

# inSight

Magazine

Vol. 23, No. 3. Autumn 2020



NCBI

Working for People  
With Sight Loss



**Dogs and iPhones:  
Dominique's Best  
Friends!**



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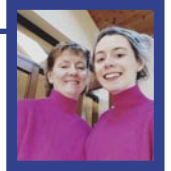
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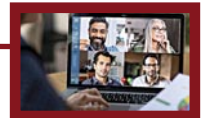
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Try your luck and spread the word about NCBI's NEW 'eye can' Weekly Lottery. Great Prizes!

**eye can**  
★★ WEEKLY LOTTERY ★★

inSight

## NCBI inSight

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# Covid-19 and street accessibility

**Covid-19 has had a significant impact on people who are blind and vision impaired. It has for example affected the way people move around our streets with independence and safety.**

Our streets are changing quickly to enable social distancing, but these changes must be accessible. Discussions are ongoing around the reallocation of street space to allow cafes, bars, and restaurants to operate whilst obeying social distancing rules. Whilst it is understandable that every option should be explored to allow businesses to trade, this cannot be done in a way which endangers the safety of pedestrians who are blind and vision impaired.

NCBI had to delay our annual #ClearOurPaths campaign this year due to Covid-19. The core objective of this campaign is to highlight the dangers of temporary obstacles on the footpath. In fact, much work has been done in recent years to reduce the volume of temporary street furniture like sandwich boards, chairs and tables, and temporary structures that block footpaths in our towns and cities across Ireland. The current system of enforcement is not perfect, but the thought of cafes, restaurants and bars being allowed to place these types of obstacles on public paths are a grave source of concern for people who are blind and vision impaired.



Currently, businesses are required to have a license from their county council to place temporary street furniture on the public footpath and it is up to each county council to enforce its by-laws.

NCBI believes where any changes to street layouts are going to be made, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government must oblige county councils to consult with representative organisations including NCBI and people who are blind and vision impaired who live in the locality.

NCBI recently made a submission to the Special Committee on Covid-19 Response on this issue as well as many other issues to ensure that the needs of people who are blind and vision impaired are fully considered as we learn to live with the pandemic. Let us know what changes have been made in your locality and how they impact you by emailing [campaigns@ncbi.ie](mailto:campaigns@ncbi.ie).

# Supporting Remote Working Practices

**Reboosting the economy and supporting diverse employment practices in response to Covid-19 is important to the Government. Subsequently, NCBI believes people who are blind and vision impaired should be included by making supports available to ensure they have access to any technology adaptations in their homes and assisting them to return to the workplace as restrictions ease.**

Pre-covid-19, Census statistics already indicated the level of labour force participation amongst people who are blind and vision impaired in Ireland is only a mere 24.4%. Therefore, less than 1 in 4 people with impaired vision were actively participating in the labour force. It is safe to say that the Covid-19 emergency will have reduced the employment rate of people who are blind and vision impaired even further.

A number of people who are blind and vision impaired are in part-time work. It is vital they do not fall into a poverty trap, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, by losing their state benefits and returning to work on reduced working hours (short-time working).

During the pandemic, we have all turned to technology for it's potential to allow us to stay connected with work colleagues, to access a wealth of online resources and apps and to continue to work successfully from home. Technology is an enabler but its cost can be too much for many people who are blind and vision impaired. Despite the clear significance of assistive technology for people who are blind and vision impaired, many are unable to afford the upfront costs of essential assistive



technology and must go without.

## **There needs to be commitment from the Government to:**

1. Extend the Workplace Adaptation Grant operated by the Department of Social Protection to employees who are blind or vision impaired who can work remotely so that they can set up an adapted office in their own home.
2. Extend the Workplace Adaptation Grant to those on Community Employment Schemes, so that people who are blind and vision impaired who are participating on these schemes can work remotely during the pandemic.

NCBI recently made a submission to the public consultation being held on Remote Working by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation outlining these issues.

**Don't forget should you require any help and support in relation to employment to reach out to NCBI's employment service.**

# NCBI Pre-budget submission to Budget 2021

NCBI recently made a submission in advance of Budget 2021 to the Department of Social Protection calling on the new Minister for Social Protection, Heather Humphreys to examine closely the effects of the Covid-19 emergency on the 54,810 people who are blind and vision impaired in Ireland.

