Crown
Commercial
Service

# Alpha

G-Cloud 15 service definition

Healthia®

# Alpha phase

**We prototype solutions to the problems uncovered through discovery research, then test and refine these with users.**

During a series of agile, collaborative two-week sprints, our multidisciplinary team will explore different directions for the service, validating and iterating concepts based on user feedback.

Insights provide evidence around which ideas will be most impactful, whether the service or product meets users' needs, is cost-effective, and should be pursued in beta.

- People choose us for alpha because of our design-led approach. We are are technology agnostic and help shift mindsets to focus on user needs over technology
- We have broad and deep experience using GOV.UK Design System, Prototype Kit and NHS Prototype Kit. Our designs are user-focused, intuitive, accessible, scalable and reusable
- We take an agile, outcome-based approach to user research and user-centred design, in line with GDS and NHS service standard
- We work in the open as one team to make collaborative decisions, taking every opportunity to share knowledge, upskill, build internal capabilities and enable sustainable benefits
- We've delivered alphas for clients including the Cabinet Office, Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, NHS England, NHS Gloucestershire CCG and Scope
- We have led multiple successful GDS assessments

# Varying fidelity prototypes

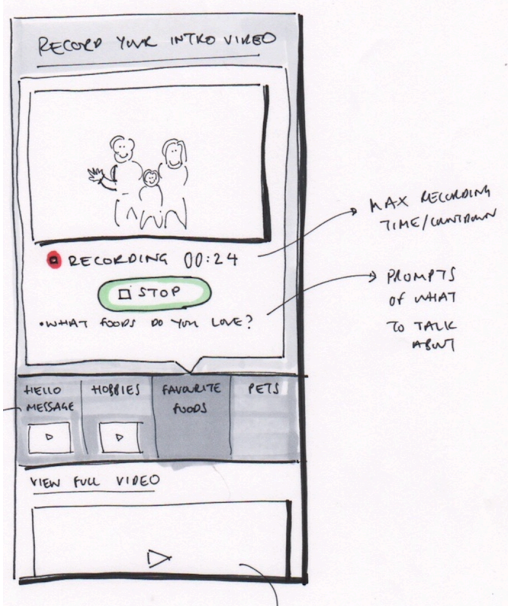
## We use a range of prototypes depending on the stage and needs of the project, from hand sketches to clickable HTML prototypes.

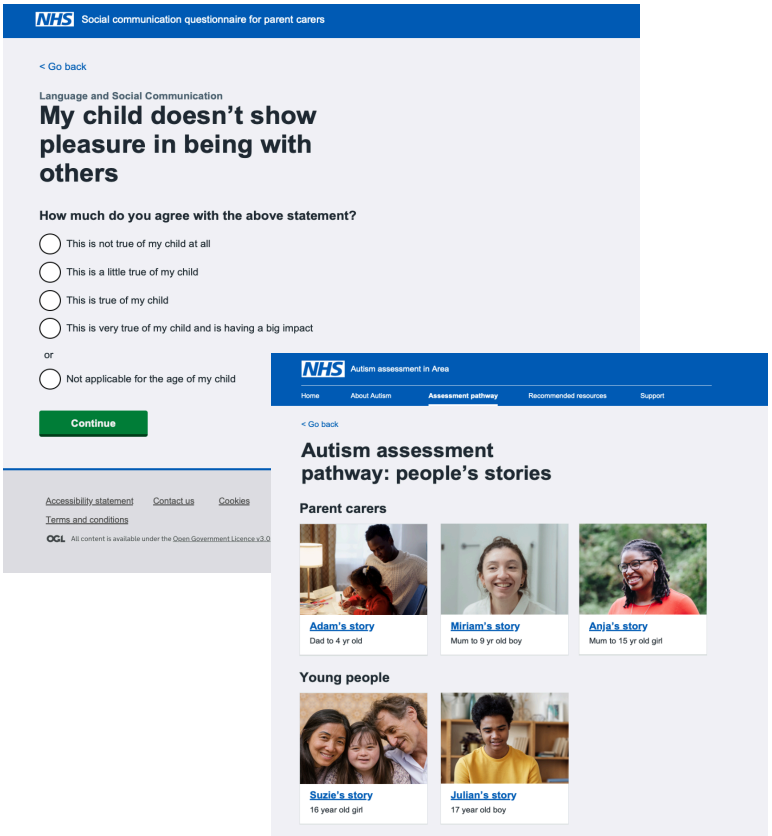
Prototyping is a powerful and low-risk technique to quickly test and refine ideas based on user feedback. Prototyping early means we avoid building costly solutions that don't meet user or business needs.

Sketched concepts communicate early thinking, encourage discussions and capture initial ideas. Clickable HTML prototypes enable realistic interactions with users to test concepts, journeys and content, and inform design direction.

"The prototype looks awesome, you helped the teams understand the importance of great UX and made it integral to development."

- **Service design director, Cabinet Office**



# Inclusive research and design

**We take an inclusive approach to our work to ensure all voices are represented. This reduces the risk of missing opportunities and fits with our ethos of leaving no-one behind.**

We make it easy for people to participate in research, adapting to specific needs or requirements. Recent research has included people with autism, people with no fixed abode / address, and people with English as an additional language.

