

Findings on digital accessibility for those affected by cancer living in Fenland

June 2026

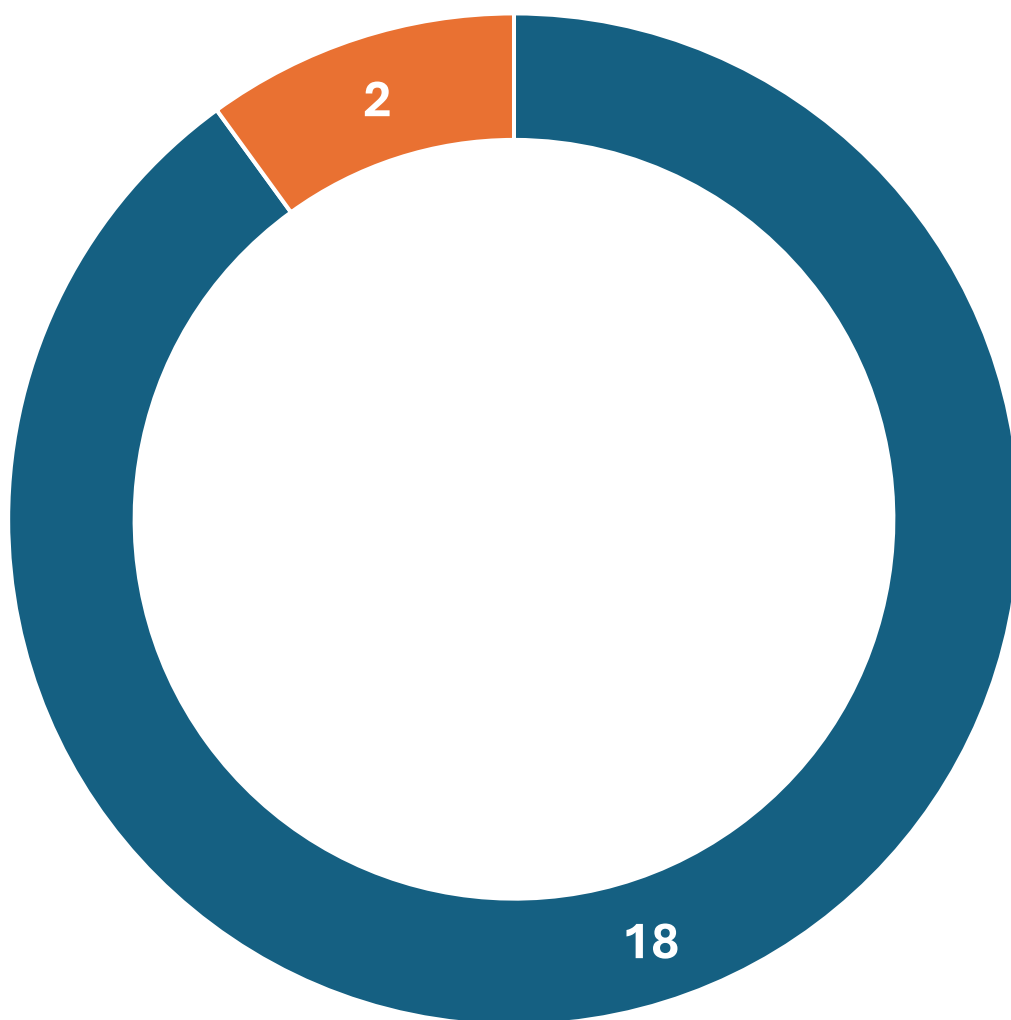
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Background

- Cambridgeshire ACRE delivers the Fenland Community Cancer Champions project funded by Macmillan. We deliver 1:1 and group support for those affected by cancer across Fenland, as well as raising awareness of cancer signs and symptoms and screening opportunities to help people receive support and detect cancer early.
- Many of our clients and support group attendees have spoken about the multiple challenges they face with digital access to health care and support during their cancer journey.
- We wanted to listen to the concerns raised and find a way to help influence change to improve cancer journeys for our residents and others who are experiencing the same challenges with their treatment and care living across Fenland.
- We asked 20 people about their experiences of digital health care systems between the months of March – May 2026. All participants are known to our service, all have a cancer diagnosis and all live in Fenland.