## We asked the Department to:

1. Increase the basic social welfare rate for the Blind Pension and Disability Allowance by at least €20 per week.
2. Change the eligibility criteria for access to the free travel scheme to include those with a long-term eye condition, which renders their level of vision insufficient to meet criteria for a driver's licence. Not all people with vision impairments are eligible for the free travel scheme. Many people who have impaired vision are not able to obtain a driver's licence, but also do not qualify for the free travel scheme. If you find yourself caught in this trap please reach out to our advocacy team on: [campaigns@ncbi.ie](mailto:campaigns@ncbi.ie)
3. Provide subsidised taxi fares to people who are blind or vision impaired to use for essential journeys to work, the shops and to appointments as we continue to live with the virus. Obeying social distancing while using public transport is very difficult for many people who are blind and vision impaired and many would choose to use a taxi for essential journeys.
4. Extend the Telephone Support Allowance to people with vision impairment who are in receipt of Blind Pension or Disability Allowance so that they can continue to avail of support services over the phone while Covid-19 restrictions continue.
5. Increase the Living Alone Allowance by €5 per week so that people who are living alone during the restrictions can better pay for their cost of living.
6. Increase the Fuel Allowance rate and extend it further over the winter months. As we go into the winter months, there could be another wave of the virus and more and more people will be staying at home.





# NCBI ensures Covid-19 app is Accessible!

Thanks to the involvement of the NCBI Advocacy department and NCBI Labs, Ireland has one of the most accessible Covid-19 tracking apps in the world. The

advocacy team contacted the HSE in late April on learning of the app being developed stressing how important it would be to ensure the app was accessible to people who are blind and vision impaired.

A number of NCBI advocates raised this issue with the HSE and the Government also. These actions resulted in the HSE considering the needs of people who are blind and vision impaired and them acquiring the expert services of NCBI Labs who worked closely with the app developers to ensure the app was fully accessible to our community.

## What is it?

Launched by the HSE and Department of Health on Tuesday 7th July, the Covid Tracking app will help us to protect each other and slow the spread of Covid 19 in Ireland. It is a free and easy to use app available from the App Store and Google Play Store that has three specific functions:



1. Digital contact tracing of close contacts of confirmed cases of Covid-19.
2. Allow users to record if they have symptoms.
3. Provide daily information about Covid-19 from a trusted source.

## How does it work?

Once you open the app, you will be asked for permission to collect and share anonymous data in order to facilitate contact tracing. You also have the option to add your phone number so the HSE can contact you if you are thought to be in need of a test. It should all take less than two minutes, and you're up and running.

**NCBI would encourage as many of you as possible to download the app and join in Ireland's fight against the virus.**

## Benefits of Remote Working

**We have learned a lot as a society during the Covid-19 lockdown. The universal switch from working in an office setting to working from home was a lightbulb moment for many people.**

If we look at the past few months as a trial period for remote working, we can really learn a lot. Some people absolutely hated it, they enjoy the office work environment and that's completely ok. Others however found working from home revolutionary.

Firstly, remote working eliminates the need to travel to a workplace. For those with a long, challenging or virtually impossible commutes, having the option to work from home takes a large amount of stress off them. For people who are blind and vision impaired, adapting to new environments can be challenging. Unfamiliar environments can be especially stressful during the Covid-19 pandemic. For this reason, working from home in a safe and familiar environment can be a much preferred option.

With the reopening of shops and offices across the country we are starting to see less people working from home. It doesn't have to be this way. A happy and stress free worker is a more productive worker, so why should we go back to working mainly in office settings now? Currently 24.4% of working age adults with a vision impairment are in employment. One major issue across the board for people is their ability to commute to work. This may be because they live in a rural area, lack of access to public transport or don't have the mobility skill or confidence. Working from home is not the answer to everyone's work related issues but it's a good place to start in tackling unemployment in the sight loss community.

## Banking differently as we live with the virus

**Many people who are blind and vision impaired feel anxious about going into their local bank while the virus continues to persist.**

A recent survey from a sample of 2,000 service users of NCBI found that 1 in 5 of our service users have not left their homes since March due to the pandemic. The reality that social distancing practices are here to stay is a source of concern and anxiety for many because engaging in these practices is virtually impossible for people who are blind or vision impaired.

Many people are instead preferring to bank from the privacy and comfort of their own home through telephone, online or mobile banking or some people have set up direct payments and bank transfers so that they do not have to worry about trying to handle or withdraw cash each week or month.

