



# How can the web support carers?

Executive Summary



## Background


This summary document and the full report were commissioned by the Department of Health and produced by Crossroads Care and The Princess Royal Trust for Carers, following research into how the internet can support carers. This research included extensive consultation with carers and service providers across the country.

The full report, which is available online at [www.crossroads.org.uk/get-online](http://www.crossroads.org.uk/get-online) or [www.carers.org/get-online](http://www.carers.org/get-online), contains a detailed exploration of the benefits and barriers to providing online support and details of the websites and services that are currently available, along with a range of recommendations for providers, illustrated by the words of carers themselves.

## Key messages

- The 24/7 nature of the internet makes it an indispensable resource for carers, and there are great benefits to making support services available online.
- Getting more carers online is essential to ensure that they are able to access all the information, services and support that are available.
- Online services should complement and add to the support that is already available, increasing carers' options rather than reducing them.
- Not all carers use the internet and even those who do may not always be able to access services online or may prefer to use another method. In cases where information or a particular service can only be accessed online, there is a danger that many carers will miss out.
- Consultation is the key to ensuring that online and offline services meet the needs of local carers.
- Exploring all the benefits and challenges of different types of websites can help providers design services that maximise resources and meet the needs of local carers.
- There are several existing tools and websites that may be able to be adapted to meet local need. Research and collaboration are essential starting points for maximising resources and avoiding duplication.

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**“The internet will not suit all, but I think it’s a useful addition to existing ways of communicating.”**

# “I use dozens of different sites every day.”

## Key facts

- Over 98% of online carers<sup>1</sup> usually access the internet from home, with only 5% regularly using public computers.
- Almost one in 10 net-using carers usually access the internet using a mobile phone.
- More than 60% of carers who use the internet are always logged on or go online several times a day.
- 99% of online carers use email, almost 45% have used instant messaging and 20% have used video chats.
- 94% of net-using carers shop online, and over half have bought groceries online.
- Seven out of 10 online carers say that the internet saves time, and five out of 10 finds that it helps them save money.
- 64% of carers say that keeping up with friends and family is one of their main reasons for going online.
- 42% of online carers say that the internet helps to reduce their feelings of isolation.
- 20% of online carers say that using the internet to work from home has had a positive impact on their caring role.
- 71% of online carers say that the internet helps them to stay connected to family and friends, and 64% of carers say that this is one of their main reasons for going online.

Further statistics on how carers use the internet are contained in the full report.



<sup>1</sup>The terms 'online carers', 'net-using carers' and 'carers who use the internet' have been employed interchangeably throughout this report to refer to carers who identify themselves as internet users, regardless of the frequency of their internet usage.

## Why carers need the internet

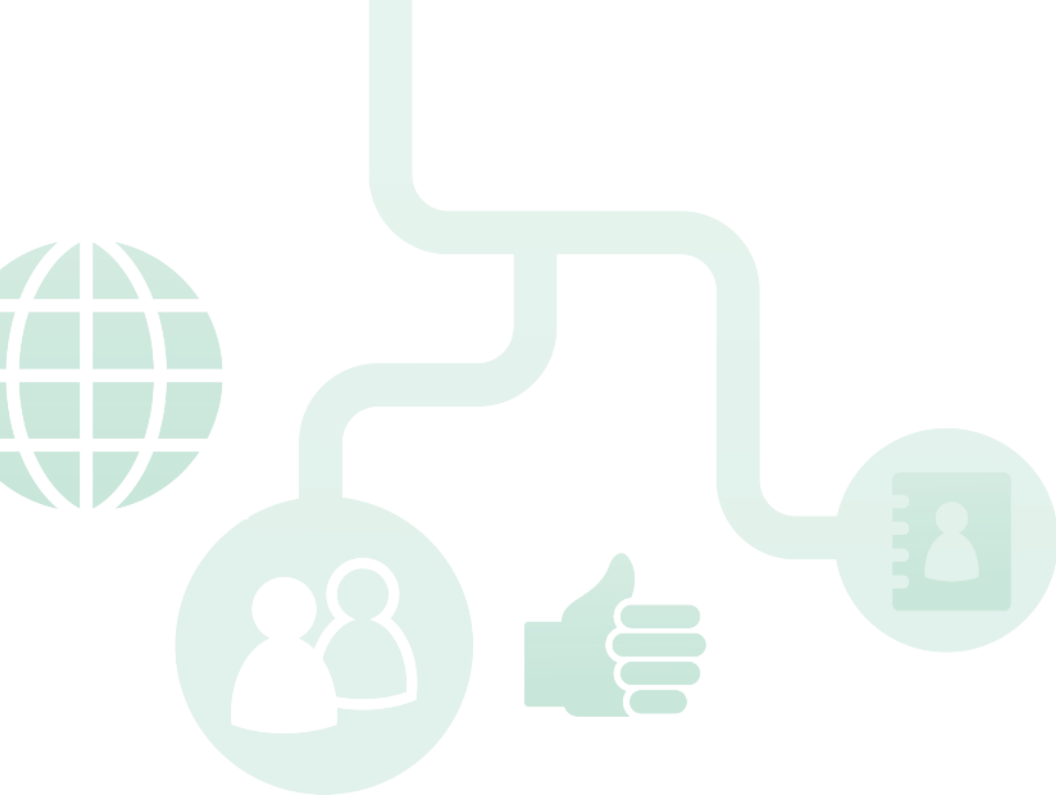
Many carers face a variety of challenges in their daily lives including irregular or unpredictable schedules, a shortage of time and money and the necessity of staying near the person being cared for. The internet can help to overcome many of these challenges by providing access to a wealth of services and functions such as:

- Information
- Social interaction
- Online shopping
- Flexible working
- Entertainment and breaks from caring
- Reduced isolation
- A life outside of caring

The internet can be an extremely effective tool for carers because it is available around the clock and without leaving home.



