

The experiences of Finnish people over 75 years old with digital health and social services

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Purpose Like the rest of Finnish society, social and health care is becoming more and more digitalized. The digital use of social and health care services has increased strongly during the last 10 years. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digitalization, and development work of the digitalization was carried out on a fast schedule. At the same time, Finland's population is aging rapidly, and social and health services need to be made more efficient. Digital services must be customer-oriented and different target groups need to find digital services useful to take root into society's services. So far, there is not much information about the experiences of using digital health and social services among different target groups. In 2023, The Finnish Publications of the Government's analysis, assessment, and research activities -department published a study Impact of digital services in health and social care¹. As a part of this study, the University of Helsinki and The Union for Senior Services, VALLI, conducted a survey for people over 75 years old. **Method** This survey is a quantitative cross-sectional study. Questionnaire was considered the most suitable method for exploring the usage and user experiences of digital social and healthcare services among citizens aged over 75. The questionnaire was developed based on relevant literature and other surveys addressing the same topic. Questionnaire was developed by the research team with the help of an expert from the Union of Senior Services VALLI. In the questionnaire, questions were addressing social and healthcare services, as well as the electronic utilization of these services. The questionnaire also drew upon a previous survey on the digital inclusion of the elderly conducted by VALLI in 2022. This foundation was supplemented with the aforementioned questions from the National FinSote survey. The older people played an integral role in the testing and development phases of the digital inclusion survey. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section gathered participant demographic information, including age, gender, place of residence, and any potential constraints (e.g., sensory limitations, mobility restrictions, or financial limitations) related to the use of digital social and healthcare services (DHS). The second section of the questionnaire collected information regarding the use of smart devices and the internet. The initial question inquired whether the participant used digital social and healthcare services at all, with response options of yes or no. There was an option to answer either by electronic form or by paper. Altogether, 1102 persons over 75 years answered the questionnaire, from 140 different municipalities in Finland. **Results and Discussion** Of the respondents (n=1102), 85 % had used or uses some digital social and health care services. Those using estimate their basic digital skills high. The most common reasons for those who had not used (15 % of the respondents) digital social and health care services, are: Not having digital skills (52 %), digital services are difficult to use (41 %) and digital equipment are difficult to use (30 %). The survey revealed that people over 75 experience that the availability and access to traditional social and healthcare service is challenging. They would be willing to adopt digital social and health care services. For example, 72 % estimate digital services has benefits for access to care in individuals with physical disabilities and long travelling distances. However, there are barriers for usage. According to the survey, those barriers needed to develop are: More accessible digital services (including cognitive accessibility), the education of social and health care professionals to use the digital connections with their customers, more information about what kind of services and possibilities there are in the digital social and health care services, more individualized digital support to the older people and more dialog between the end-users and the developers of the digital services. The survey revealed that older individuals appreciate being heard and taken into consideration. Their under-represented experiences are especially important in the development of inclusive digital health and social services.

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