

# Digital tools for those with sensory impairments

A How To Guide for digital inclusion  
in health

October 2018



# Contents

Introduction to the pathfinder	3
Intervention Model	4
Before you Start	5
Stage 1 Engaging Patients and Practices	6
Stage 2 Implementing Learning	10
Stage 3 Benefits	14
In your area	22

# Introduction

There are an estimated [2 million people living with sight loss](#) and [11 million people living with hearing loss](#) in the UK.

People with sensory impairments face many barriers in their day-to-day interactions with the health service.

One of the most common places for all patients to visit is their local GP practice. Consequently, this can be a source of significant frustration for patients with sensory impairments as they try to have meaningful appointments for everyday ailments and symptoms.

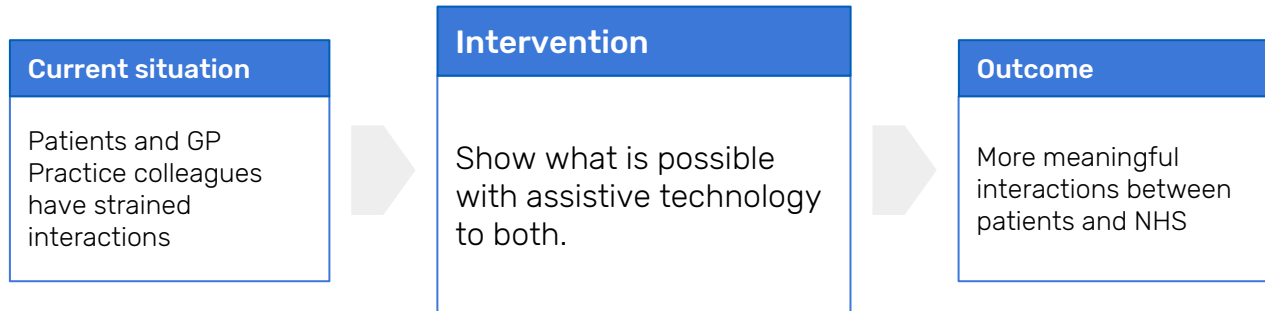
There is huge potential in digital technology to make this a better and more meaningful interaction for both patient and health professional.

Digital can, therefore, allow GP Practices to make “reasonable adjustments” in accessibility as per [CQC guidance](#).

This pathfinder focussed on two contexts of digital inclusion and accessibility;

