Developers guidance

Researching user needs

Downloaded on July 26th, 2025

This is **best practice** guidance

Although not legally required, it's an essential activity.

This Guide covers:

- United Kingdom

From:

- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

Last reviewed: 11 October 2024

Knowing the user needs of your digital technology in the health and social care space is critical to your success. Researching and defining user needs is therefore an important first step in a user-research plan.

The importance of knowing what your users need from your digital technology

Knowing user needs will help you:

- determine if your digital technology is relevant and useful for the health and social care system
- develop a clear and relevant value proposition and identify any possible barriers to adoption of your digital technology

If you do not understand user needs, your digital technology is not likely to meet them, and so adoption of your technology will be unlikely.

Users are anyone who would use your digital technology. This includes patients and their families, carers, health and social care staff, or a combination of these. User needs are the needs that a user has of a service. That service must meet the needs of the user and provide them with the right outcome.

Research user needs: how to do it

User needs within health and social care systems are complex. There may be existing capacities or methods for solving the problem you are trying to solve, and any new digital technology could disrupt current systems. So it's essential to understand people's entire experience around the technology or service you're building.

Follow guidance on researching user needs in:

- the [Department of Health and Social Care's guide to good practice for digital and data-driven health technologies](#)
- the [Government Digital Service's manual on user research](#)
- the [NHS Digital service manual](#)

Also think about your full user-research strategy. Users should be involved as much as possible throughout the technology's lifecycle (conceptualisation, development, design and post-market review).