

May 2026 | Care Policy & Evaluation Centre (CPEC)

Recommendations for implementing digital social care records

Who is this for?

Polymakers | People interested in digital technology policy for social care



READING TIME 5 – 10 minutes

Contents

Purpose of briefing

Research overview

Recommendations

1. **Improve support for choosing the right DSCR**
2. **Address concerns around future affordability of DSCRs**
3. **Strengthen digital skills across the care workforce**
4. **Support safe and effective data sharing**
5. **Enhance care provider support for managing digital change**
6. **Foster strong care provider–technology supplier relationships**
7. **Improve accessibility and inclusivity of DSCRs**

Find out more

Research partners and funders

About Socrates

Purpose of briefing

This briefing note presents 7 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.

The government has recently announced that all care providers will be expected to become fully digitised by the end of this parliament (currently June 2029). These recommendations account for this evolving context.

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:

- Set clear expectations for DSCR suppliers to provide essential functionality, such as offline working, and to be transparent about the conditions needed for their DSCRs to work well, such as reliable WiFi.
- Provide tailored decision support to help different types of care providers identify the DSCR features they need and ask suppliers the right questions.
- Improve transparency on costs, value for money and available advice networks, so providers can make informed choices and reduce the risk of buyer regret or supplier switching.



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. 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 of their data rights.

4. 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

5. 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

6. 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 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.

7. Improve Accessibility and Inclusivity of DSCRs

There is a national focus on improving interoperability and data usage, but less on accessibility, inclusivity, and engaging people drawing on care and their families.

Recommendation: Increase the focus on inclusivity and expand access for people drawing on care and their families

- Ensure DSCRs meet accessibility standards and support a diverse workforce.
- Encourage DSCR suppliers to develop and improve 'patient and family' portals, and support care providers to adopt and promote their use.
- 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.

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

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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:

<https://www.lse.ac.uk/cpec/research/projects/socrates>

