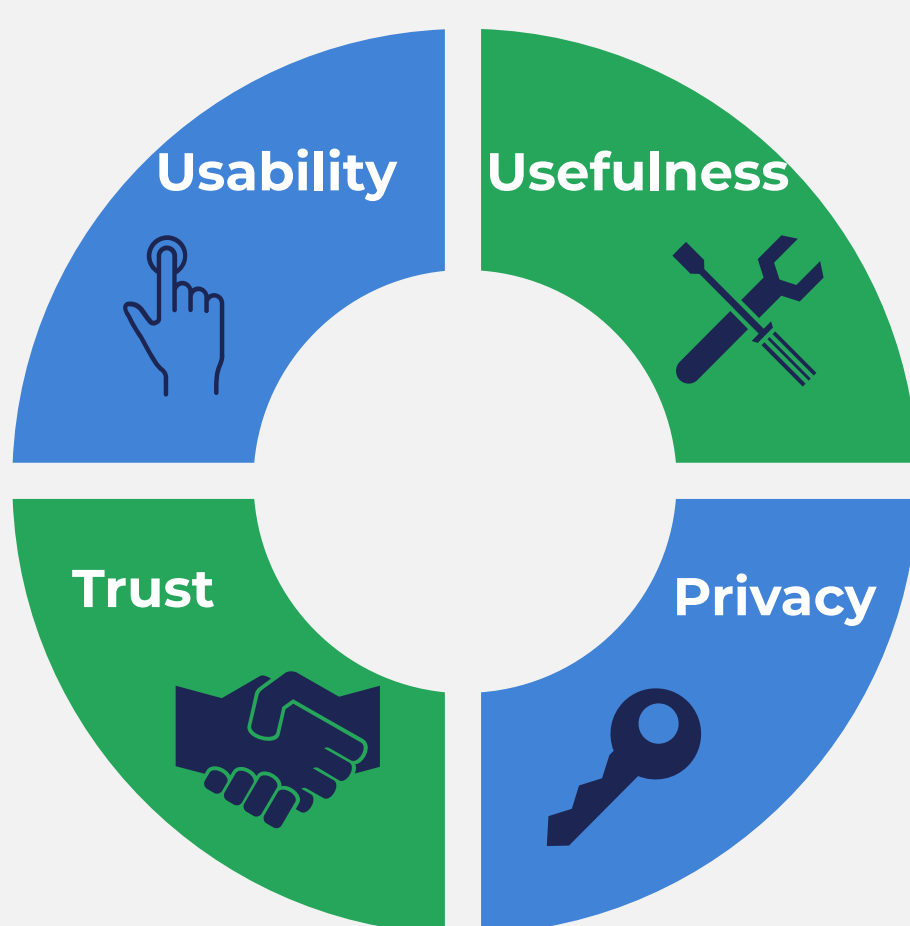


Virtual Care During COVID-19: Four Barriers Preventing Older Adults from Adopting Digital Technologies For Seeking and Exchanging Health Information

Older adults have disproportionately low rates of digital literacy, creating a generational digital divide. Closing the gap is important as more services are forced to rely on digital tools for information sharing and gathering during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are four main barriers that hinder older adults from being able to participate in virtual care.



Barriers preventing use of technology

Facilitators to technology adoption

Privacy

Older adults are more concerned than younger age groups about the privacy of their information and data that is shared online through technologies like wearable tracking devices.



Send older adults information about the precautions taken to ensure their privacy during virtual care visits and explain how health outcomes from using the digital tool outweigh risks to privacy.

Trust

Older adults report having low trust in the information they find using the internet because of being unable to identify the legitimacy of the information they find.



Family doctors are older adults' preferred source of information. Provide patients with trusted resources to help them find the information they need.

Usability

Older adults may lack the background knowledge that more digitally-literate groups have. They may also experience varying cognitive and physical abilities associated with aging that can make it difficult to learn and use digital technologies.



Provide step-by-step instructions on the devices they will be using during COVID-19. These should include greater detail than instructions provided to more digitally literate groups. Instructions should include information on how to make the device more accessible, for example instructions on how to change font size.

Usefulness

Older adults report resistance towards adopting digital alternatives for practices they already have. For example, tracking diet through a phone app versus handwritten notes.



If the digital alternative is the only option during the pandemic, give a detailed explanation of why it is necessary in the current environment for seeking, documenting, and exchanging information.

Sources:

McCutcheon, T. (2018). *The effects of digital literacy on the information activities of older adults accessing health information*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Toronto.