

Supporting patients with free mobile data and affordable home internet

Introduction

In today's digital world, accessing healthcare services online is crucial. Yet, many individuals face barriers due to the inability to afford mobile data or home internet. This can prevent them from:

- Accessing health information and support services
- Using the NHS App
- Requesting repeat prescriptions
- Attending video consultations

This guide aims to provide NHS staff with information about two key support resources:

1. **The National Databank** – offering free mobile data, texts, and calls.
2. **Social Tariffs** – providing discounted home broadband packages.

Understanding these services will help staff direct patients to the appropriate support, improving digital access to healthcare.

1. The National Databank

What is the National Databank?

The National Databank functions like a food bank for mobile data, offering free mobile data, texts, and calls to those struggling to stay connected. Managed by Good Things Foundation, it is supported by VMO2, Vodafone and Three.

Why is it important?

Access to mobile data is vital for patients to:

- Use the NHS App
- Attend video appointments
- Contact healthcare services
- Access online health information and other services such as online banking, benefits and council services. Poor connectivity is linked to poorer health outcomes.
- Stay connected with family, carers, and support networks

Who might benefit?

Beneficiaries of the National Databank include patients who:

- Are experiencing financial hardship
- Have little or no mobile data
- Frequently run out of data
- Cannot afford mobile top-ups
- Need internet access for health-related activities

Specific groups include older adults, people on low incomes, unemployed individuals, refugees, people seeking asylum, those experiencing homelessness, and individuals with long-term health conditions.

Eligibility

To be eligible, a person must be:

- 18+ years old
- **AND** from a low income household

And qualifies in one or several of the following statements:

- Has no access or insufficient access to the internet at home
- **AND/OR** has no or insufficient access to the internet when away from the home
- **AND/OR** cannot afford their existing monthly contract or top up

How can patients access the National Databank?

Healthcare staff should guide patients to local digital inclusion organisations rather than issuing data directly. These organisations, often registered as Databank Hubs, can assess SIM cards through the scheme and distribute them to patients. Examples include community centres, libraries, digital inclusion projects, and charities supporting vulnerable groups. You can use the map on the Good Things Foundation website to [find your nearest Digital Inclusion Hub](#).

For more information, patients can visit the [National Databank Information Page](#).

What should staff do?

1. Identify potential need

Listen for comments like:

- "I don't have enough data."
- "I can't use the NHS App."
- "I don't have internet at home."
- "I can't afford phone credit."

2. Have a supportive conversation

You could say:

"There are schemes available that may provide free mobile data if cost is making it difficult for you to get online."

3. Signpost

Guide patients to local Databank providers or digital inclusion services via the map.

2. Social Tariffs

What are Social Tariffs?

Social tariffs are discounted home broadband packages offered by internet providers, aimed at helping people on certain benefits access affordable home internet.

Why are Social Tariffs important?

Reliable home internet enables patients to:

- Use the NHS App
- Attend video consultations
- Access online health services
- Communicate with family and carers
- Access support services and benefits

Who may be eligible?

Eligibility is typically linked to receiving benefits such as:

- Universal Credit
- Pension Credit
- Income Support
- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)

Patients should verify eligibility directly with broadband providers.

Key facts about Social Tariffs

- Generally cheaper than standard broadband packages.
- Often available without early termination charges.
- Can offer significant monthly savings.
- Provided by many major broadband providers.
- Existing customers may switch to these tariffs.

How can patients access a Social Tariff?

Patients should inquire with their broadband provider by asking:

"Do you offer a social tariff?"

If they are not currently connected, they can compare options online. Useful details are available on the [Ofcom Social Tariffs Guide](#).

What should staff do?

1. Identify need

Listen for statements like:

- "My broadband is too expensive."
- "I cancelled my internet because I couldn't afford it."
- "I only use mobile data because broadband costs too much."

2. Raise awareness

Many eligible individuals are unaware of social tariffs.

3. Signpost

Direct patients to:

- Their broadband provider
- Local digital inclusion services
- Citizens Advice
- Social prescribing teams where available

Quick reference: National Databank vs Social Tariffs

National Databank	Social Tariffs
Free mobile data, calls, and texts	Reduced-cost home broadband
Supports mobile internet access	Supports home internet access
Delivered through approved Databank Hubs	Delivered through broadband providers
Intended for people who cannot afford connectivity	Intended for people receiving eligible benefits
Usually accessed through local support organisations	Usually accessed directly through providers