1. Do you experience any issues for accessing digital health care platforms / GP apps / test results?

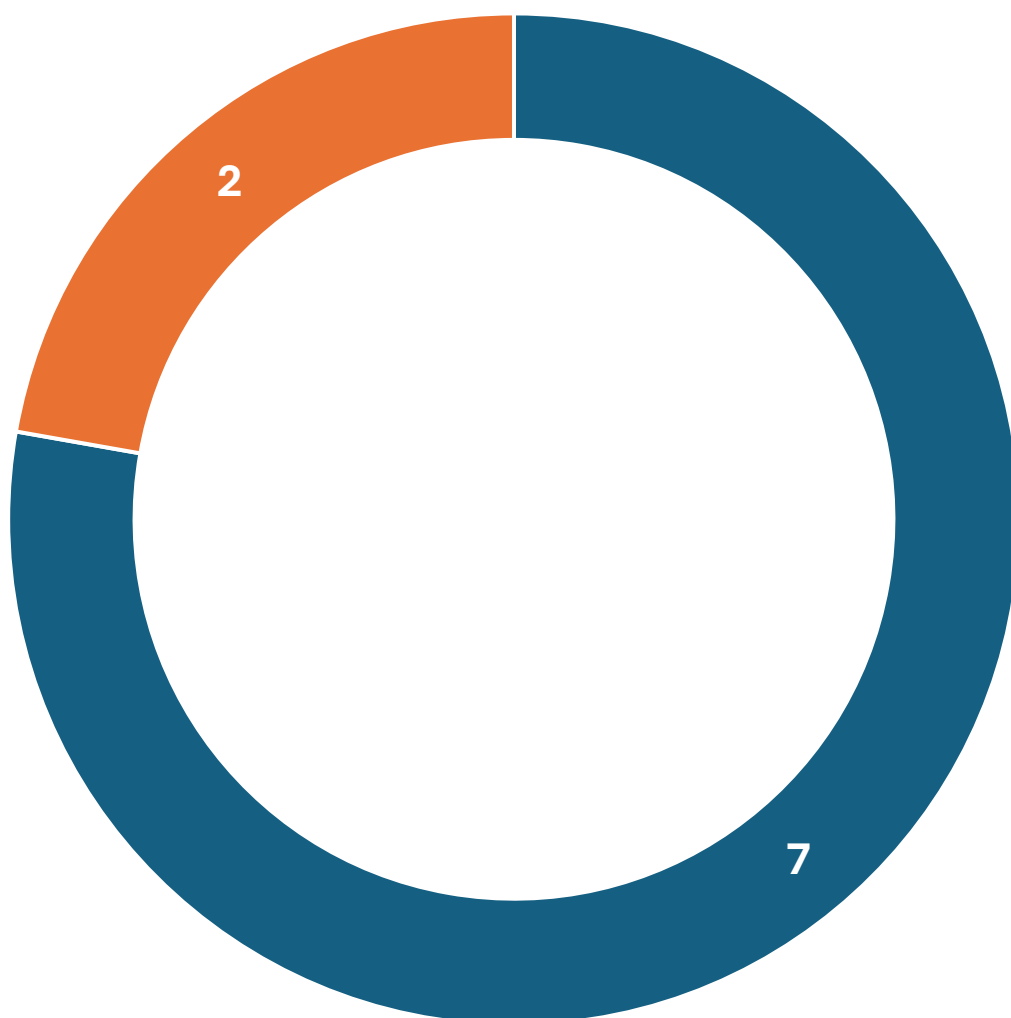


■ Yes ■ No

2. If you answered 'yes', what are your issues?

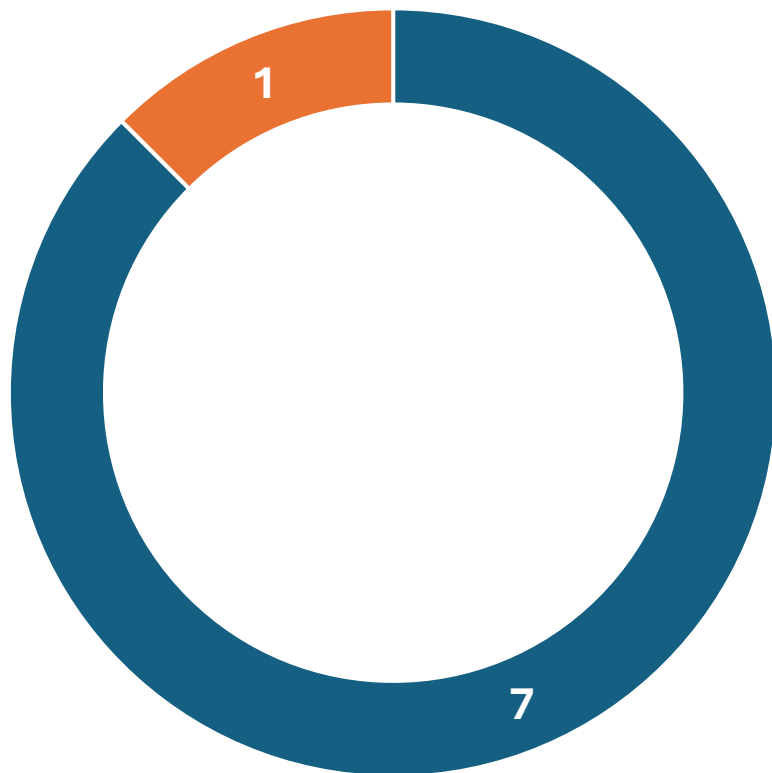
- Don't have a smart phone/can't use one.
- Don't own a mobile/smart phone or have internet access at home and GP surgeries won't allow you to book appointments over the telephone anymore, everything is done online, (George Clare Surgery in Chatteris and Cornerstone surgery in March are digital-only).
- Can't read or write / visual impairment.
- Too many platforms to look on for different results/appointments - gets confusing.
- Links not working & get stuck in a loop, Verification codes being sent but due to poor network coverage not receiving the text in time to verify and having to start all over again.