It is therefore vital that telephone, online and mobile banking be fully accessible to bank customers who are blind and vision impaired and that they are not charged a fee for use of these services as many people have no other option but to do so particularly while we continue to live with the pandemic.

NCBI has been in touch with several customer banks so that the needs of bank customers with vision impairments are given full consideration.

Tell us your experiences of banking in Ireland by emailing: [campaigns@ncbi.ie](mailto:campaigns@ncbi.ie)

# Identifying money and managing your financial affairs

Managing your money is more difficult if you can't see the notes or coins or read your bank statements. Many have to rely on family / friends to help but here are some tips to help you be more independent in managing your financial affairs.

## Difficulty seeing your bills/bank statement:

- Always use good lighting and introduce task lighting.
- Use a magnifier to read your bills or statements, NCBI can assess your vision to determine strength of magnification you need.
- Ring customer service of your utility/ financial provider who can go over your bill/bank statement with you.
- Consider getting electronic bills/bank statements and an adaptive software can magnify or use audio to make your bills/ bank statement accessible. Your local NCBI office can give you information or a demonstration of this software.
- Consider setting up direct debit to pay your bills but ensure that you examine your bank statement regularly to keep track of what you are paying.

## Organising your bag/purse

Try to avoid very large handbags and instead just bring essential items.

- Use a cross body bag as this leaves both hands free.
- Use a handbag with light coloured lining and having a purse in bright contrasting colour to make it easier to locate.
- Use handbags with different sections as it makes it easier to locate items e.g. purse



in first section, phone in middle section, house keys in third section.

- Use a purse with different sections to help organise different notes, secured sections such as zipped sections decreases the risk of money falling out of your purse.

## Identifying Money

All bank notes are different sizes: the higher the value, the bigger the banknote.

The notes are designed to use contrasting colours for easy identification.

- The €5 banknote is grey and the €10 is red.
- The €20 is blue, followed by an orange €50 and a green €100 banknote.
- The €200 banknote is yellow-brown, the €500 banknote is purple.

## Tip for managing your cash:

- When withdrawing money from your bank or collecting your payment / pension, ask for the same denomination e.g. all €20 notes.
- Use the note folding method to organize your purse/wallet, this involves keeping €20 flat, €10 folded in half, €5 folded in quarter.



- Keep €50/€100 in a separate secured (preferably zipped) section of your wallet.
- Consider using bank note money detector. This simply device has a slot to slide your money into, press the one button on the device and it will give a number of vibrations according to the note value. It is available in both euro and sterling.
- Consider using apps which can be downloaded onto your phone/tablet such as Seeing AI or Tap Tap See.

### Identifying Coins

Consider using a Euro Coin Holder. This is a pocket sized plastic holder which can hold up to five one euro coins. These are available in NCBI Shop.

Coins have individual identifying marking along the edges as well as having different size, shape, and colours.

- €2 coins have characters struck into the finely-ridged edge.
- €1 coins have 3 finely-ridged sections interspersed with 3 smooth sections along the edge.
- 50 & 10 cent coins have fine scallops along the edge.
- 20 cent coins are smooth and have seven indents along the edge.
- 5 & 1 cent coins have a smooth edge.
- 2 cent coins are smooth and have a groove along the edge.

Coins have different weights — the higher the value, the heavier the coin (except for the €1 coin). Coins have different thicknesses – the higher the value, the thicker the coin (except for the €2 and €1 coins).

## Jimmy Glynn RIP – loyal friend to NCBI

We are sad to learn about the recent death of Jimmy Glynn, Tavanagh, Tuam, Co. Galway.



Jimmy and his wife Pauline, also deceased, joined the NCBI Voluntary Committee in Galway over 30 years ago to offer their support to fund and develop services for individuals who were blind and vision impaired. They both gave of their time, skills, and energy willingly, and were always happy to be of help and support to others whom they met on their journey. One of their many achievements was to support the development of support services for parents of children who had a vision impairment.

Jimmy went on to become the Chairperson of the NCBI Committee in Galway and a Board Member of NCBI.

