Will the new NHAP improve access for digital products in England and Wales? A review of digital product success to date

HTA393

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INTRODUCTION

- Announced in the 2025 NHS 10-year plan, the National HealthTech Access Programme (NHAP) aims to accelerate and improve equity of access to selected high-impact, non-medicine technologies, including digital products, across England and Wales
- However, the extent to which previous NICE recommendations for digital HealthTech have translated into local patient access remains unclear
- Standard NICE HealthTech guidance does not automatically require NHS funding. Outside specific mandatory funding arrangements, adoption depends on local commissioning decisions, budgets and population needs
- Reviewing historical NICE assessments alongside local access may provide context for understanding NHAP's potential impact

OBJECTIVES

1. Assess the rates of positive and negative NICE recommendations for digital therapeutic products since 2020 and analyse whether the number and proportion of positive recommendations have increased since the introduction of the NHAP
2. Assess whether positive recommendations translated into local access using digital mental health products as a proxy

CONCLUSIONS

- NICE assessments of digital HealthTech has expanded substantially since 2023, although the number of products evaluated varied considerably between years. This variation may reflect differences in the number and size of appraisals, as individual NICE assessments can evaluate multiple digital products
- The proportion of products receiving a positive recommendation increased from 48% in 2023 to 66% in 2026. This trend should be interpreted cautiously, as there was an increase in products gaining conditional use
- Despite increasingly positive NICE recommendations across multiple therapeutic areas, national endorsement does not consistently translate into local patient access
- Mental health case studies demonstrated substantial variation between ICBs, suggesting that positive national guidance alone has been insufficient to ensure equitable access
- Limited national implementation and funding mechanisms may partly explain this variation. NHAP may help bridge the gap between national assessment and local adoption by linking recommendations for selected HealthTech to more consistent national funding
- Further evaluation will be required to determine whether NHAP improves both the consistency and speed of patient access to recommended digital technologies

METHODS

1. NICE HealthTech guidance published between Jan 2020 and May 2026 was filtered for digital assessments. Disease area, functionality, date, details of product and appraisal outcome were extracted
2. Three patient-facing mental health products (Sleepio, iCT-PTSD and SilverCloud) were selected to assess local access. This was done through an analysis of formularies, prescribing guidance, and local pathways of the 36 Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)

RESULTS

1. **NICE appraisal outcomes:** Until 2023 the number of NICE HealthTech assessments were low averaging just 1 per year. Since 2023, NICE recommendations for digital health technologies have increased in number and have become increasingly positive, with approval rates rising from 48% in 2023 to 66% in 2026 across all 181 digital health products assessed (Figure 1) (conditional recommendations were included as positive recommendations)

   While 181 products were assessed, the number of NICE appraisals was much lower, with only 40 appraisals between 2020 and May 2026 (Figures 2 and 3), as HealthTech appraisals typically cover more than one product per appraisal if they have a sufficiently overlapping decision problem