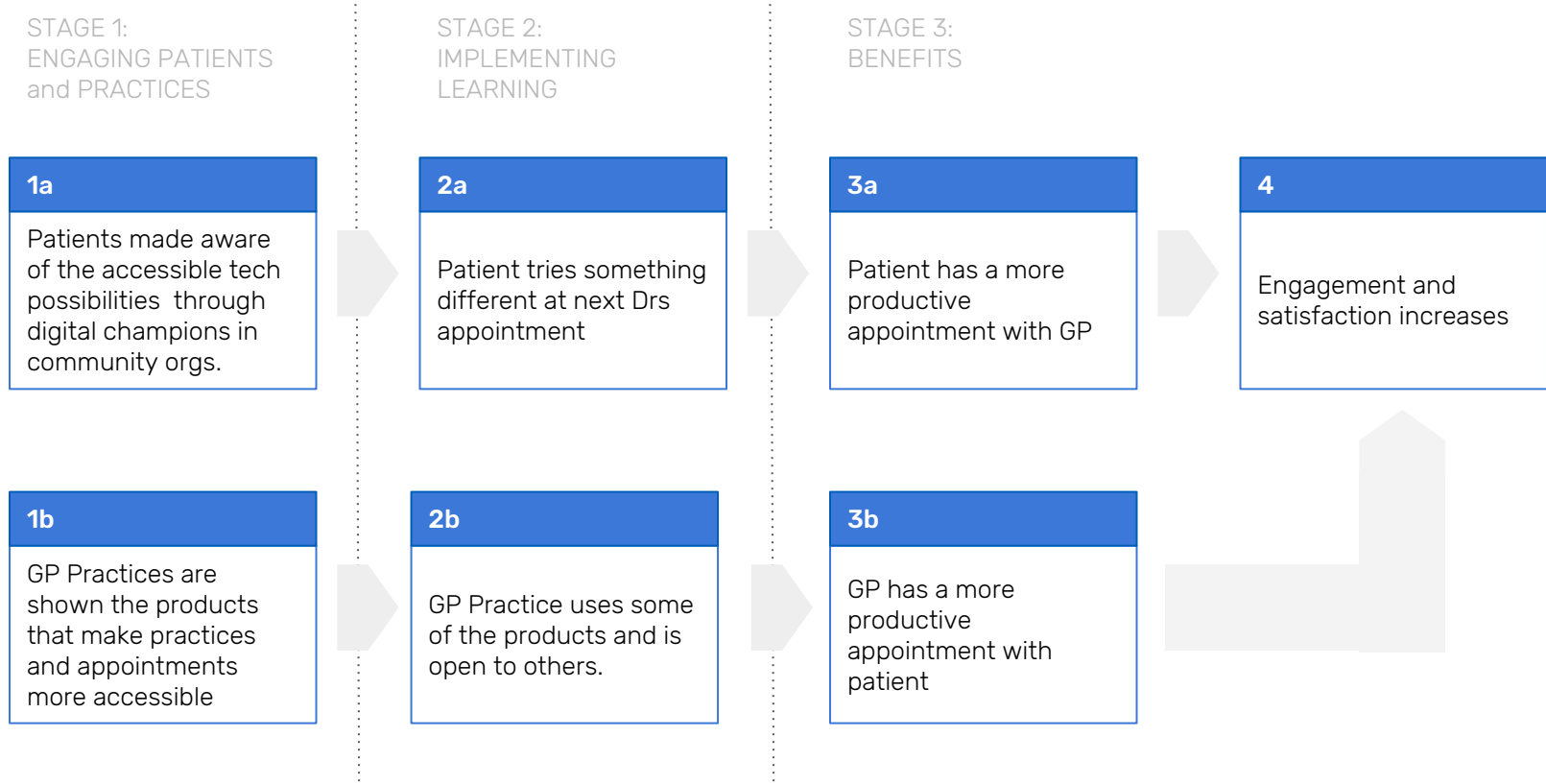
- The patient’s awareness of what is possible and readily available
- The GP Practice’s awareness of what is possible and readily available

The pathfinder worked with patients, support organisations and GP Practices across West Yorkshire over 12 months to find out what would work best and why.



# The Model

**Model:** Accessibility, through digital inclusion, working in parallel across patients and GP Practices



# Before you start

The first thing to do is identify who will be the driving force behind the change. It works well if there's a senior sponsor within the CCG or STP but it also needs someone on the ground to help implement the model.

