Introducing the TechForce19 winners

NHSX and MHCLG have announced 18 tech startups whose innovative digital solutions have been awarded funding under the TechForce19 challenge. TechForce19 has awarded up to £25,000 each to innovation that offers a digital way to support vulnerable people who need to stay at home or need other help in the community for extended periods of time.

NHSX, that is the agency within the Department of Health and Social Care to drive the digital transformation of care – launched TechForce19 in partnership with PUBLIC, the AHSN Network and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

All innovators who could support the elderly, vulnerable and self-isolating during COVID-19 were encouraged to apply urgently for government funding of up to £25,000 to test their solutions. Between 23 March and 3 April, the TechForce19 challenge received over 1,600 applications, and the competition hosts had to narrow this list down to a final group of 18 companies for testing.

The challenge

The TechForce19 challenge was defined around developing innovative tech solutions to help the vulnerable or isolating amid lockdown. The competition was broken down into three themes, with companies asked to identify which theme their solution sought to address. These were:

Remote Social Care

Finding healthy and qualified carers who can provide support for those in need

Managing and delivering care in care homes

Delivering domiciliary care and technology in the home

Optimising Staffing in Care and Volunteering Sectors

Recruiting, training and certifying of doctors and nurses and professional carers

Volunteering – recruiting and triaging volunteers into clinical and non-clinical workers

Projecting demand for health and care workers across the country to improve deployment and management of resources

Tackling data gaps in the care sector to understand the financial sustainability and needs of care businesses

Mental Health

Discovering and delivering mental health services

Accessing relevant and inclusive peer 2 peer communities

Supporting self-management of mental health and well-being

Facilitating employee well-being

The eighteen TechForce19 winners are...

Feebris helps carers to identify health risks and deterioration within elderly communities, with an app that guides a carer through a 10min check-up, including the capture of vital signs from connected medical-grade sensors (digital stethoscope, pulse oximeter etc.). Powerful AI augments clinical guidelines and personalised monitoring to help decisions on triaging health issues. The intention is to provide Feebris to care homes to help carers triage the day-to-day health needs of their residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, and also enhance the capabilities of remote clinicians.

Chanua provides Neurolove.org, a platform providing a friendly ear and human support for young people to help them to keep virtually social and safe online. Supporting young people to manage anxiety and low mood, they can book sessions directly with mentors and therapists and find content that will support them to manage their emotional and mental health in this current period of uncertainty.

Peppy helps parents-to-be and new parents remotely access trusted, convenient advice from perinatal and mental health experts. This includes remote support via phone/video with lactation consultants, baby sleep consultants, specialist mental health support and more. Peppy provides timely interventions that reduce stress, anxiety and burn out for parents-to-be and new parents.

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TeamKinetic's digital platform helps organisations better manage community-led volunteer programmes. The solution helps manage recruitment and retention of volunteers, as well as monitoring the impact of these programmes in real-time. TeamKinetic are also looking at developing and documenting some open standards and establishing a model for better service interconnectivity across the voluntary sector.

Vinehealth is a mobile app to support cancer patients and their loved ones during treatment by allowing them to easily track and understand their care, including their symptoms, side effects, appointments and medications. By completing a 1-minute daily log, cancer patients can develop a clear overview of their progress through treatment and access advice on how to cope and when to access health services. The Vinehealth app empowers cancer patients who are self-isolating to self-manage and feel more in control.

Beam is a digital platform that supports the homeless and vulnerable. Beam takes referrals from local authorities and homeless charities, then ensures goods are funded, delivered and documented.

Alcuris' Memohub® prolongs the independence of elderly or vulnerable people, enabling them to return to home quicker, from hospital discharge. A digital platform collates data from unobtrusive sensors placed in the home, then provides actionable alerts when behaviour changes, enabling families to intervene early to delay or reduce the frequency of professional 'crisis intervention' help. This gives the family a reassurance of loved one's safety and wellbeing even when left alone for extended periods. Also provides objective information to inform professional care planning.

