**Pensioner Poverty & Digital Working Party**

**Briefing Paper - September 2022**

**Introduction**

The Covid-19 pandemic lockdown exacerbated the loneliness, isolation and povertyof older people not online. It also shone a light on how they lost out financially if they were unable to shop and access discounts on goods and services. The cost of living crisis has made things much worse. Combined action is needed from regulators including OFCOM and from statutory, independent and third sector service providers.

“Digital poverty is the inability to interact with the online world fully, when where, and how and individual needs to,” according to the Digital Poverty Alliance (DPA).

The DPA’s UK Evidence Review says**:** 1.7 million households are offline; 11 million people in the UK lack the digital skills needed for everyday life; developing data literacy will be important for keeping people safe online and building trust in the digital world.

**Background**

Pensioner poverty is a significant factor in people being digital excluded. 25% of people aged 65 and over in the UK don't use the internet. Older people who are without digital skills risk losing access to key services such as banking, shopping and health services, as well as communications platforms that keep people connected. This exclusion only goes to further exacerbate pensioner poverty.

* An Age UK and ISP CommunityFibre, survey found that 43% of those over the age of 60 are “struggling to pay for internet access” via broadband and mobile data services as a result of the cost-of-living crisis
* Nearly two million over-75s in England are still digitally excluded
* Digital exclusion is inextricably linked to wider inequalities in society, and is more likely to be faced by those on low incomes, people over 65 and disabled people
* over three million people aged 55 and over have never been online, with people aged over 75 the most likely to be digitally excluded.
* Digital exclusion was also almost twice as high among disabled people aged 64-75 than among their non-disabled peers.
* the number of people without basic digital skills in the UK is estimated to be 10.6 million

The most common reasons for people aged 65 and over not using the internet were:

* devices and connectivity
* access
* capability
* motivation
* support and participation

To end digital poverty these five intertwined determinants of digital poverty must be addressed to help alleviate pensioner poverty now and eradicate it by 2030 – the goal of the Digital Poverty Alliance, a coalition of charity and private sector bodies. The Alliance’s UK Evidence Review (Ref.1), says many people who would like help with digital skills and to get online do not know where to access it. Better information is needed.

The UK government’s long-awaited Digital Strategy (Ref.2) published in early June was a big disappointment. It barely touched on digital inclusion and according to Jen Gracie, Head of Policy and Communications, Digital Poverty Alliance: “Digital poverty is completely absent. This ignores the daily reality for many – that access to the digital world is out of reach. And we know that, increasingly, that means access to the fundamentals of life is out of reach…”

The government need to focus more on Digital Exclusion and work with organisations like the NPC to ensure alternative access to services are maintained.

**What the Digital Working Party and the NPC can do?**

Older people not online and without digital skills are missing out financially, socially and culturally and will become poorer as implementation of “digital first” policies in both the public and private sectors accelerates.

The Digital Working Party will:

* Support and work in partnership with other organisations campaigning on digital poverty, and continue to raise awareness of issues including: The BT switchover and what providers need to put in place to protect older and vulnerable people from losing telephone access. Ensuring at least that providers offer social tariffs.
* Support and work in partnership with other campaigners calling for access to the internet to be considered a human right.
* Launch a newsletter to help engage members in the Connections for All campaign, which will include raising awareness of digital issues, pensioner poverty problems and what can be done about them.
* Work in collaboration with other NPC working parties where there are cross-over digital issues affecting pensioner poverty
* Campaign for the right to choose. People must be able to access services by telephone, face to face and post
* Signposting members to organisations that offer courses for digital skills

The NPC has recently become a member of the Digital Poverty Alliance Community Hub. The NPC and supports its campaign for urgent action now and to end poverty by 2030. A lot of information is available, and we need to look at how best we can share this with our members.

**Further Information / References**

\*1. UK Evidence Review, Digital Poverty Alliance published 27th June, 2022

<https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/uk-digital-poverty-evidence-review-2022/executive-summary/>

\*2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uks-digital-strategy>

\*3 Jen Gracie quote <https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/news-updates/uk-digital-strategy-nowhere-near-digital-for-all/>

Further information on the NPC Digital Working Party - [www.npcuk.org/digital-working-party](http://www.npcuk.org/digital-working-party)

Age UK - Digital Skills - [www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/programmes/digital-skills/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/programmes/digital-skills/)

**National Pensioners Convention**

**Marchmont Community Centre**

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**London**

[**www.npcuk.org**](http://www.npcuk.org)