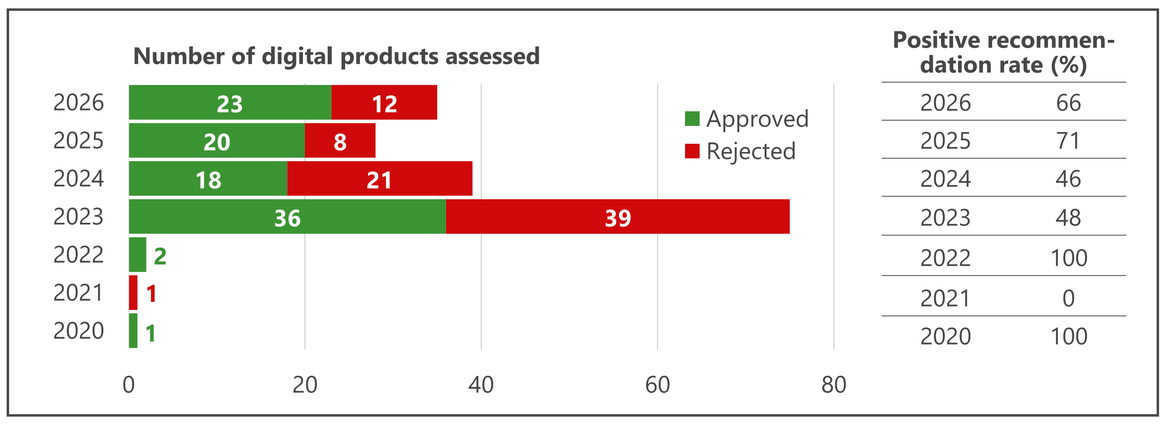


Figure 1: The proportion of digital products receiving positive NICE recommendations increased from 48% in 2023 to 66% in 2026, although rates varied between years

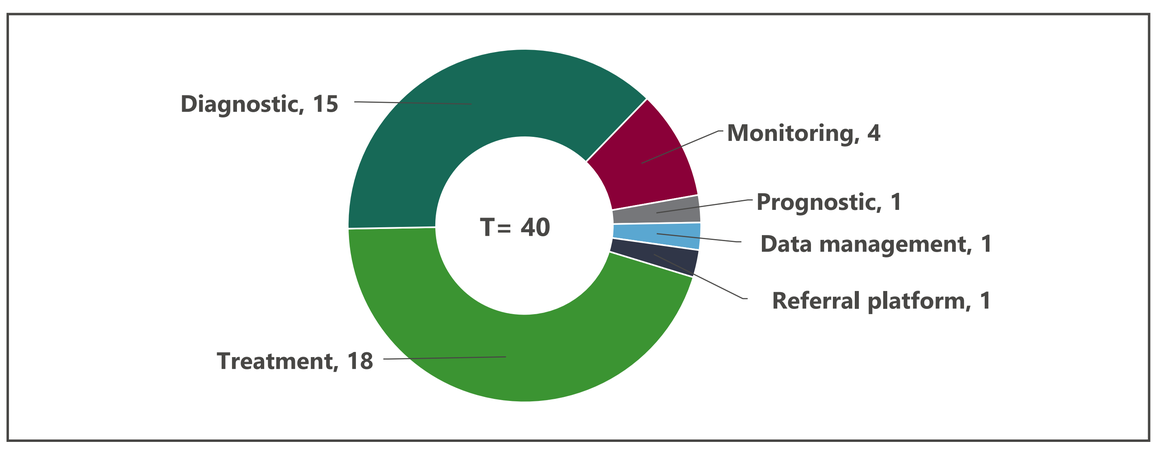


Figure 2: Number of NICE digital HealthTech assessments by tool functionality, Jan 2020–May 2026

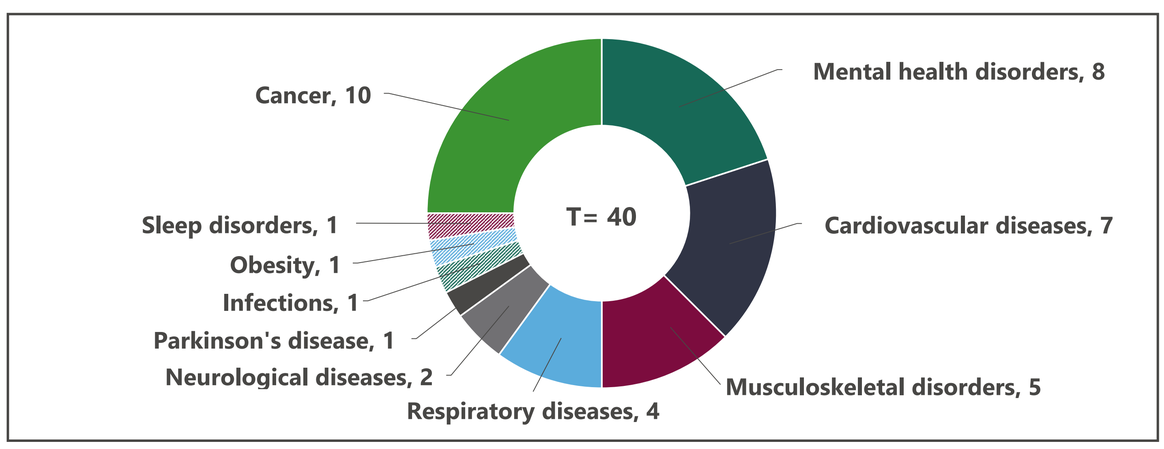


Figure 3: Number of NICE digital HealthTech assessments by disease area, Jan 2020–May 2026