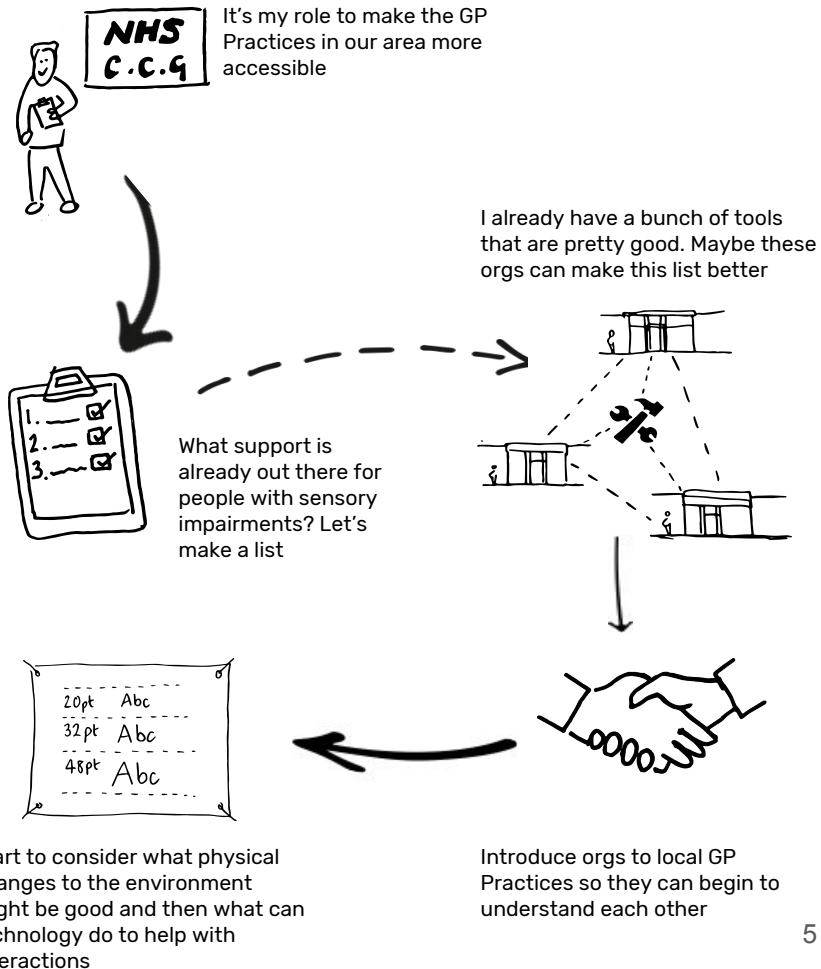
The next step is to understand what organisations (local or national) are helping people understand assistive technology already e.g. we used national RNIB Helpline, local [Kirklees Visual Impairment Network \(KVIN\)](#) and [Bradford Talking Media \(BTM\)](#).

The digital champions in these organisations are constantly showing how readily available technology can help day-to-day lives of people with sensory impairments. Bring them into the fold so you can design your area with them.

Linked to this guide is a list of assets that we have tested, take the relevant list with you as a starter and let these organisations/users/digital champions add to or take away as they are the experts in their field and locality.

