

The Rt Hon James Murray MP,
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care,
Department of Health and Social Care,
39 Victoria Street,
London.
SW1H 0EU

29th June 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

We the undersigned, are writing to draw your attention to the findings of Care on HOLD – a report from Re-engage, the UK's only charity dedicated to ending social isolation and loneliness in older people, aged 75 and over. The campaign brings together research and lived experience to show the impact of digital-first GP access on older people.

Our report reveals that the rapid shift towards digital-first systems is creating significant barriers that prevent many older people from accessing care, while also setting out practical steps to ensure equitable access to GP services. As GP services shift towards digital-first systems, older people increasingly report feeling excluded and disconnected from healthcare, often describing their experiences as “inadequate”, saying they feel “disadvantaged” or even “discriminated against”. This exclusion has tangible consequences for health outcomes and wellbeing, risks increasing loneliness and social isolation, and places additional pressure on already stretched NHS and emergency services.

The UK has a strong record of leadership on issues of equality and inclusion, and as our population ages it is vital that health and care systems evolve in ways that protect older people's rights, dignity, and ability to participate fully in society. However, too many older people are being left behind by digital-first healthcare models that do not reflect their needs or circumstances. Our report found that 63% of older people agree that online GP services increase feelings of isolation and loneliness. A minority of people aged 75 and over use the internet frequently, and many face physical, cognitive, financial or confidence-related barriers to digital engagement. Without reliable offline alternatives, digitalisation risks widening health inequalities and undermining the Government's ambitions for prevention and early intervention.

We call upon the UK Government to commit to making digital health systems genuinely inclusive, accessible, and equitable for socially isolated and lonely older people by adopting the following recommendations:

Human connection - Embed in NHS digitalisation strategies the right for people to choose between digital or offline access when using health services.

Offline access - Include in GP contracts a condition that analogue routes remain available by making non-digital access a protected component of health digitalisation policy.

Listening - Ensure older people are directly involved in shaping digital health policy and service design.

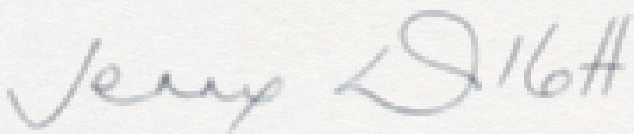
Data transparency - Centrally collect and publish data from Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and health boards on both digital and analogue access, broken down by age, gender, disability and ethnicity.

These actions would send a clear signal that older people are valued equally and would work to strengthen the relationship between older people and their GP. Older people tell us they want choice to use digital routes if they wish, alongside offline options.

We respectfully urge your office to consider supporting the Re-engage Care on HOLD campaign in its mission to create lasting, positive change for older people aged 75 and over and ensure that no one in our community is left behind.

We look forward to your response and your action on this issue.

Yours sincerely,



Rt Hon Jenny Willott OBE
Chief Executive, Re-engage

Co-signatories:

