

Age UK Charity Warns Older People Risk Being Left Behind in Digital Shift

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A charity has raised concerns that the growing shift towards digital-first services could disproportionately affect older people, leaving them at a disadvantage. Age UK Coventry and Warwickshire has highlighted the risks that increasing reliance on online platforms poses to older adults, particularly in managing essential services such as healthcare and finances.

Recent analysis from Age UK suggests that around 240,000 older people in the West Midlands have limited access to or use of the internet. It is estimated that 21 per cent of them go online less than once a month or not at all. This digital divide, according to experts, could further isolate older generations, who may struggle to access vital services that are increasingly being offered online.

Michael Garrett, Chief Executive of Age UK Coventry and Warwickshire, highlighted the need for a balanced approach to service delivery. “We must also ensure that no one is left behind, including the many millions of older people who are not online and who often want and need to use more traditional means of communication, such as telephone and face-to-face,” he said. Garrett’s comments reflect the concerns of many who believe that digital services, while convenient for some, risk alienating those who are not confident using technology or who may lack the means to access online platforms.

The charity’s warning underscores a growing issue within the UK as digital services become more prevalent across various sectors, from banking and shopping to healthcare. While many organisations and businesses tout the benefits of digital transformation, the needs of the older population must be considered to avoid exacerbating inequality.

In response to these concerns, Age UK continues to call for an inclusive approach that accommodates both digital and traditional methods of communication. This could include offering telephone services or in-person appointments for those who are not comfortable navigating the online world. With the rapid pace of technological change, ensuring that older individuals are not left behind is a challenge that requires urgent attention from both policymakers and service providers.

The debate over how best to integrate digital services while maintaining accessibility for all remains an important issue. As the UK continues to embrace a digital future, it is crucial that older generations are not left at a disadvantage and that their access to essential services is not compromised by the digital divide.