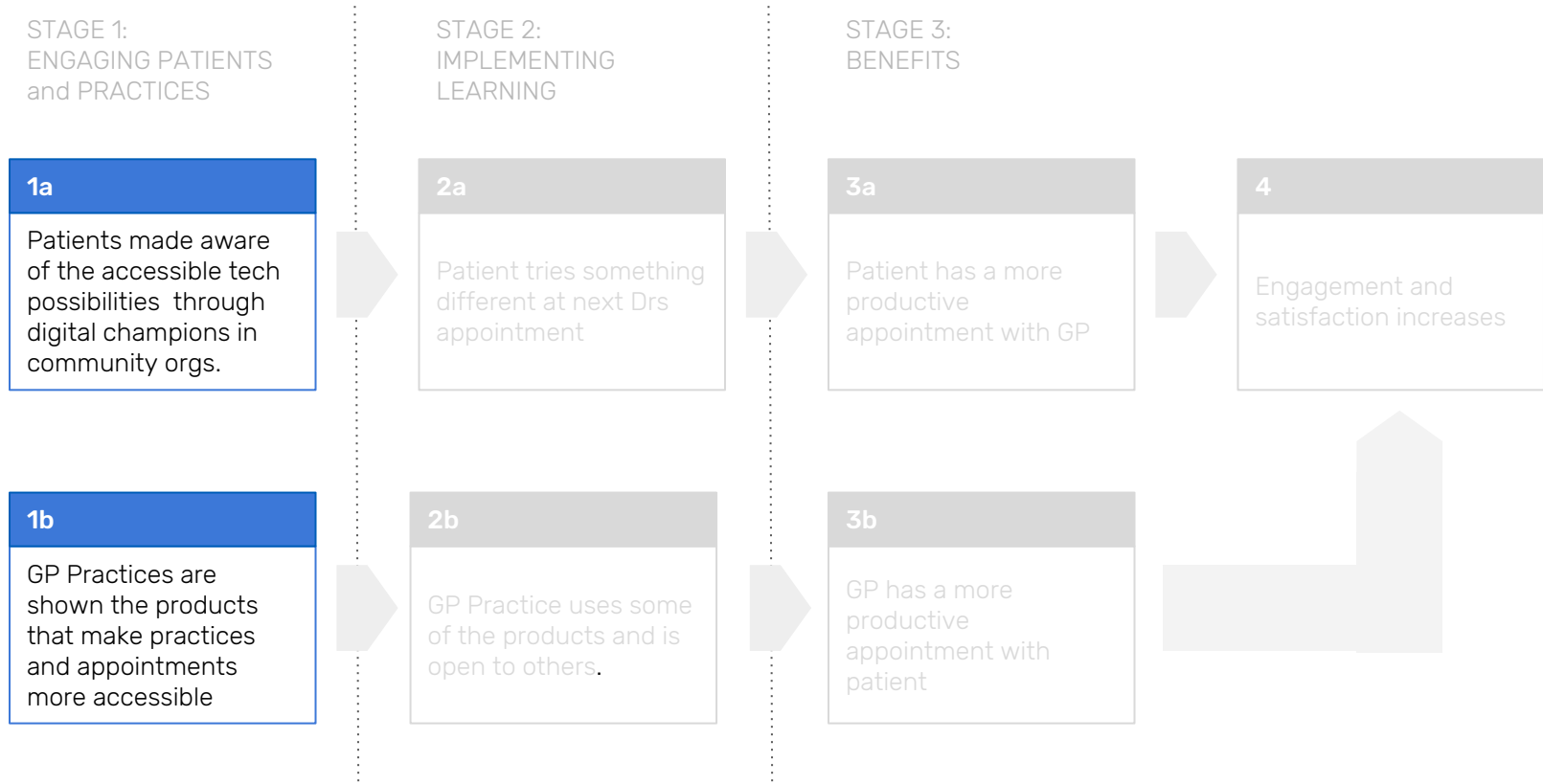
Then act as broker for building relationships between GP Practices and the identified organisations in your area. The better the relationship with practice staff the more mutual understanding will grow between all partners.

Remember that everybody's needs are different. This process is about accepting new ways to interact.



# Stage 1 Engaging Patients and Practices

**Model:** Accessibility, through digital inclusion, working in parallel across patients and GP Practices

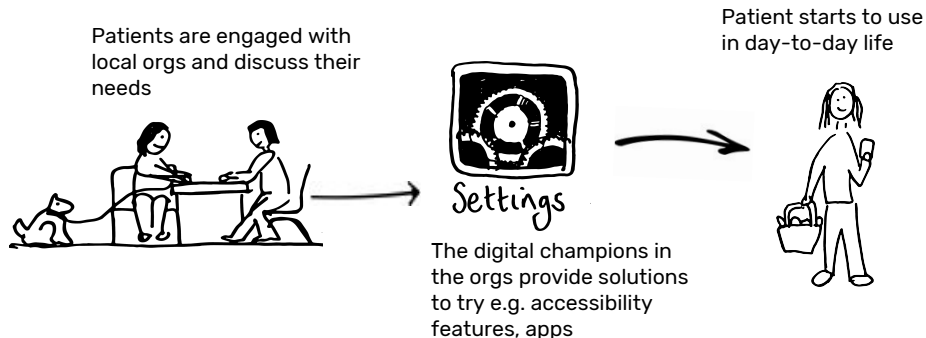


# STAGE 1: Engaging Patients and Practices

## Patients

The key to this process is introducing patients to technology/digital tools that will help them in their day-to-day life and using those same technologies and tools for interactions with the NHS.

Understanding the needs of patients is important. The digital champions within the local organisations are experts at finding out those needs and introducing relevant tools to people. This is an opportunity for the digital champions to discuss the tools we have identified to see what could work.



