

May 2026 | Care Policy & Evaluation Centre (CPEC)

Recommendations for implementing digital social care records

Who is this for?

Polymakers | Care provider managers | People interested in digital technology policy for social care



READING TIME 5 – 10 minutes

Contents

Page number:

Purpose of briefing	1
Research overview	1
Recommendations	2
1. Improve support for choosing the right DSCR	2
2. Address concerns around future affordability of DSCRs	2
3. Clarify expectations around digitisation requirements	2
4. Strengthen digital skills across the care workforce	3
5. Support safe and effective data sharing	3
6. Raise awareness of DSCRs among people drawing on care and families	3
7. Enhance care provider support for managing digital change	3
8. Foster strong care provider–technology supplier relationships	4
9. Improve accessibility and inclusivity of DSCRs	4
10. Expand Access for People Drawing on Care and Families	4
Find out more	5
Research partners and funders	5
About Socrates	6

Purpose of briefing

This briefing note presents 10 evidence-based recommendations for policymakers involved in making decisions about digital technology for social care. They can support the effective implementation of Digital Social Care Records (DSCRs).

The recommendations aim to maximise the benefits of DSCRs across adult social care, ensuring they are introduced in ways that are inclusive, practical, and impactful. They have been developed with input from our Evaluation Advisory Network (EAN) and other expert stakeholders.

Research overview

The recommendations are based on evidence from a rapid evaluation completed in 2025. It aimed to help organisations providing care for adults to use DSCRs in a way that could deliver the greatest benefit for the most people.

The research involved 30 home care and care home providers in 4 areas across England. We carried out 86 interviews with care provider managers, frontline staff, people drawing on care, their families, and DSCR technology suppliers.

Recommendations

1. Improve Support for Choosing the Right DSCR

Many care providers reported difficulty selecting a DSCR system due to limited capacity and knowledge, leading to buyer regret and supplier switching.

Recommendation: Develop and promote impartial, accessible advice and resources to support informed decision-making. This should include:

- Clear and accessible standards for features essential to DSCR functionality (e.g. offline working)
- Requirements for optimal performance of each DSCR (e.g. reliable WiFi, 5G data, device specifications)
- Tailored guidance for care providers on what questions to ask technology suppliers in the form of a decision tree
- Tailored advice or checklists that highlight relevant DSCR features for different types of care providers (e.g. home care and care homes)
- Transparent information on costs and return on investment
- Raising awareness of regional and national advice networks for care providers

2. Address Concerns around Future Affordability of DSCRs

While financial support and policy attention has driven adoption, concerns persist about long-term affordability, particularly for small independent care providers.

Recommendation: Ensure flexible, ongoing financial support for digital transformation. Consider:

- Factoring ongoing DSCR subscription costs into NHS and local authority contracts
- Maintaining funds to stimulate digital technology adoption, but with greater flexibility
- Developing a formula-based tool to tailor funding to care providers with different levels of digital maturity and care contexts

3. Clarify Expectations around Digitisation Requirements

Uncertainty around whether DSCR adoption is mandatory and how it affects Care Quality Commission (CQC) ratings has led to confusion among care providers.

Recommendation: Provide clear, consistent messaging from national and local government, the NHS, and the CQC regarding:

- Legal and contractual requirements around DSCR adoption
- Implications of DSCR adoption for CQC inspection ratings
- The future direction of digital policy in adult social care to ensure momentum gained is not lost

4. Strengthen Digital Skills Across the Care Workforce

Digital confidence and skills among care staff vary widely, and many are unaware of or underusing DSCR features.

Recommendation: Encourage care providers to prioritise digital skills training across all levels of the workforce. Consider:

- A national educational campaign promoting continuous professional development and the organisational benefits of digital upskilling that aligns with the Digital Inclusion Action Plan
- Educational topics could include using technologies for care, digital leadership, safe and secure digital working, data regulations, data sharing, and informing people drawing on care of their data rights.

5. Support Safe and Effective Data Sharing

There was some confusion among care providers about data sharing responsibilities when using DSCRs.

