkit (DSPT) or equivalent. This should be completed annually.

We do not assess the standard or technical functioning, or capabilities of the digital record systems themselves.

Accessing digital records on site visits

We have powers to access a provider's records to enable us to carry out our regulatory functions. This is set out under:

- section 63 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008

- section 120 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

This means that inspectors (and other members of the inspection team with authorisation) will ask to see records. We expect providers to give them access in a timely way, that does not obstruct inspection activity.

Under section 63 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008, it is also a criminal offence for anyone to obstruct our on-site inspection activity without a reasonable excuse. This means providers cannot refuse to show CQC inspectors (or other authorised members of the inspection team) records when requested or stop them accessing digital records without a valid reason.

Points to consider

Inspection and assessment teams can use log-on details when on site using a provider's computer system. They should not access a provider's systems on their laptops or when off site. This is an approach we are developing.

- We are aware that you need to meet your own data governance requirements, particularly around preventing accidental changes or loss of data. Read-only access to records means you can be confident that you can prevent accidental data changes or loss.

- If you have guest log-in details for the system, you should provide these where you and the inspection team member are confident that they can independently access the records they need to see. Where available, this should be read-only access. You should not use the log-in details (including smart cards) of anyone who is not present.

- If read-only access is not available or the inspection team member needs support to use the system, you should help them to access the records they ask to see. For example, you could have a staff member available.

- Generally, where an inspection team member can access the digital records they need, they will not ask for paper copies. However, there are circumstances where you should provide hard copies, for example if waiting for a member of staff to assist would prevent them from carrying out their inspection activity. We may request specific formats where it is necessary for regulatory decision making or taking enforcement action. We will explain this request clearly.

Sources of best practice and guidance

The following will help you to keep good quality records securely and share them appropriately.

[Professional Records Standards Body](#) (PRSB) sets out standards for good quality care records. This includes the ['About me' standard](#), which captures most important details that a person wants to share with professionals in health and social care and is a cornerstone of personalised care.

These standards are endorsed by reputable national organisations and professional bodies. PRSB standards are increasingly mandated in England for implementation in systems by dates specified in [Information Standards Notices (ISNs)](). The [What Good Looks Like]() framework requires all integrated care systems develop shared care records in line with [PRSB standards]().

[Data protection legislation (including UK GDPR) requirements]() provides guides and standards for using and sharing personal information.

[Data Security and Protection Toolkit]() is an annual online self-assessment for health and care organisations to support data and cyber security. The [Better Security, Better Care programme]() provides free one-to-one advice on the DSPT and information security to support providers to meet minimum data and cyber security standards.

[Accessible Information Standard]() sets out standards for all NHS and publicly funded services to make sure information and communication is accessible for people with communication needs because of disability, impairment or sensory loss.

[Digital Care Hub]() works in partnership with the Digitising Social Care Programme and the Better Security, Better Care Programme, to provide advice and support to the adult social care sector on technology and data protection.

[Digitising Social Care - Assured Supplier List]() was commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care and is managed by the [Digitising Social Care programme](). The list includes suppliers that provide digital social care record systems that meet the requirements set out by the Digitising Social Care programme. The ambitions for digitising adult social care are set out in the government white paper [People at the Heart of Care: adult social care reform]().

The [National Cyber Security Centre]() is the UK's independent authority on cyber security. It provides guidance on cyber security risks and how to manage them.

[Adult Social Care Digital Skills Framework](#) is published by the Digitising Social Care programme to support the development of digital skills across the adult social care workforce. This is a free resource for providers to help with planning staff training, or for individual staff for their personal development.

[Digital working in adult social care: What Good Looks like](#). This is guidance for care providers and local authorities for digital working in adult social care.

The [Information Commissioner's Office](#) is the UK's independent body set up to uphold information rights. It provides guidance and resources on meeting UK data protection requirements.

The [Records Management Code of Practice for Health and Social Care (2021)](#) sets out what people working with, or in, NHS organisations in England need to do to manage records correctly.

[Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#) investigates complaints about local authorities and adult social care providers. The ombudsman has published guidance based on lessons learned from complaints investigations on [Good record keeping - guidance for providers](#).