## Practices

GP Practices are introduced to the concept of assistive technology and how it might be useful for patients with sensory impairments. They are given the 'pack of accessible tools' but grow to acknowledge that patients will find other tools and these should be accepted as far as possible.

This also helps the GP practice look at the physical environment and see if signs, posters, screens are sufficiently accessible.



# STAGE 1: Engaging Patients and Practices

## People who are needed (not exhaustive)

**Accessibility Lead** from the CCG or STP who can drive this across the area

**Senior Sponsor** who can champion accessibility and the need to adopt digital tools

**Local Support Organisations** who use peer mentors / digital champions to show people with sensory impairments what tools are available

**National Support Organisations** who have experience and resources in accessibility and recommended tools

**GP Practice Managers** who are bought into the idea of making things more accessible and willing to give a bit of time to it

## Resources that are needed

[List of tools](#) that could be useful for sight impairments to offer to local support orgs and GP Practices

[List of tools](#) that could be useful for hearing impairments to offer to local support orgs and GP Practices

[How to support someone with sight loss](#) guide for GP Practices to show staff (receptionists, Nurses, GP's etc)

[How to support someone with hearing loss](#) guide for GP Practices to show staff (receptionists, Nurses, GP's etc)

[Electronic Info pack](#) to support GP Practices



# STAGE 1: Engaging Patients and Practices

## Don't:

- Assume the lists provided are exhaustive or indeed the correct tools for everyone
- Be scared to ask patients what would help them

## Do:

- Remember everyone's accessibility needs are different. Make notes on the system of best ways to help individuals
- Get to know local support organisations. They want to be involved and will help you re imagine your practice and appointments

## Don't:

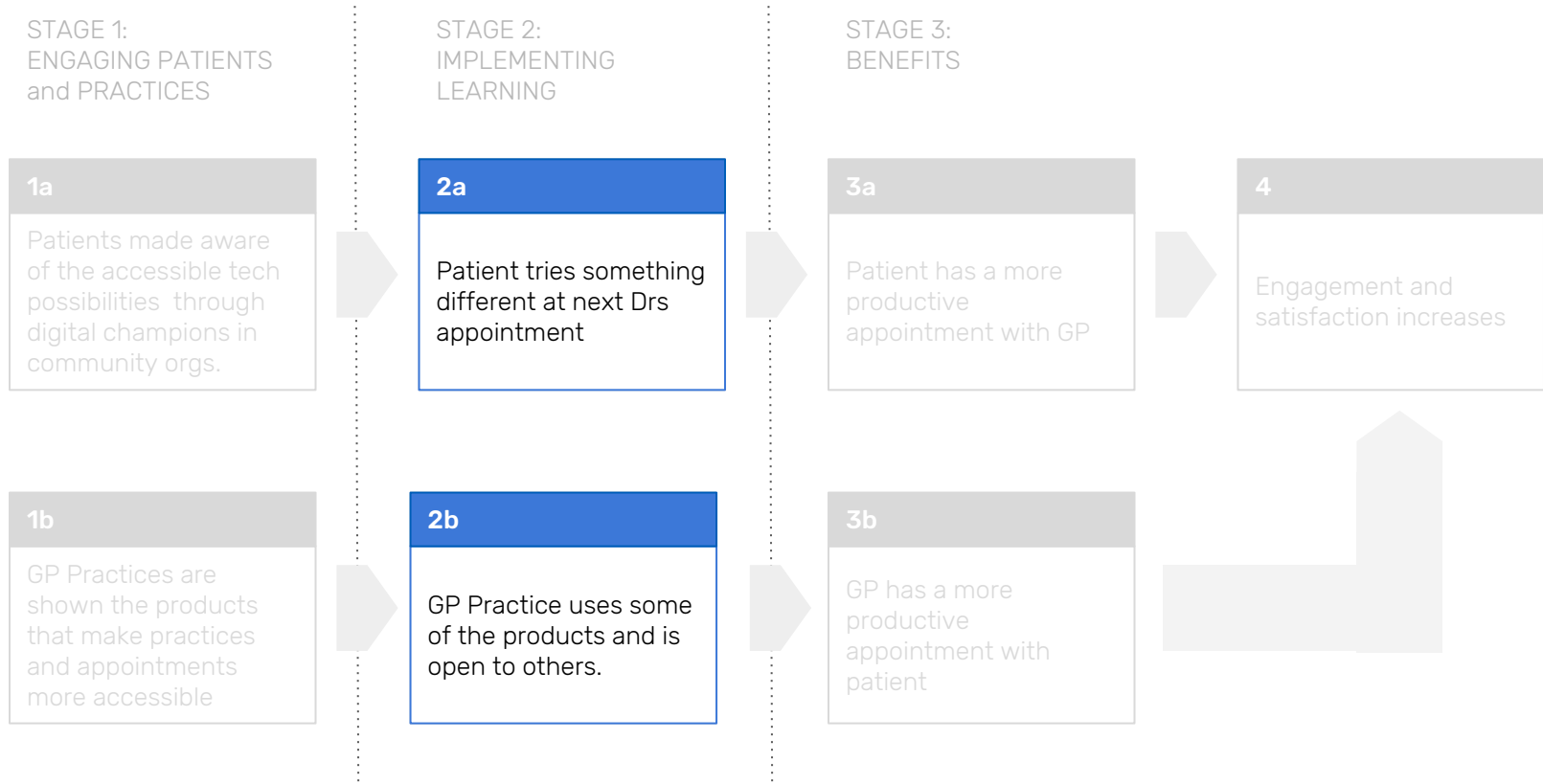
- Expect to be an expert in every tool. This is about learning what could be useful together
- Think that sensory impairments are limited to those with severe impairments. More accessible tools and environments can help those with slight or moderate loss.