Recommendation: Support care providers in understanding data sharing obligations in a digital context and promote interoperability of DSCR solutions. Actions include:

- Ensuring that DSCR suppliers continue to work towards interoperability with other DSCRs and technologies
- Developing NICE guidelines on good practice when working with digital records and technologies, which would apply to NHS and adult social care organisations

6. Raise Awareness of DSCRs Among People Drawing on Care and Families

People drawing on care and their families often lack understanding of DSCRs and how they are used.

Recommendation: Empower care providers to inform people in their care and their families about DSCRs and their rights regarding access to and use of their data. This could involve:

- Promoting existing resources for care providers (e.g. Digital Care Hub)
- Including this topic in the educational campaign to help staff approach conversations about data

7. Enhance Care Provider Support for Managing Digital Change

Care providers were often surprised and unprepared for challenges when managing digital change, despite many being predictable.

Recommendation: Improve access to practical advice and peer support for care providers to plan, manage and resource change more successfully. Consider:

- Expanding digital leadership training (e.g. through the recommended educational campaign)
- Encouraging membership organisations and DSCR suppliers to develop peer support networks

8. Foster Strong Care Provider–Technology Supplier Relationships

Successful DSCR implementation depends on responsive and collaborative relationships with technology suppliers.

Recommendation: Support DSCR suppliers to deliver excellent customer service and maintain development capacity for customer-driven improvements. Consider:

- Developing clearer and more binding guidance about how DSCR suppliers should respond to technical issues, including cyber-attacks, and reasonable development requests from care providers.
- Collaborate with care providers on shaping national development roadmaps to ensure the direction serves their needs and those of specialist care providers.

9. Improve Accessibility and Inclusivity of DSCRs

DSCRs can be difficult to use for individuals with visual, motor, or language barriers.

Recommendation: Ensure DSCRs meet accessibility standards and support a diverse workforce. Consider the steps needed to ensure DSCR suppliers:

- Comply with Accessible Information Standards and national accessibility guidelines
- Clearly state accessibility features (e.g. translation features, reading age required to use their DSCR)
- Recommend accessible devices compatible with their DSCR (e.g. tablets for people with limited dexterity)

10. Expand Access for People Drawing on Care and Families

Despite potential benefits, portals for people drawing on care and their relatives to access DSCRs (sometimes known as patient and family portals) are underused.

Recommendation: Encourage DSCR suppliers to develop and improve portals, and support care providers to adopt and promote their use. Consider:

- Encouraging DSCR suppliers to co-design portals with people drawing on care and their families to ensure accessibility and usability of portals
- Encouraging care providers to adopt portals and support people drawing on care and their relatives to use them (e.g. through the recommended educational campaign)



Find out more

- Malley J, Westwood J, Snow M, Farrelly N, Steils N, Henderson C and Larkins C (2026). A Rapid Evaluation of the Implementation of Digital Social Care Records in England. *Health and Social Care Delivery Research*, Vol. 14, Issue. 16, URL: <https://doi.org/10.3310/GJJW2821> (or scan QR code here →)
- Snow M, Silva-Ribeiro W, Baginsky M, Di Giorgio S, Farrelly N, Larkins C, Poole K, Steils N, Westwood J, Malley J (2025). Best Practices for Implementing Electronic Care Records in Adult Social Care: Rapid Scoping Review, *JMIR Aging*, 8:e60107, URL: <https://aging.jmir.org/2025/1/e60107>



- [Webinar in June 2024](#) presenting emerging findings from interviews with care managers (click hyperlink or scan QR code here ↔)
- [Webinar in November 2024](#) presenting emerging findings from phase 2 (interviews with care workers, people drawing on care, and families) (click hyperlink or scan QR code here →)



Research partners and funders

We extend our sincere appreciation to all individuals and organisations who have contributed to this research, as either participants or peer researchers/advisors in our Evaluation Advisory Network (EAN).

This project was funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Health and Social Care Delivery Research Programme (NIHR163639) through the Social Care Rapid Evaluation Team (NIHR153673).



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE



University of
Lancashire

Funded by



National Institute for
Health and Care Research





About Socrates

Socrates is a group of researchers and people with experience of social care from three universities: the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE); the University of Lancashire; and King’s College London (KCL).

We have been funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) to undertake rapid evaluations that will make a difference on issues that people care about in social care, including adults, children and families.

Please visit our website for more information:

 www.lse.ac.uk/cpec/research/projects/SOCRATES