3. Do you experience digital connectivity issues / poor internet speeds which affects your access?



■ Yes ■ No

4. Have you experienced hospital to hospital / GP practice issues with sending test results / your health data?

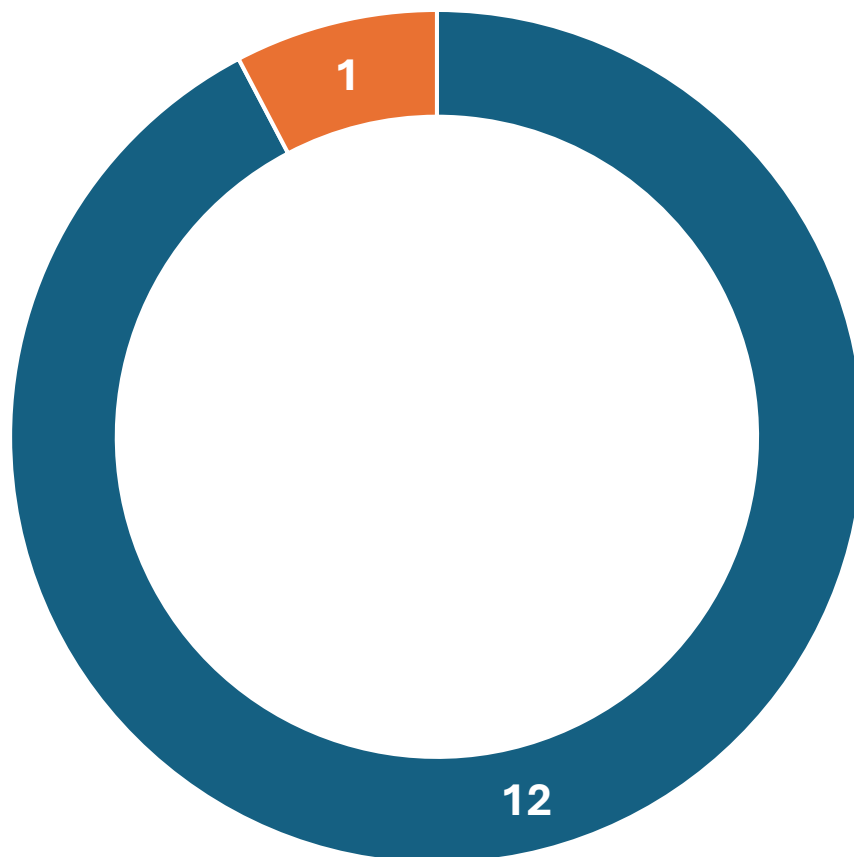


■ Yes ■ No

Comments:

- Hospitals under different trusts don't talk to each other or transfer test results (Addenbrookes to PCH or Hinchingsbrooke to Papworth & Addenbrookes, this has resulted in repeat tests for some at a different hospital).
- GP surgeries still need to scan on letters/results these get left in a pile and don't get scanned on quickly enough to records).
- Appointment letters not made clear enough if telephone/or face to face.