Jimmy was well known, respected and loved in Galway. He played football for Galway and rugby for Connaught. He was a very resourceful gentleman and was successful in gaining a lot of support for NCBI Services as a result of his personality and reputation. He gave of his free time and his expertise as an electrician to support the setting up of NCBI's Resource Centre in Galway in 1999 the first of its kind outside of Dublin, and he was always available to offer his support and guidance to the Community Resource Work Staff in Galway in relation to any projects they were working on. Jimmy will be sadly missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him. Ar Dheis De go raibh a anam, ni bheidh a leitheid aris ann.

## Virtual Workshops for Primary School Children



NCBI's Children and Young Person's Team were delighted to be able to deliver a series of online programmes in partnership with the Department of Education's summer provision for primary school age children during the month of August.

The creative juices were flowing as staff worked hard to put together some amazing resources that allowed plenty of activity and communication between the children that took part. Ten programmes were delivered including orientation and mobility, Braille technology, independent living skills, using a connect 12/ laptop with specific transition supports for primary school starters and leavers. Over 80 children took part from their kitchens, living rooms and our virtual host centres in Tallaght and Galway!

## NCBI Host the First

**“It was an amazing experience from start to finish, lovely to be able to connect with the other campers and hear stories from the volunteers.**

**Margaret, Aoife and Caroline all did a super job, well done to all and thank you so much”**

**NCBI were proud hosts of the first ever Virtual Camp Abilities on July 1st 2020 with 18 campers, their parents, siblings and even the dogs taking part!**

Our Programmes Coordinator Margaret Bousquet said “We were bitterly disappointed to have to cancel the camp for 2020 in April due to Covid-19 but there was such a strong desire amongst the committee to look at an alternative, particularly when we were so close and had worked so hard. The virtual idea seemed almost the opposite of what camp is about in terms of creating opportunities for physical activity and social connections. But it was worth all the extra planning and those countless meetings we had on Microsoft Teams to see the smiles on the faces of the campers.”

Camp Ambassador and rugby player Ian McKinley officially opened the ceremony and spoke about his desire for more inclusion in sports through the wearing of sports goggles.

Paralympic athlete Jason Smyth offered his nuggets of wisdom to the group of eager listeners, speaking about being diagnosed with

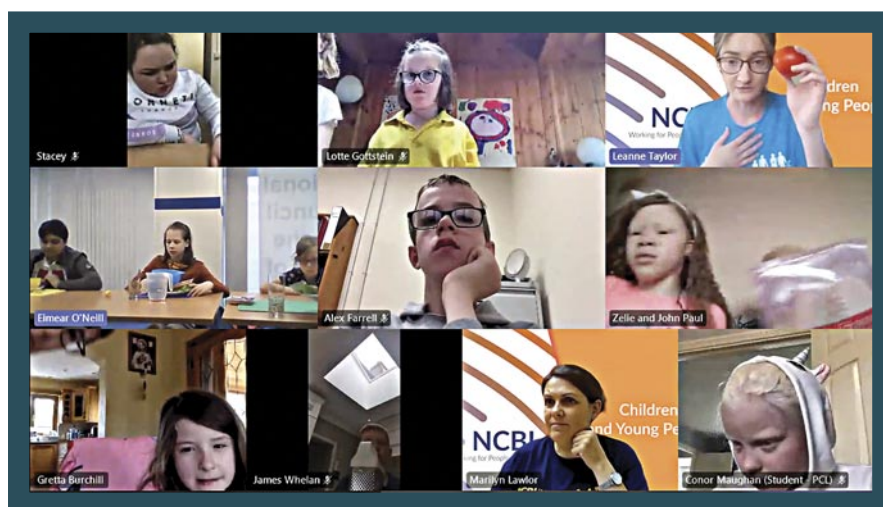
# Virtual Camp Abilities!