We have developed ways to effectively engage with diverse groups to co-create and co-design solutions in a collaborative and transparent way, helping design accessible services, policies and places that work for everyone.

We are experienced in researching, collaborating and designing with complex stakeholder groups including staff, local authorities, communities, charities, businesses, partner organisations and technology providers.

**Seldom-heard and under-represented groups**

- We include diverse, seldom-heard, under-represented and marginalised communities in our research as standard, including low digital literacy
- We include people from outside the mainstream and across socio-economic backgrounds, so we can design for people with markedly different lives and needs
- We have created a guide to conducting research around sensitive topics with vulnerable users to ensure the wellbeing of both participants and our researchers. Please contact us for a copy
- Through experience we have developed a number of techniques for recruiting from these groups which we tailor to each engagement

# Co-design

## We use co-design techniques to design with stakeholders, communities and service users.

Running co-creation / co-design sessions with stakeholders and service users is a great way of ensuring we tap into existing expertise. Through a combination of collaborative workshops, sketching, prototyping and user research, we help generate, validate, adapt or discard ideas.

We involve users across the design process, identifying and working through challenges together. This builds trust and an understanding of the lived experience.

We advocate for inclusive research and design practices, and use various methods to ensure all voices are heard, reducing the risk of overlooking needs and missing opportunities. We have deep experience co-designing with seldom-heard and under-represented users.

“Healthia provided an exemplary discovery and alpha project to NCSC. By having seasoned and independent researchers and designers assist us, we were able to canvas the community comprehensively in order to construct a long term development plan for the service.”

**- Programme manager, NCSC**

“They spend time to include you at each step of the way and work collaboratively where appropriate. In true partnership, they are open to working in different ways”

**- Insights and engagement manager, NHS BNSSG**

# Stakeholder engagement

**Stakeholder engagement is fundamental to our approach. We use innovative ways of keeping disparate and time-poor stakeholders involved.**

We put effort into creating an effective and inclusive engagement plan to understand individual perspectives, wider context, priorities and build on their valuable expertise.

We have extensive experience collaborating with SMEs and stakeholders at all levels and adapt our communication to meet technical and non-technical needs.

Through our work with government and NHS clients, we have developed ways of effectively engaging with complex stakeholder groups across organisations and government departments. We bring stakeholders together to align priorities and collaboratively drive evidence-based decisions.

“They are capable of liaising with and managing stakeholders at all levels so for us they’ve interacted with people at board level all the way down, sensitively and empathically building relationships with customers who are often at a point of crisis. That can be quite a difficult thing to do and those softer skills really matter”

**- Service owner, Cabinet Office**

“They work openly and collaboratively with stakeholders to plan, execute and act on the research and design. This is so important when you are looking to transfer skills into the organisation and unlike other agencies or consultants we have worked in the past they do not exclude clients from the process or take specific parts of the project, work on it and then deliver a finished product.”

**- Insights and engagement manager, NHS BNSSG**

# Alpha approach

## Example two-week sprint

**Week one**

- Discovery workshop with product team and stakeholders
- Concept exploration and sketching
- Prototype development
- Prototype review and updates

**Week two**

- Research plan
- User research
- Research analysis and findings session
- Prototype iteration and review
- Prototype refinement

## Outputs:

- **Clear evidence around priorities to pursue through beta**

- Sketches and storyboards
- Prototypes (low / mid / high fidelity) covering the end-to-end service and user journeys
- Service and user experience maps
- Navigation structure / IA
- Draft content
- Research report
- Prioritised user needs and user story backlog
- Defined success metrics
- Proof of concept
- Service / product MVP

# Our experience

## NHS Gloucestershire: Lowering barriers to mental health support

*HSJ Healthtech Partnership Award - highly commended*

Following the pandemic, demand for mental health support in Gloucestershire increased sharply, with many young people facing long waits for care. Funded by NHSX, NHS Gloucestershire ICB commissioned Healthia to explore how digital could make support more accessible, responsive and equitable.

Initial thinking focused on a dashboard to communicate waiting times. Through research and testing, this evolved into a clearer problem statement: young people needed a simple way to find the right support, earlier, and feel more in control while waiting.

**Our approach**

We led a GDS-aligned process, combining research, co-creation and rapid prototyping with children and young people, clinicians and partner organisations. We explored:

- Earlier support before crisis
- Clear routes to appropriate help, including social prescribing
- Choice, control and agency for young people
- What meaningful support during waiting periods looks like

We prototyped and tested end-to-end journeys, interfaces and content, refining everything from tone of voice to question formats with real users.

**Outcomes**

- Clear evidence that a dashboard alone would not meet user needs
- A validated concept for a mobile-first support finder, accessible via SMS
- A live service, *On Your Mind Glos*, bringing together over 100 services
- System-wide adoption, reaching over 10,000 young people in its first year

“Healthia’s rigorous research and user-centred design process helped us identify where to invest to have impact. The service they designed is simple and effective.”
**- Beth Gibbons, Programme Manager, NHS Gloucestershire**