## Do:

- Take into account the advice of the digital champions out in the community. They are usually expert by experience
- Build closer and closer relationships between GP Practices and local/national support orgs.

# Stage 2 Implementing Learning

**Model:** Accessibility, through digital inclusion, working in parallel across patients and GP Practices



# STAGE 2: Implementing Learning

## Patients

A person has now been introduced to something that could be useful for them. This could range from accessibility features on their smartphone, new apps to try or even new hardware. They start to use these tools in their day to day life and realising the potential of digital - specifically the potential of readily available things.

They are open to trying it in more formal interactions like in a Doctor's appointment.

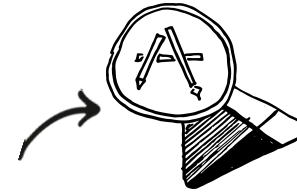
## Practice

The practice has made some changes and is willing to try new things to help patients with sensory impairments. It is important to open this discussion with a patient. Show them what you have got and be willing to use what the patient uses.

In time the practice can become digital champions in this area and talk to new patients about what they know has helped others in the past



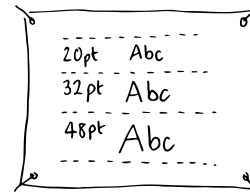
Patient uses new digital tools to benefit their day to day life



Starts to seek out new solutions for themselves



Willing to try it in a more formal environment. Becomes confident in articulating needs and solutions



GP Practice makes changes to office e.g. making print bigger on posters, moving obstacles, understanding a patient's journey

Reception staff engage patient in conversations and offers willingness to try something



Digital is used for an appointment or a transaction and a note is made on the system



# STAGE 2: Implementing Learning

## People you need

**Digital Champion in support org** to show new accessibility features, apps, hardware etc.

**Patients** who have become more confident in digital tools and are willing to try them at an appointment

**Reception staff** who are confident to start a conversation about digital with patients and help offer solutions or look to adopt what patient has