**ABOVE:** Above staff and participants in the first ever Virtual Camp Abilities.

**RIGHT:** Getting to grips with the format and listening intently.

**BELOW, Right:** Olympian Jason Smyth (right) offering his nuggets of wisdom to the group.



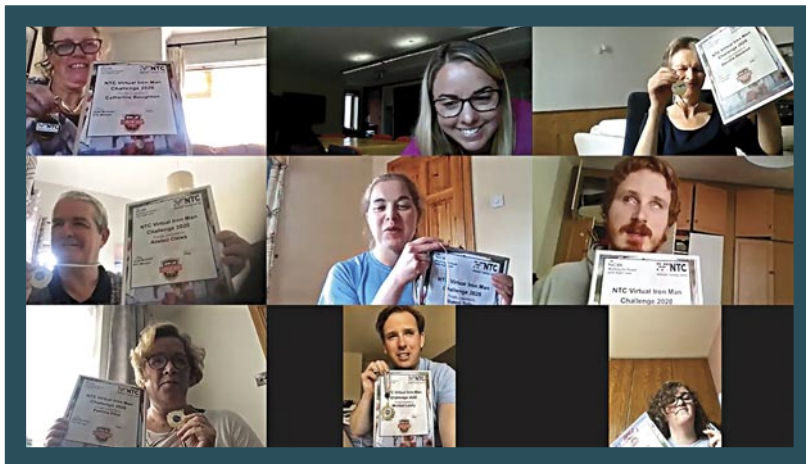
Stargardt's disease at a young age and how hard work and self-belief were the keys to his success.

Our amazing partners at Visionsports, Cara, Cappanalea Outdoor Education Centre, Kerry Recreation and Sports Partnership and IT Tralee along with our many energetic volunteers and past campers delivered an exciting and fast paced event to go down in history.





# The inaugural National Training Centre Virtual Iron Man Challenge!



**L-R top row: Catherine Boughton, Chantelle Smith, Deirdre Deverell; 2nd row: Alistair Clews, Niamh Trihy, Robert Creed; 3rd row: Petrina Finn, Michael Leahy, Roisin Lenehan.**

**Congratulations to the amazing service users on completing the inaugural Virtual Iron Man Challenge. On the 8th May 2020 the service users from the National Training Centre embarked on a 226km virtual journey equivalent to the IRONMAN World Championship held in Kona, Hawaii each year.**

This programme is typically face to face but was run virtually during lockdown. The students usually travel to the centre to participate, but due to the event being held virtually, students were able to attend from further afield, including Mayo and Kilkenny.

Everyone showed dedication and courage over the course of the challenge and proved that **ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE**. Congratulations to them on the incredible progress they have made with their goals during this time.

A big shout out to Niamh and Petrina who very dramatically tied and then had to battle it out to the very end with a Burpee challenge. Our picture shows everyone holding their certificates and medals up proudly!

## NCBI InfoLine

Following on from the success of the NCBI Help Line

during the COVID-

**19 health emergency, NCBI will continue to ensure services are accessible through one single entry point: NCBI's InfoLine.**



Using the same number 1850 33 43 53, services users, their families/friends, other service providers and health professionals can access all NCBI Services from Monday to Friday, 9.00am until 5.00pm, with an out of hours message/call back facility.

The options available to people contacting the InfoLine are the following:

1. Children & Young Peoples' Services
2. Adult Services
3. NCBI Labs (AT Assessment, Provision)

- and Training & Support)
4. NCBI Foundation (donations, fundraising etc.)
  5. Other (Accounts, HR, CEO etc.)

The provision of a nationwide and dedicated clerical staff team through the InfoLine will provide callers with a clear and consistent approach to accessing NCBI Services. This service coupled with the online Referral system via the website, email [info@ncbi.ie](mailto:info@ncbi.ie) and the CRM Information enquiries will ensure easier access and information to NCBI Services.

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## Pass-Sport: New Guide System for Blind and Vision Impaired People to Return to Sport

### Have you signed up yet to Vision Sports Ireland's Pass-Sport programme?

This programme enables the safe return to sport for people who are blind and vision impaired. The programme registers Vision Sports' members and their guide/pilot from outside of their household, to enable travel to and from a sport or leisure facility and to participate in exercise, including running, swimming, blind tennis and tandem bike riding. The programme supports potential contact tracing requirements in place by the HSE and Department of Health. Pass-Sport has been approved under Phase 3 of the Government Roadmap for reopening society and business and the return to sport.

Whilst a Sport Ireland survey of general population found record low levels (11%) of

sedentary behaviour, a survey by Vision Sports Ireland, now a part of NCBI, found a stark difference amongst people who are blind or vision impaired.



It found 75% of blind and visually impaired respondents were unable to meet national recommended guidelines on physical activity during Covid-19, with an alarming 90% reporting their physical activity had been severely limited due to Covid-19, largely due to the physical and social distancing guidelines restricting the use of guides/pilots for exercise. Half of surveyed members additionally reported a strong negative impact on their mental health as a result of these exercise restrictions.

