

Caroline Dinenage's keynote speech for the Founders Forum – Healthtech stage

This is a double first (and a double honour!): to be opening the inaugural health tech stage at the first ever virtual London Tech Week. I hope you and your loved ones are safe and well in these new and uncertain times.

Over the last few months I've experienced the difficulties of both working from home and trying to homeschool my children and the return to Parliament.

I've had the pleasure of joining a number of virtual roundtables with representatives from the tech sector, and I've been fascinated and delighted by the scale and breadth of tech's response to COVID-19.

I am unashamedly pro-tech and I want to thank you, the people that make up the tech sector, for all of the tireless work you have put in already to connect people to their loved ones and support networks; to deliver food and medicine; to enable patients to access their doctors; and to provide life-saving medical interventions. Health tech companies in the UK should be proud of the positive impact they have made on people's lives.

There are three points I want to make today.

Firstly, I want to highlight a few of the many successes that the UK tech sector has had during the current crisis.

Secondly, I want to talk about digitisation of social care, a topic close to my heart from my time as Minister for Care.

And then I want to talk about the role of health tech as we look to the future beyond the current crisis.

There have been many success stories in the UK tech sector. Thank you to the firms that have supported the NHS in innumerable ways- from the innovation involved in the detection and treatment of the virus, to the digital services and equipment the whole health and care workforce are now using.

I also want to highlight those in IT and tech who have been critical in the direct response to the health emergency, with dozens of British companies contributing towards the search for treatments and vaccines.

AI businesses have also been working with NHSX to gather and analyse data to help understand and predict the spread of the virus. This ultimately helps Government, NHS Trusts, and social care services to respond effectively, based on reliable evidence.

In my previous role I was the Minister for Care, in the Department of Health and Social Care, and the topic remains very close to my heart.

Health tech has begun to enter into this space- to give just a few examples:

enabling patients to talk to their families remotely; enabling doctors to monitor remote wards; and helping care staff to carry out their jobs which are both so emotionally and physically labour intensive, and vital to our society.

We should not underestimate the scale of the problem: 15,000 care homes across England do not have adequate access to the internet; and social care reflects an intersectionality of so many different vulnerabilities. Patients in care homes are likely to have pre-existing conditions, may be more economically vulnerable, and may not have the skills, confidence or devices to be able to make the most out of what technology has to offer.

But despite these challenges, I remain optimistic, and I am excited to see what happens next. The tech revolution in the social care sector is just beginning: COVID-19 has accelerated the rate of change and tech businesses have risen to the unique challenges faced in social care.

We must continue to press forward and ensure this critical aspect of the health and care system is not left behind. And I encourage you all to continue engaging with DHSC and NHSX.

Finally, I want to look to the future as we begin to rebuild our economy, and slowly return to the new normal.

There are immense challenges facing our whole economy, and I am fully aware that the tech sector is not immune to these. My officials and I continue to work hard with colleagues across government to ensure that we as a Government understands the needs of the sector.

Let me reiterate that you have my full support. In April the Chancellor announced 1.25 billion pounds of funding to protect innovative firms. This is a concrete demonstration of Government's commitment and a direct outcome of our regular communication with the sector. It includes a £500 million investment fund for high-growth companies impacted by the crisis, and £750 million in grants and loans to support small and medium sized enterprises focusing on research and development.

I urge you to review the options on [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) if your business is in need of additional funding, and I am delighted to be supporting the Digital Boost platform, which will provide much-needed digital support for small businesses and charities in the UK that have been impacted by the Covid-19 crisis.

Report after report puts the UK as the tech capital of Europe. This is true of London, and of the UK beyond the M25.

There is incredible innovation happening across the UK: in my constituency of Gosport, I've seen small tech firms pivoting to address the crisis, manufacturing personal protective equipment for NHS and care staff. I hope that one of the benefits of remote working will be that more and more people feel empowered to build businesses without having to relocate to London or another major city.

The resilience and strength of the UK is an invaluable asset at this time. Just as our digital sectors are at the very heart of our response to COVID-19, they must be at the heart of our economic recovery too. We must rebuild in a way that is sustainable, inclusive, that celebrates and promotes diversity and that creates an economy that works for everyone.

Your spirit of ingenuity will help carry us through this current crisis and into a brighter future, and you have my full support as we map the route to recovery.