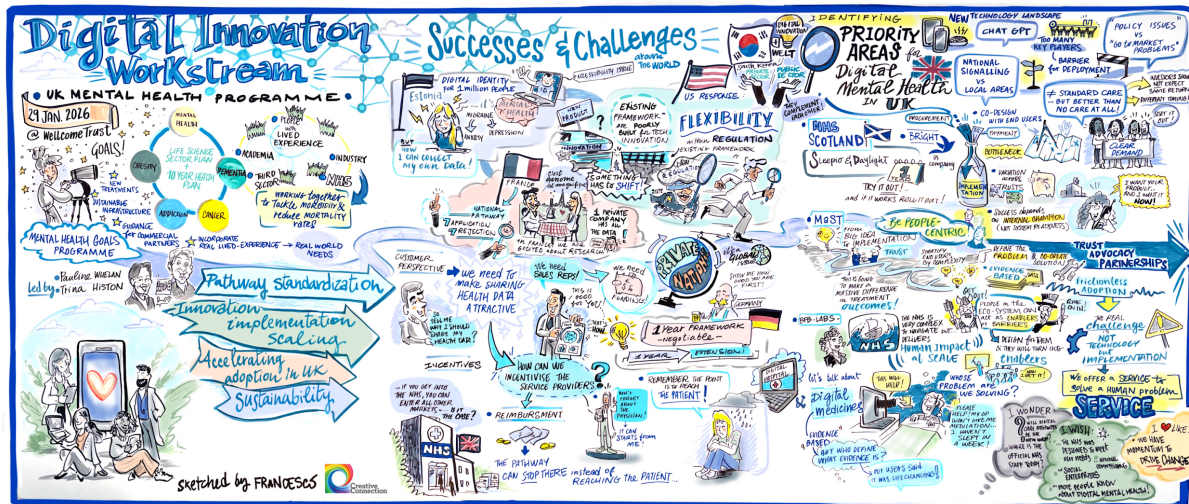


Mental Health Goals Programme

Digital Workstream - Industry Workshop

29 Jan 2026 – Wellcome Trust, London



Executive Summary

Digital Innovation in Mental Health: From Innovation Supply to System Infrastructure

Purpose

This workshop convened end-users, system leaders and industry innovators to explore how digital innovation can accelerate progress against the UK’s Mental Health Goals. It introduced the Mental Health Goals Programme and digital workstream, examined international experiences of implementing digital mental health at scale and surfaced lessons from innovators working within the UK NHS. Speakers presented experiences of digital health technologies in the UK, South Korea, France, Germany, US, Estonia, Japan and Scotland.

The central conclusion was clear: the challenge facing digital mental health is infrastructural rather than technological. There is no shortage of evidence-based tools or ideas; the constraints lie in the system conditions required for effective solutions to become embedded sustainably in routine care. Technologies designed to directly benefit patients will increasingly be eliminated from care pathways unless appropriate systems are put into place.

Key Insights

1. System infrastructure, not innovation supply, is the limiting factor

International experience demonstrates that digital mental health success depends on clear nationally agreed pathways for reimbursement and procurement, alongside workforce, training, data, and governance infrastructure, not the availability of new technologies. Repeating approaches that have already failed risks entrenching fragmentation rather than enabling progress.

2. Lived experience is required at every stage of innovation in mental health.

The perspectives of people with lived experience of mental health problems are critical in shaping the digital mental health strategy. People with lived experience must be involved as partners at every stage of the innovation lifecycle.

3. National clarity and prioritisation drive uptake

Clear, end-to-end national pathways from pilot to routine commissioning matter more than the volume of innovation activity. Active national signalling on which digital solutions are well placed for widespread adoption is critical to shifting digital tools from pilots into everyday care.

4. Funding is required to drive sustainable change. Reimbursement and procurement determine legitimacy.

Where reimbursement and procurement pathways are explicit, and funding is allocated, digital tools can be made available as legitimate treatments rather than optional add-ons. Lack of available funding and ambiguity in commissioning models slows adoption.

5. Interoperability is a foundational enabler

System connectivity and shared standards reduce friction for clinicians and innovators, enable safer deployment of AI-enabled tools, and support ongoing monitoring and accountability post-deployment.

6. Digital mental health tools typically require implementation as services, not just as products.

Success relies heavily on local adaptation to clinical workflows, organisational culture, and population needs. Technical quality and clinical evidence alone are insufficient without integration into real-world care delivery.

7. Change management and clinician adoption are critical

Adoption is driven by internal champions, education and organisational culture. Clinician time and the need for their engagement with the technology must be explicitly recognised and supported; they cannot be assumed.

8. Evaluation approaches must evolve

High-quality real-world evidence (preferably longitudinal), implementation data, and safety-in-use monitoring can complement RCT evidence, in line with NICE standards, to build a robust, well-rounded evidence base, particularly for DMHTs that adapt rapidly over time or incorporate AI agilities.

9. Proportionate regulation and post-deployment assurance of tools is essential

Proportionate regulation, ongoing monitoring, safety surveillance, and assurance that tools continue to perform as intended are critical, especially for AI-enabled solutions.

10. Stakeholder misalignment slows progress

Commissioners, clinicians, patients, industry and policymakers are often solving different problems on different timelines. Without coordination, this misalignment undermines adoption and scale.

11. Unregulated LLMs are now widely used by people seeking mental health support.

As people turn to LLMs for mental health support, there is an urgent need to explore the opportunities and challenges in this space.

Key Recommendations

1. Establish a clear national digital mental health strategy

Define transparent routes from early evaluation to routine commissioning, with clear roles and responsibilities defined across national, regional and local bodies. Clarify which responsibilities lie at which level and reduce the redundancy of evaluations being repeated at multiple levels.

2. Embed lived experience at every stage of the innovation pathway

Develop digital mental health strategy and infrastructure in close partnership with people with lived experience of mental health problems.

3. Signal national priorities for uptake and scale

Move beyond neutrality by actively signalling which digital approaches are best placed to be adopted, supported, or discontinued.

4. Align reimbursement and procurement with clinical reality

Develop explicit funding and procurement models and budgets that recognise digital tools as part of care delivery, including the clinician time required to use them effectively.

5. Invest in interoperability and digital foundations

Treat connectivity, shared standards and digital identity as core infrastructure for the national digital mental health strategy.

6. Build workforce and ecosystem capability

Support clinicians, commissioners, and system leaders through training, education, and change-management resources, while providing clearer navigation support for innovators.

7. Modernise evaluation and assurance models

Support the generation of real-world evidence linked to patient-prioritised and societal outcomes, alongside the evaluation of clinical and service outcomes.

Role of the Mental Health Goals Programme

The Mental Health Goals Programme is well positioned to act as a national coordinating infrastructure, aligning stakeholders, signalling priorities, and ensuring that adoption, safety, and scale are actively managed rather than assumed. International experience suggests that success will depend less on generating new digital tools and more on building/creating the system conditions that allow effective solutions to thrive.