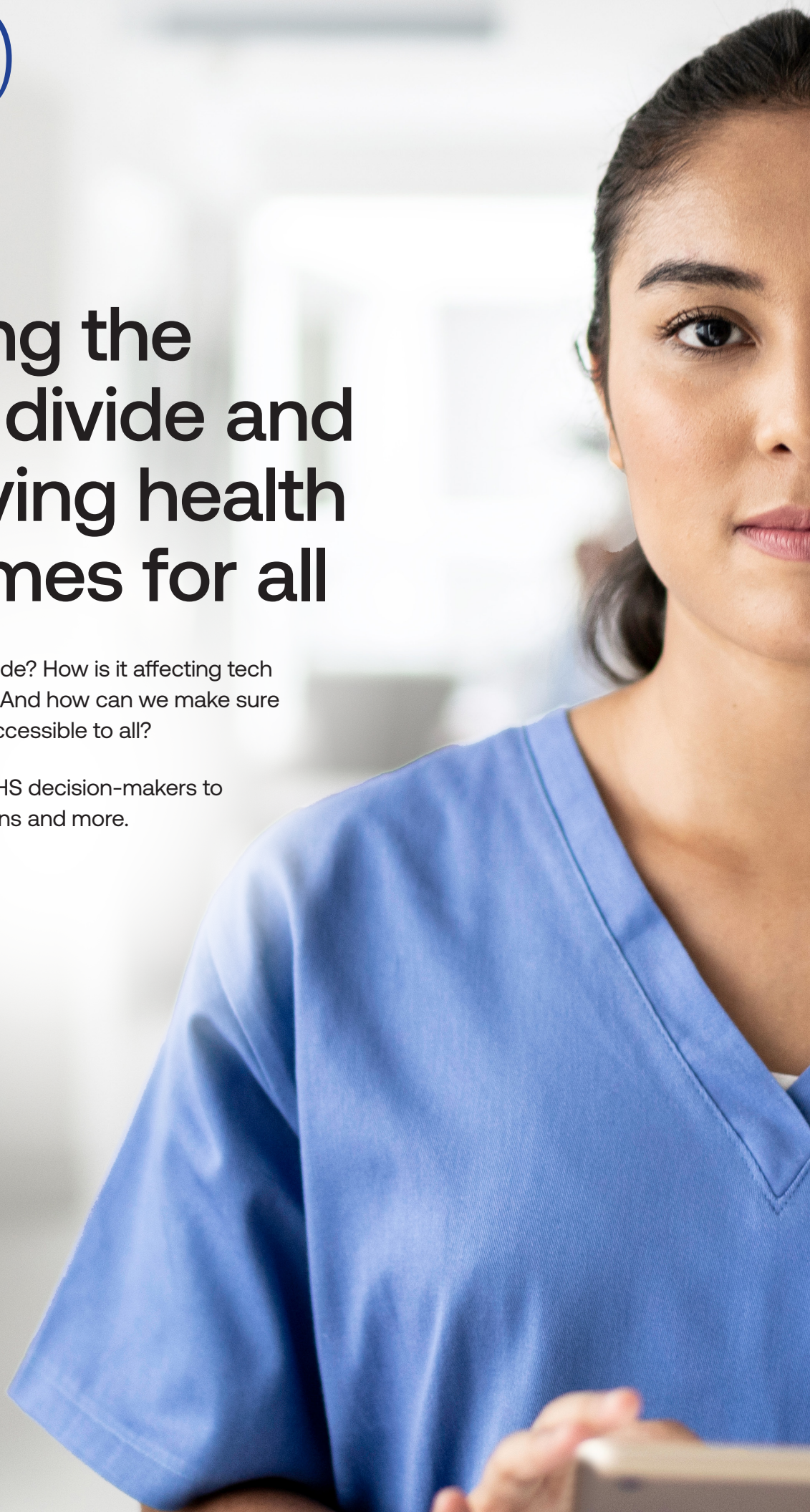
Virgin media O2 Business

Bridging the digital divide and improving health outcomes for all

What is the digital divide? How is it affecting tech progress in the NHS? And how can we make sure digital healthcare is accessible to all?

We surveyed 1,000 NHS decision-makers to answer these questions and more.



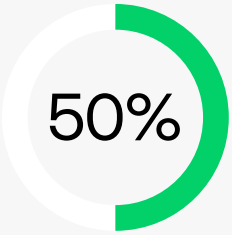
The dangers of the digital divide

The digital divide is the gap between people who can access digital tech and those who can't.

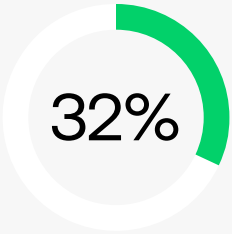
With digital tools like the NHS app becoming more and more important, this divide could lead to some patients struggling to access services.

of Britons don't have the basic digital skills to use the internet.

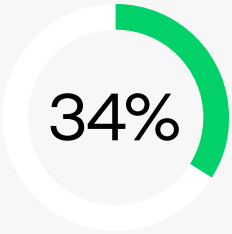
NHS decision makers see the divide as a major problem:



believe it's crucial for patients to have digital skills.



believe the cost-of-living crisis has made digital healthcare less accessible.



believe closing the digital divide could take up to a decade.

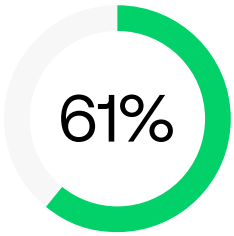
"We need to stop vulnerable people becoming digitally isolated due to its impact on their independence. I know an elderly person who ended up in hospital because they couldn't reach their doctor by phone to order repeat medication. This acute admission put extra pressure on the NHS, and impacted their independence which could've been avoided if the person had the digital access and skills to order their prescription online."