Alongside Vision Sports' innovative Long-Cane Physical Distancing Exercise, supported by volunteer guides recruited from the parkrun community, attention has been turned to the Pass-Sport registration system to enable people with a vision impairment to participate in sport and physical activity with a guide from outside of their household.

As expected, social distancing protocols and advice from the HSE/ Department of Health and Sport Ireland will be maintained whilst participating under the Pass-Sport programme.

Pass-Sport is open to all Vision Sports Ireland members.

**For more information on how to get involved or sign up, please visit**

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/KSRP3KY> or **get in touch via** [visionsports@ncbi.ie](mailto:visionsports@ncbi.ie).

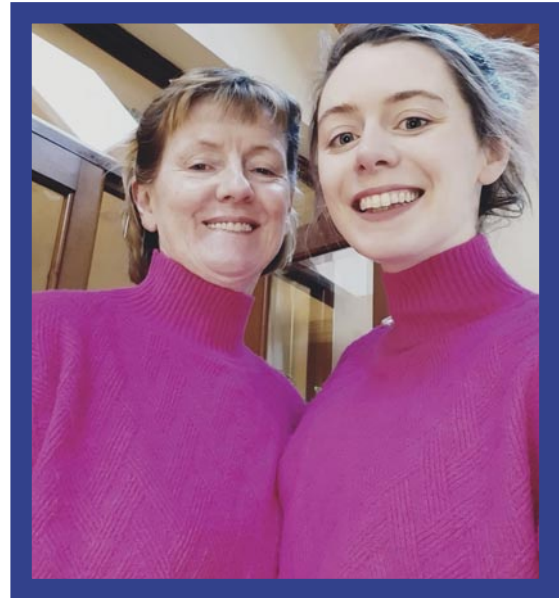
## Pandemic Pantry Heroes



Doing baking or cooking doesn't need to pose a challenge when you are blind or visually impaired. Here's some simple strategies to help you have confidence to create a tasty masterpiece.

- Familiarise yourself with the oven and position of tray before it is turned on.
- Use long sleeve oven mitts which cover the forearm when transferring the tray in and out of the oven.
- Use a dark coloured mixing bowl and measuring utensils to contrast against the white coloured ingredients.
- Use a non-slip mat or damp cloth under your mixing bowl or work surface to stop them slipping.
- To pour a liquid, use your finger to align the edges of the containers. Raise the edge of the pouring container slightly over the edge of the receiving container. Listen for the sound as the container fills, feel the weight, estimate the time. Don't be afraid to use your index finger over the side of the container to feel when the cold liquid nears the top.
- Cooking is a tactile experience! So long as your hands have been thoroughly washed don't be afraid to touch the food.

## Supporter Profiles: Denise Slacke



**Left to right: Lorraine and Denise Slacke.**

Happy Birthday Denise and a massive heartfelt thank you to you and your friends for supporting NCBI.

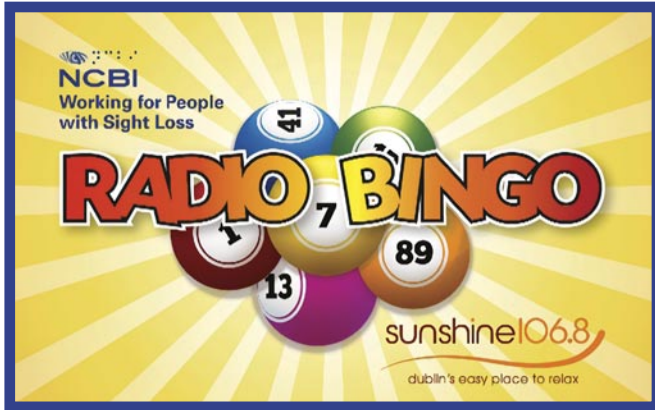
Denise herself lost part vision last summer in both her eyes, after a tough few months, her world started to shrink as she privately dealt with her new life. After plenty of help and support, Denise is back working and driving.

Trauma visited the family for a second time earlier this year when Denise's mother Lorraine had two brain aneurysms; she had a stroke and lost all sight in her left eye. Lorraine was put in touch with NCBI by her consultant and hasn't looked back.

After a year they will not forget, Denise's boyfriend, Brian, decided to do something extra special to mark her 30th Birthday, he set up a GoFundMe raising a fantastic €1095 NCBI services.



