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Mark Hackett  
Chief Executive  
Swansea Bay University Health Board  
One Talbot Gateway  
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[By Email only]

30 January 2024

Dear Chief Executive,

### **Ensuring access to information and services in a digital age**

As you may recall, I wrote to you in July 2023 about follow-up work I was undertaking on digital exclusion and ensuring older people can access information and services in an increasingly digital world.

Thank you for updating me on further actions and measures you have put in place since you responded to my guidance on 'Ensuring access to information and services in a digital age: Guidance for Local Authorities and Health Boards' in 2022, and for sharing examples of good practice.

Over 150 older people shared their experiences with me, and the findings are concerning, evidencing the scale of the challenge in undertaking everyday activities without using the internet or a smart phone. Available data shows that 101,200 people over 75 do not use the internet in Wales, and this underlines the scale of the challenge.

I attach the report – Access Denied <https://olderpeople.wales/resource/access-denied-older-peoples-experiences-of-digital-exclusion-in-wales/> – which includes a series of recommendations for various bodies, including health boards. While there

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

are areas of good practice across Wales, much more needs to be done to ensure older people who are not online can access the information and services they need.

This right to access information and services is enshrined across several human rights instruments and other legislation, including the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010.

As you will see from the report, a number of the recommendations for health boards should be easy to achieve. For example, displaying phone numbers for public enquiries clearly on the home page of health board websites was an issue raised by older people, as was the importance of restoring hard copy leaflets and information across all sites, where this has not already returned post-pandemic. This is crucial to help ensure that the services provided by health boards, and those for which they are responsible, are available to an equivalent standard for people who are not online or do not have a smartphone.

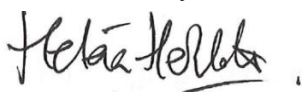
Older people, particularly individuals who are not online, need to be more consistently involved in the design of services to ensure that they are accessible. Investment is also needed in effective ways to help older people who want to be online to get online, and this support needs to be available on a sustainable basis.

Given the growing social exclusion being faced by older people and other groups who are digitally excluded, as highlighted in my report, it is more important than ever for us to work together to ensure that people who are not online can continue to access information and services.

I would be grateful if you could provide a response to my report and particularly the recommendations for health boards.

If you or members of your team would like to meet to discuss the findings and recommendations further, please contact my Policy and Practice Lead, Sion Evans: [sion.evans@olderpeople.wales](mailto:sion.evans@olderpeople.wales) // 07742 764125.

Yours sincerely,



Heléna Herklots CBE  
**Older People's Commissioner for Wales**