5. Do you struggle to use online platforms to request GP appointments?

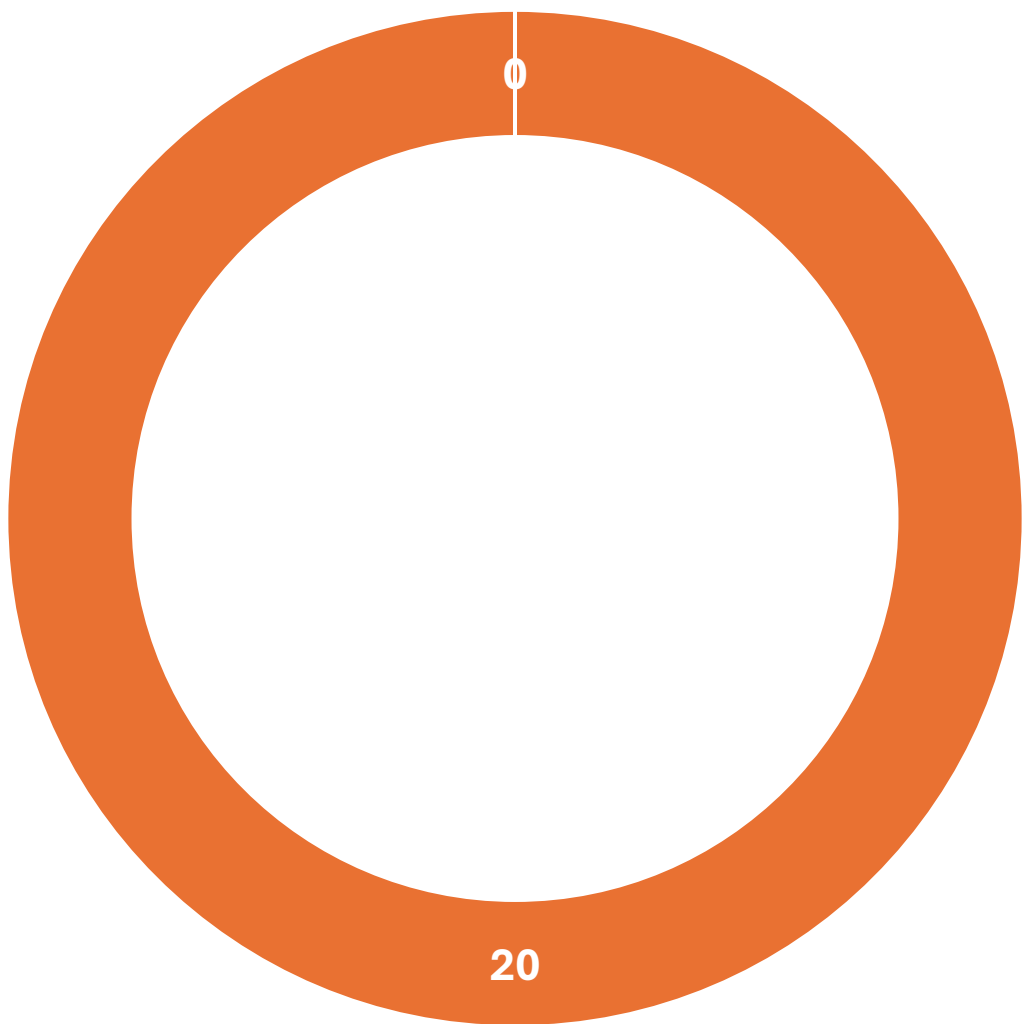


■ Yes ■ No

Comments:

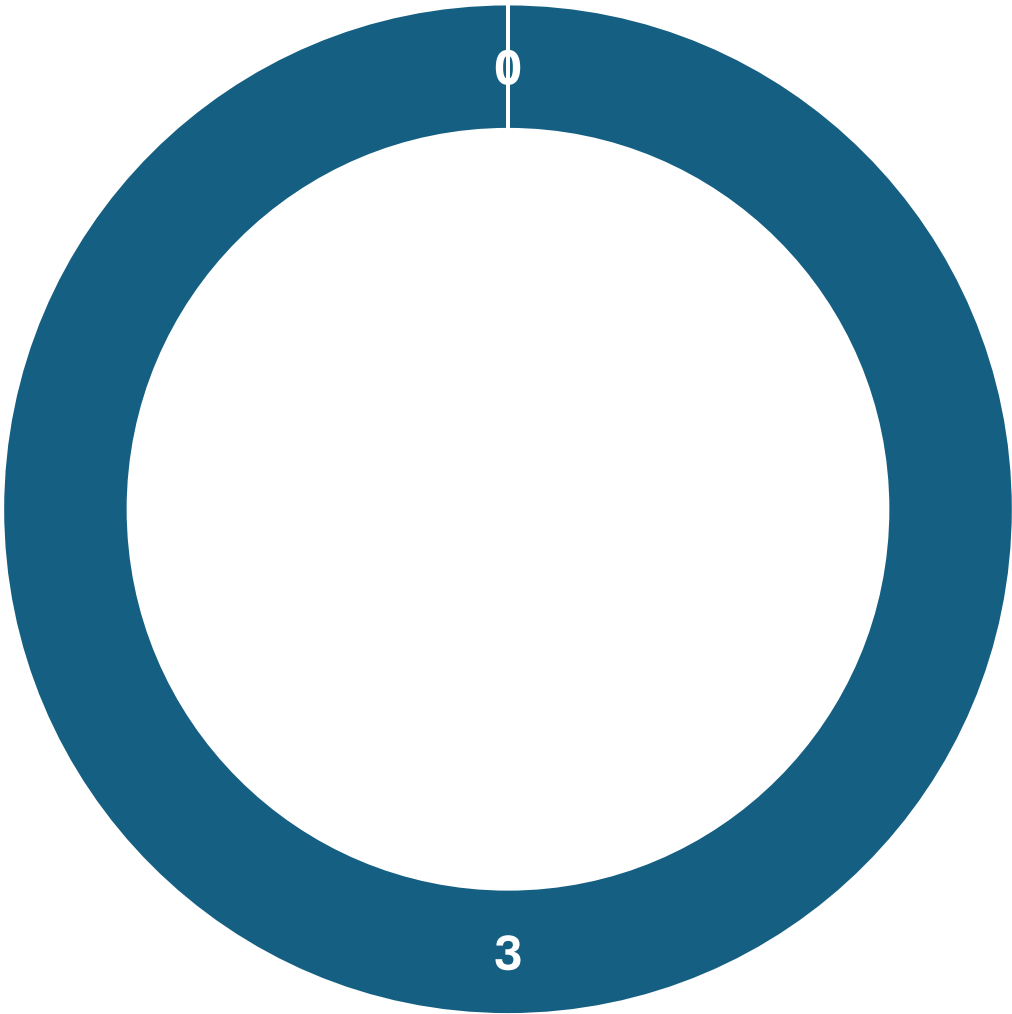
- Don't own a smartphone or have internet connection.
- Own a smartphone but don't know how to use it.
- Forms keep freezing and have to restart again, slow internet connection.