**GPs and Nurses** who are brought in to the process to try digital tools within their appointments.

## Resources you need

**Tablet** for some tools that might need to be 'owned' by the practice

**Wifi** to connect up devices and have a select number of apps available to start with

**Notes** to update systems on what has worked and how appointments should proceed with specific patient.

[Existing NHS patient online information](#) to display and follow

# STAGE 2: Implementing Learning

## Don't:

- Worry if the patient uses something that you haven't seen before. This is a good starting point for dialogue
- Assume a patient will be the one to talk first about ways to make things better. GP Practice staff hold the power in these early discussions

## Do:

- Have some tools/apps already on a tablet to show a patient what might be worth trying
- Let reception staff get used to different accessibility features on android and apple smartphones - make some handy guides if necessary

## Don't:

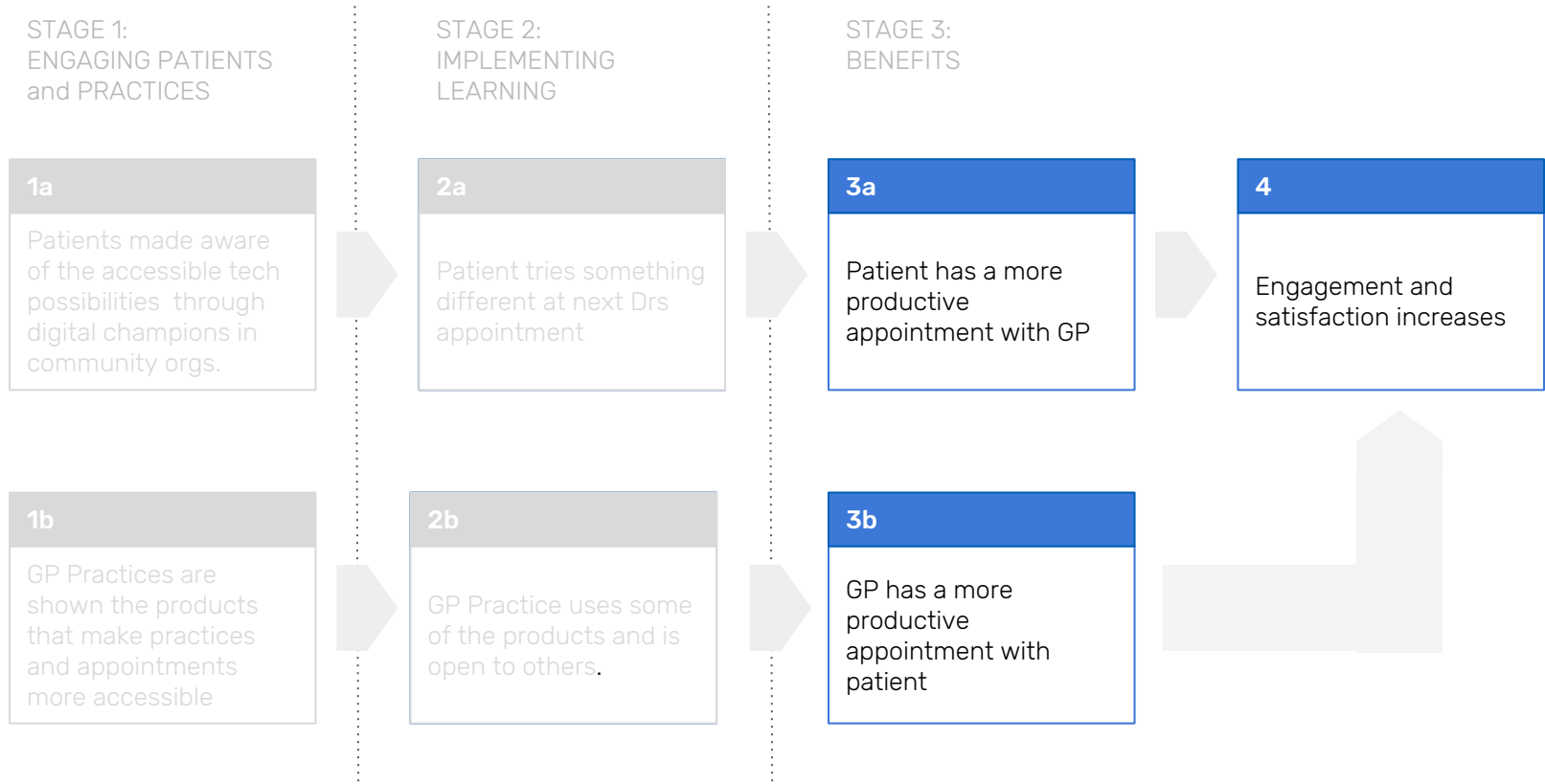
- Say just say "we can't use that app" if you are worried it hasn't been vetted. Offer a solution or say "let's have a look at this list and see if there's anything that does the same thing"
- Get into a situation where the patient has to repeat their needs everytime they come into the practice - document it on the system