Ampersand Health's self-management apps help people with long term, immune-mediated diseases (such as Crohn's and Colitis) live happier and healthier lives. Using behavioural and data science, the apps deliver courses and programmes designed to improve sleep quality, stress management and medication adherence; with modules for activity, diet and relationships in the works. During the Covid-19 crisis, this will help these people better manage their conditions and reduce the need for clinical support. Ampersand is also offering its clinical management portal free of charge to NHS Trusts until January 2021, no strings attached. This will allow clinical teams to help manage their patients, remotely.

Aparito uses remote monitoring technology (videos, wearables, photos and text) to gather patient-generated data outside of hospital. This is focused on patients with rare diseases. Data is captured and transferred via the patient's own smartphone/tablet and made available to clinicians or researchers in real-time to help avoid direct contact during the COVID-19 crisis.

Birdie provides a digital platform for home care agencies to better manage the care they provide. Through an easy to use app, care workers capture daily visit logs, and a central hub allows staff to track real-time information. Family members receive live and daily safety and well-being updates through the app,

including from optional home monitoring sensors. Birdie helps domiciliary care agencies to increase efficiency and improves the care people receive in their homes through systematic monitoring, prevention of risks, and support to carers.

Buddi Connect is a smartphone app, enabling people to stay in touch with those they care for. Safe groups of connections are united through the app to share private, secure messages and raise instant alerts when help is needed. Important messages from the NHS can be shared directly to users. During this difficult time, while many vulnerable people are missing the face-to-face contact of family, friends and carers, the reassurance that help is available at the touch of a button is more important than ever.

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Just Checking supplies activity monitoring systems, used by local authorities to help with assessment of older people in their homes, for social care. Sensors pick up activities of daily living and display the data in a 24-hour chart. The company also has a second, more sophisticated activity monitoring system, to help manage the care and support of adults with learning disabilities.

Peopletoo and Novoville have been selected to launch GetVolunteering, a volunteering app to fast track volunteers into clinical and non-clinical roles to support the fight against COVID-19. It will enable local authorities to quickly identify and assess capable volunteers in the local community to fill key roles to support social care in areas that have been impacted by the loss of staffing capacity due to COVID-19, or for new roles that are required during the crisis.

The RIX Multi Me toolkit provides highly accessible and secure social networking that serves as a support network for people with learning disabilities and mental health challenges. This easy to use a multimedia network, with accompanying communication, personal-organiser and goal-setting tools, enables isolated and distanced vulnerable people to build stronger support circles. It helps them self-manage their care and actively limit the impact and spread of COVID-19 infection. Care professionals use the 'Stay Connected' RIX Multi Me Toolkit to remotely monitor and support people's

wellbeing in an efficient and friendly way.

Simply Do will develop a virtual community of NHS medical professionals currently in self-isolation. These employees have significant expertise, experience and skills which can be unlocked virtually to help solve COVID-19 care challenges set within the platform. This will create a powerful 'think-tank' of medical professionals to contribute virtually to fight COVID-19 by solving wider health challenges (i.e. challenges faced in the care sector).

SureCert is a digital platform that connects people with job and volunteering opportunities. The system also manages background checks. SureCert can provide data on successful placements, and information to enable policymakers to better understand the labour market and volunteering supply and demand.

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VideoVisit® HOME allows the elderly to communicate with their family members and home care providers through a virtual care tablet designed specifically for the elderly. VideoVisit will measure how this virtual home care service can increase people's feeling of safety and decrease loneliness during self-isolation.

Virti aims to make experiential education affordable and accessible to everyone. Virtual and augmented reality, coupled with AI, transports users into difficult to access environments and safely assesses them under pressure to improve their performance. The system is used for training and patient education.

PUBLIC brings together experience from the public sector, technology and finance to help startups solve public problems.