2. **Implications for local access:** We found that NICE endorsement does not consistently translate into patient access. Availability varied markedly between ICBs, with SilverCloud available in 100% of ICBs compared with just 28% for Sleepio and 8% for iCT-PTSD

Scan to view ICB names and numbering from Figure 4

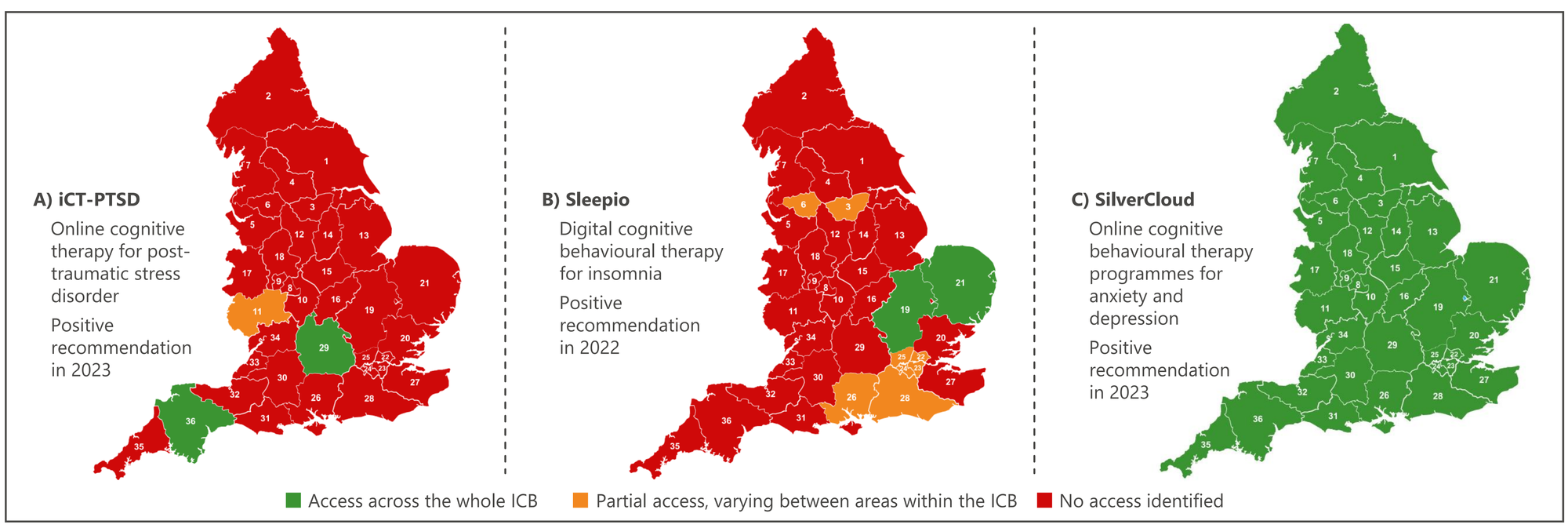


Figure 4: Local access to three digital therapies across England's Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)

References: 1. Department of Health and Social Care. 10 Year Health Plan for England: fit for the future. London: Department of Health and Social Care; 2025. Available from: GOV.UK; 2. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Faster, fairer access to healthtech under new national programme. London: NICE; 2026. Available from: NICE; 3. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Published guidance, NICE advice and quality standards: HealthTech guidance. London: NICE. Available from: NICE HealthTech guidance; 4. NHS integrated care boards. Local commissioning and access information for digital mental health technologies. Individual ICB websites; accessed 2026

Abbreviations: ICB, Integrated Care Board; iCT-PTSD, internet-delivered cognitive therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder; NHAP, National HealthTech Access Programme; NHS, National Health Service; NICE, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence; PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder

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