## Do:

- Ask the patient for advice in what you could do to continually improve the practice
- Remember that things like patient online can be very valuable for those who struggle to make appointments by telephone

# Stage 3 Benefits

**Model:** Accessibility, through digital inclusion, working in parallel across patients and GP Practices



# STAGE 3: Benefits

Making sure that everyone gets a meaningful appointment, where everyone understands what has been said and the actions to take, can potentially give a raft of benefits for patients and practices.

- Getting to the symptoms quicker, allowing for more meaningful conversations between patients and doctors
- Less reliance on third parties to be present at appointments and the risk of cancellation
- Increased customer satisfaction in the service
- Increased customer activation in taking an active role in their own health
- Mutual knowledge increase on what is available and how digital can benefit more aspects of life
- Better record keeping and ease convenience of service
- Taking away some of the anxiety associated with attending a GP Practice for those with sensory impairments



I am receiving a better service and I'm confident that my Doctor understands my accessibility needs and presenting symptoms

I understand my patient better and I'm able to communicate more effectively



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# STAGE 3: Benefits

## Don't:

- Assume this is a one time thing. Digital technology will constantly change - keep reviewing
- Worry if you've never seen the technology before. Find out what it does and how it satisfies the patients needs and then it will be easy to find a more trusted source

## Do:

- Create an environment of digitally curious staff. No one needs to be an 'expert' - that would be a full time job.
- Talk about what you have been trying across your networks. Building confidence to try things is important.

## Don't:

- Think that accessibility stops with sensory impairments. Be open to uncovering things that might help other patients with different needs
- Forget the whole journey for the patient. It's not just about the Doctor's appointments. Think about before, during and after (booking, at the practice, picking up medication)

## Do:

- Be open to feedback and provide places for that.
- Maintain contact with the local organisations in the area

# In your area

This is how we did it in West Yorkshire. We have tried to make the model as flexible as possible allowing for local context and local needs.

To embed this into another area we recommend;

- Finding a senior sponsor within the STP or CCG area to allow facilitate access to GP Practices
- Identify a set of local organisations that can help with assistive technology

If you would like to discuss how you might be able to try something in your area please contact [pete@goodthingsfoundation.org](mailto:pete@goodthingsfoundation.org)

# Assets

[Evaluation](#)

[Case Studies](#)

[Alpha Evaluation](#)

[Design Session 1 - Stakeholder](#)

[Design Session 2 - User Insight](#)

mHabitat [project page](#)

Training day [blog](#) from mHabitat

Training day [vlog](#) from [Molly Watt](#)

Sight Impairments [List of tools](#)

Hearing Impairments [List of tools](#)

[How to support someone with sight loss](#) guide for GP Practices to show staff (receptionists, Nurses, GP's etc)

[How to support someone with hearing loss](#) guide for GP Practices to show staff (receptionists, Nurses, GP's etc)

[Electronic Info pack](#) (NHS) to support GP Practices

[Literature and market review](#)