**“I’d be absolutely lost without the internet.”**



### **Benefits of providing carers' services online**

In light of the positive impact of general internet use on the lives of carers, there are many compelling reasons for providers to offer support services online including:

- reaching more carers, especially those who do not have access to offline services
- providing more options for accessing services
- maximising and streamlining carers' use of offline services by helping them to prepare beforehand
- reducing costs, staff time and administration.



**“The internet makes a lot of things possible.”**

# “Technology can help but it cannot replace.”

## Challenges for providers of carers' services online

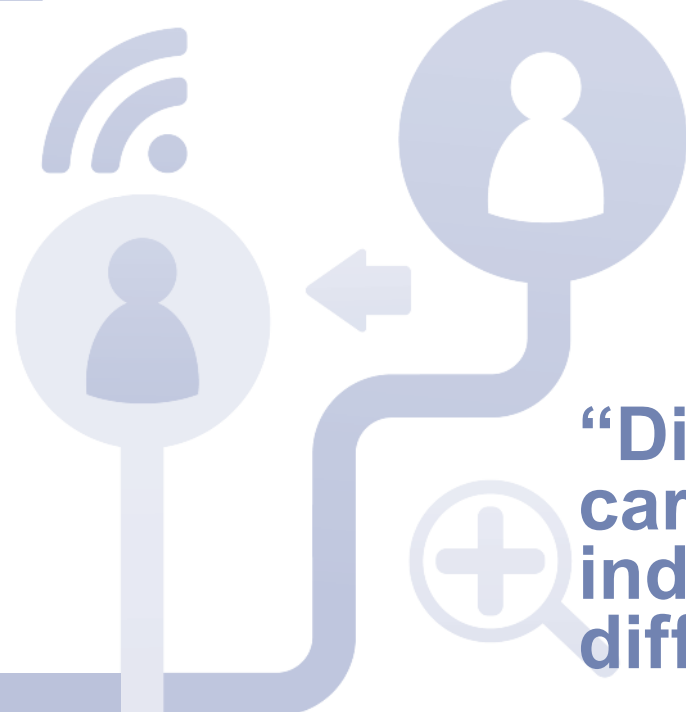
Many carers are unable to get online because of geographic restrictions, financial barriers and training needs. Others may be prevented by a need for ongoing support, fears about the risks and dangers or an inability to access public computers due to the demands of their caring role.

Some carers may not find it practical to use the internet due to physical disability, language issues or simply personal preference. Many carers also face the additional barriers of:

- time constraints
- necessity of staying near the person being cared for
- increased isolation if all services can only be accessed online
- desire to use the internet for fun rather than caring purposes.

All of these issues must be addressed in order to get more carers online, and offline services need to be offered alongside websites to ensure that all carers are able to access the services they need in the way that is most useful for them. Suggestions for how to overcome many of the barriers are contained in the full report, along with a list of organisations that are working to get more carers online.





**“Different groups of carers and different individuals have different needs.”**

### **Guidelines for carers’ websites**

Before embarking on the creation or development of websites aimed at carers, the following recommendations should be taken into account:

- involve carers and their families
- include the people being cared for
- avoid duplicating existing websites
- explore whether it would be possible to collaborate with or adapt an existing site or tool
- keep it free or low-cost
- tailor the service to the needs of carers in the local area or the target audience for the site
- find ways to attract carers who do not realise they are carers
- provide offline options for carers who are not online or prefer to access services in other ways.

Due to the challenges faced by many carers in their everyday lives, several universal website guidelines also require special attention when carers are the target audience:

- Keep site navigation simple and clear.
- Provide a solid technical foundation and back-up support if anything goes wrong.
- Pay special attention to issues of safeguarding and data security.

Methods for achieving these aims are outlined in the full report.

## Types of online support

**Information websites:** More than 70% of online carers use the internet to search for information related to caring, and almost half of these are searching at least once a week. Most are looking for particulars relating to a specific illness, disability or condition, with a search engine acting as their first port of call.

**Forums and chat rooms:** More than a fifth of online carers have visited chat rooms, and the same proportion regularly access online carers' forums. Almost half of these visit carers' forums more than once a week, with a quarter visiting at least once a day.

**Online networks of support:** 14% of net-using carers have online networks of support to exchange information about the person being cared for, get help with tasks or receive support with caring from friends, family and other contacts.

**Online breaks bookings:** Around 6% of net-using carers are making care arrangements online, and 4% have used a website to book a caring break.

**e-Learning:** 30% of online carers have taken part in e-learning, but only 9% of these programmes contained content relating to caring.

**Podcasts:** One in 10 net-using carers listen to podcasts, while almost a quarter listen to online radio.

See the full report for a detailed exploration of the benefits, challenges and recommendations for each type of website, along with examples of each and details of other applications.

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**“For many who don't access physical carers' services it's about providing what will be most useful for them online.”**





## What carers would like to see developed

Carers' suggestions for future developments include:

- dedicated ISP to provide free internet access to carers
- gateway website or one-stop shop aimed at new carers
- comprehensive information about all services available in a local area
- more online services booking
- information and support relating to money and benefits
- resources covering personalisation and personal budgets
- guidance for carers who want to start their own groups.

More details of these proposals, along with further information and carers' views on all of the issues outlined above, are contained in the full report.

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**“If I had an Aladdin's lamp, my wish would be for an internet site called [questionstoaskifyou'vejuststartedthiscaringlark.org](http://questionstoaskifyou'vejuststartedthiscaringlark.org).”**



**“I am able to communicate with other carers who really understand what a carer's life is like.”**

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