Sharon Sanders
Digital Inclusion Program Manager, Bradford Council

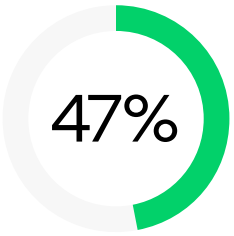
Closing the divide for staff

It's not just the patients. NHS workers feel overwhelmed by the pace of tech change and need the knowledge, expertise and confidence to make the most of any new tools.

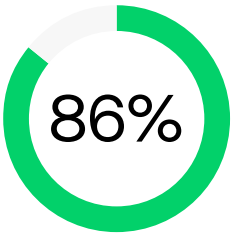
It's an issue recognised by NHS decision makers:



believe digital skills for staff are crucial.



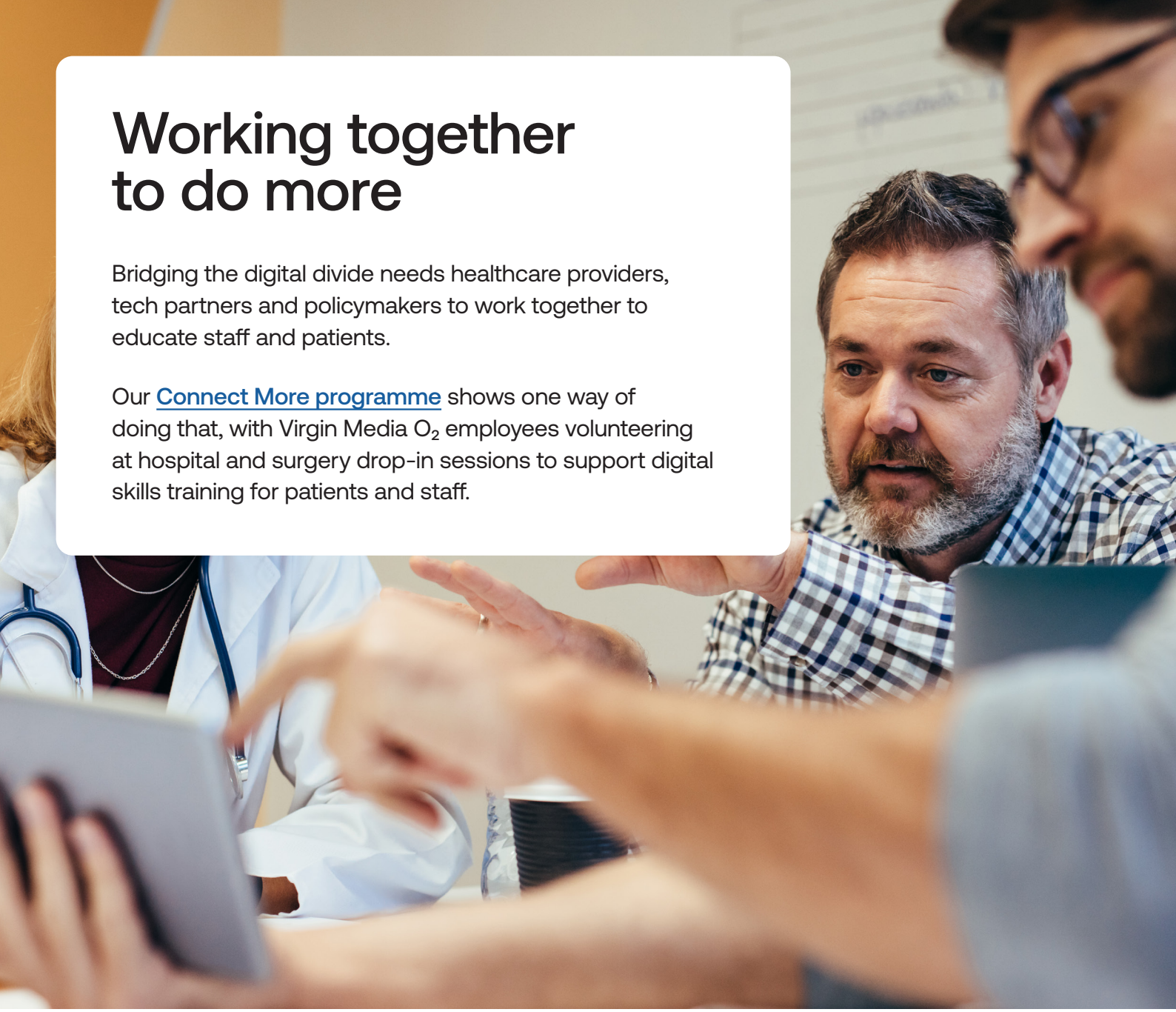
identify staff training needs as a barrier to adoption of digital tech.



call for further investment in digital skills for the NHS workforce.

"Training to ensure staff and end users have access to digital healthcare services has become critical. As technology has become more sophisticated, some professionals are unable to operate it efficiently."

Graham Walsh
Medical Director,
Health Innovation



Working together to do more

Bridging the digital divide needs healthcare providers, tech partners and policymakers to work together to educate staff and patients.

Our Connect More programme shows one way of doing that, with Virgin Media O_2 employees volunteering at hospital and surgery drop-in sessions to support digital skills training for patients and staff.

Want to increase digital inclusion in your trust?

In our new report we share key findings from research conducted with 1,000 senior NHS staff. It's full of insight and tips on driving digital inclusion for patients and staff alike.

Read the report

Source: Survey of 1,000 NHS decision makers undertaken by Censuswide, Jan 2024