6. Have you ever accessed digital health support sessions from the hospitals or GP surgeries?



■ Yes ■ No

7. If this was offered, would you be interested to attend?



■ Yes ■ No

Findings

18/20 of participants had experienced difficulties accessing health services digitally.

It is clear from the comments that there are a mixture of reasons why residents in Fenland are struggling to access health care services digitally:

- Internet speeds / connections much slower in rural areas.
- Lack of adequate devices.
- Poor education / understanding of how to use the services and even their device.
- Poor literacy skills, as well as visual impairments not being considered.
- Links not downloading, freezing, passcodes not sent in time.

Limitations:

This is a small sample size and unfortunately not everyone completed every question, so some answers are more limited than others. However, we feel this provides an insight into the residents' experiences from rural settings in particular and highlights the significant areas of concern for health care moving further into digital-only access. More should be done to support those who are getting left behind.

Further information on the findings

Speed of internet and connectivity issues

Only 9 participants shared an answer to Q3 but 7 / 9 experience connectivity and internet speed issues. Comments throughout reveal internet download speeds affect access and difficulty connecting, including links not downloading and verification codes not being sent in time.

Issues for Hospital to Hospital / GP surgery transferring notes / letters/ results

Responses to Q4 highlight issues with transferring of hospital notes between hospitals affecting treatments and even causing repeat of tests. Also, there are reports of issues with the quality of hospital notes not being clear if appointments are in person or on the phone and GPs not scanning documents in time for next appointments.

Challenges with GP surgeries moving to online services

The responses to Q5 show there are issues with GP practices moving to digital platforms to request appointments, out of 13 responses, 12 experienced difficulties using GP online services. Comments includes connection issues, device issues, lack of understanding to use device for that purpose.

Support received to help with these issues / challenges?

The responses to Q6 shows there are little efforts made from health care sectors to offer support for learning the technical systems. The responses to Q7 shows there is an interest if there was education sessions held by GPs / hospitals to educate people using these online services.

Our suggestions / desired outcomes

- An alternate method such as a telephone lines to remain available for residents who are not able to access online services. More understanding for those who are, visually impaired, unable to access or use digital equipment, and who live in rural areas where connection speeds will affect their digital access.
- More education sessions from hospitals and GP practices to educate their residents on how to use their online platforms. More training for all staff to be able to support those in their care to use the apps, and different digital systems. This should be clinical and non clinical staff.
- Creating a video tutorial is not enough, residents will benefit from staff support / education sessions for those experiencing issues. For example, Is there scope for their designated cancer care nurse to ask whether the person can access digital health records at the start of their treatment and if not, this then can be noted on their care plan and alternative methods for keeping the patient informed can be used?
- For more collaboration to occur across health services, different trusts and from secondary to primary care, for transferring test results, documentation and appointment details.
- Collaboration from health settings with digital support services and other cancer support services in the community. This could be for the delivery of support sessions for example for digital health platforms as well as a better joint up approach to support that resident holistically.