Northumbria University NEWCASTLE

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Collaborative research to help plan North Tyneside's digital future

Academics at Northumbria University are leading a study which is investigating how residents across North Tyneside access and use digital technology – and where there are barriers to its take-up. The results will help to shape the development of future services within the borough, from healthcare and housing to education and digital infrastructure.

Northumbria University, Newcastle University and North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) are working together on behalf of local partners

to gather information on how people in North Tyneside access and use digital technology. Residents across North Tyneside are being asked to share their experiences via a survey, which will help local partners to understand why people are not using the internet or digital devices.

The survey is being delivered to every home across North Tyneside asking residents to answer questions about how and what technologies they use, how they use them and the skills they need to use them.

Entirely anonymous and confidential, the survey has been developed in partnership with North Tyneside Council, Healthwatch, local community organisations, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), VODA and the Community Healthcare Forum.

Dr Gemma Wilson-Menzfeld, principal investigator of this research and Senior Lecturer from Northumbria's Department of Nursing, Midwifery and Health, said: "The North East has the second highest proportion of non-internet users (12.1%) across the UK, however very little is known about the extent of digital poverty in North Tyneside.

"Whether connecting with others, accessing information and services or meeting the changing demands of the workplace, digital access and digital skills are ever more important.

"We want to identify reasons for non-access to technology, to understand peoples' physical access, skills, and perceptions of technology. This data will enable us to work with stakeholders to transform policies and services across North Tyneside and to support digital access and skills development for residents."

Professor Lesley Young Murphy, Executive Director of Nursing and Chief Operating Officer, North Tyneside said: "We live in a world full of cutting-edge technology that helps people in their daily activities as well as supporting and delivering health and care needs.

"It's important that we listen and understand local people's experiences of accessing the internet and use of technology, as well as understanding the barriers that some people face. The results of this survey will be used to help inform local plans and to address inequalities caused by digital exclusion."

The research team are encouraging as many North Tyneside residents as possible to take part in this survey and say that understanding the experiences and views of people in local communities will help to gain a better insight into how digital technologies are accessed and used.

Paul Jones, Director Healthwatch North Tyneside, said: "We have had feedback from local people about some of the difficulties they have had using technology to access a variety of services. There are also examples of where technology has really helped make a difference, particularly during the pandemic. This is your chance to have your say and help shape future services."

The survey can be completed by freepost, by telephone or online at https://northumbria.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/resident-survey.

Anyone requiring assistance in completing the survey can call the Community Healthcare Forum on 0191 257 8000 extension 4280.

More detailed information for participants is available on the study's Participant Information Sheet.

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