## NCBI Radio Bingo Launches in Dublin



**Successful partnerships with Highland Radio (Donegal) and with Shannonside/ Northern Sound (Midlands) have been bringing a daily bingo game to thousands of players who enjoy the connection with the charity and with their favourite local radio station.**

For those who are housebound or who are cocooning, the Radio Bingo has been a lifeline. Proceeds from the Radio Bingo helps to support services to those with sight loss in these counties.

Starting September 2020, a new partnership with Sunshine 106.8 means that NCBI Radio Bingo will be available across Dublin on a daily basis with daily numbers called live on air at 10am and 4pm. Listeners in the Dublin region can pick up their books weekly from a network of retailers across the county.

**The books can also be ordered at the NCBI online shop or from 01 882 1972. A Large print version of the book is available too.**

## Direct Mail Appeal

The suspension of fundraising events and the temporary closure of NCBI charity shops has represented a big challenge for NCBI Income. We rely on that income to supplement the shortfall in funding received by HSE.

A mailshot sent in April to general supporters and users of our services — the first comprehensive appeal in over ten years, was met with a very positive response. Over 1,000 families responded with 847 individual gifts while 219 people signed up to the **Eye Can Lottery** and for monthly contributions. Joe McKenna, Head of Foundation, said “These responses were very encouraging. There was great good will from people on the phone and in the letters. Participation is what matters. Not everyone can give at a high level but the contribution of many has helped to bridge the gap in our finances”.

The Advocacy Team fed back a number of issues regarding the style and tone of direct mail appeals and the adherence to communications preferences. These will be adhered to in future mailings where the information is available to NCBI.

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## Eyes Online Donation of Equipment by Companies

Our Eyes Online initiative to seek donations of laptops and other technology devices given the surge in demand for people to stay connected online. We're delighted to report our appeal to companies and supported by the American Chamber of Commerce Ireland led to generous supply of laptops and other devices. These will be loaded with appropriate software and hardware by the NCBI Labs team and made available to individuals who have particular pressing needs for connection to work or education. Companies participating in the scheme so far include Wisetek, Cognizant and Coca Cola. Many thanks to these.

## Dogs or iPhones man's best friend?

**Dominique Farrell (aged 48) shares how technology has enriched her life and allowed her to continue to stay connected even with failing sight.**

"I lost all of my sight in June 2019 due to a damaged retina, and there is no surgery here or abroad to rectify it. Prior to this, I had 20% vision which enabled me to get around independently with my previous guide dog Opal, but now since my sight has gone, it's set me back a little bit. I am in the middle of training with my new guide dog Mini. Covid-19 has been very isolating for me as I have been terrified to leave the house, everything is tactile, and I have to touch things. I am hoping once Mini and I are trained with our fantastic Guide Dog mobility instructor, I will be able to regain some of my independence.

"I was born three months premature, I weighed one pound 10 kg and was given too much oxygen in the incubator, which damaged the tissue of my right eye. I never had sight in my right eye, but I had about 30% in my left before I had a cataract, which I had removed in 2009, and I had the best sight ever. During the time I had a cataract my vision went down to 10% and then when my retina was damaged, I was left with no sight at all. I used to get on the bus, and I would usually sit on people because I couldn't see they were there.

"I have been using various NCBI services since

I was 18 and have always found them helpful to me. I also have greatly benefitted from the counselling service.

"Over this timeframe, the changes to technology have been enormous. NCBI trained me on using JAWs screen reader in 2003. When I began to use the IT services, there was no possibility of the NCBI IT staff being able to access my computer from theirs. The staff had to come out to my house and set it all up but now they can do everything remotely. Another resource I have loved during Covid-19 is the NCBI Lab's weekly live event and podcast. I also get the newsletter. It has very informative and interesting articles.

**I would be lost without my computer, my iPhone and my Apple Watch!**

"I use JAW's every single day to go on the Internet and email. Realistically, I would be lost without my computer, my iPhone and my Apple Watch as I rely on them so much and even more so during COVID-19 lockdown. With these devices, I can stay in touch with my interests (which includes listening to my favourite singer and good friend Mary Black), the NCBI website, the Irish Guide Dogs website and my brother Barry who lives in Geneva who I speak to every day. For my birthday this year, he arranged a surprise Zoom meeting for me and about 20 friends and family, so we could all celebrate together.

"Other technologies that have changed my life are the Amazon Echo Dot, (Alexa). It is a

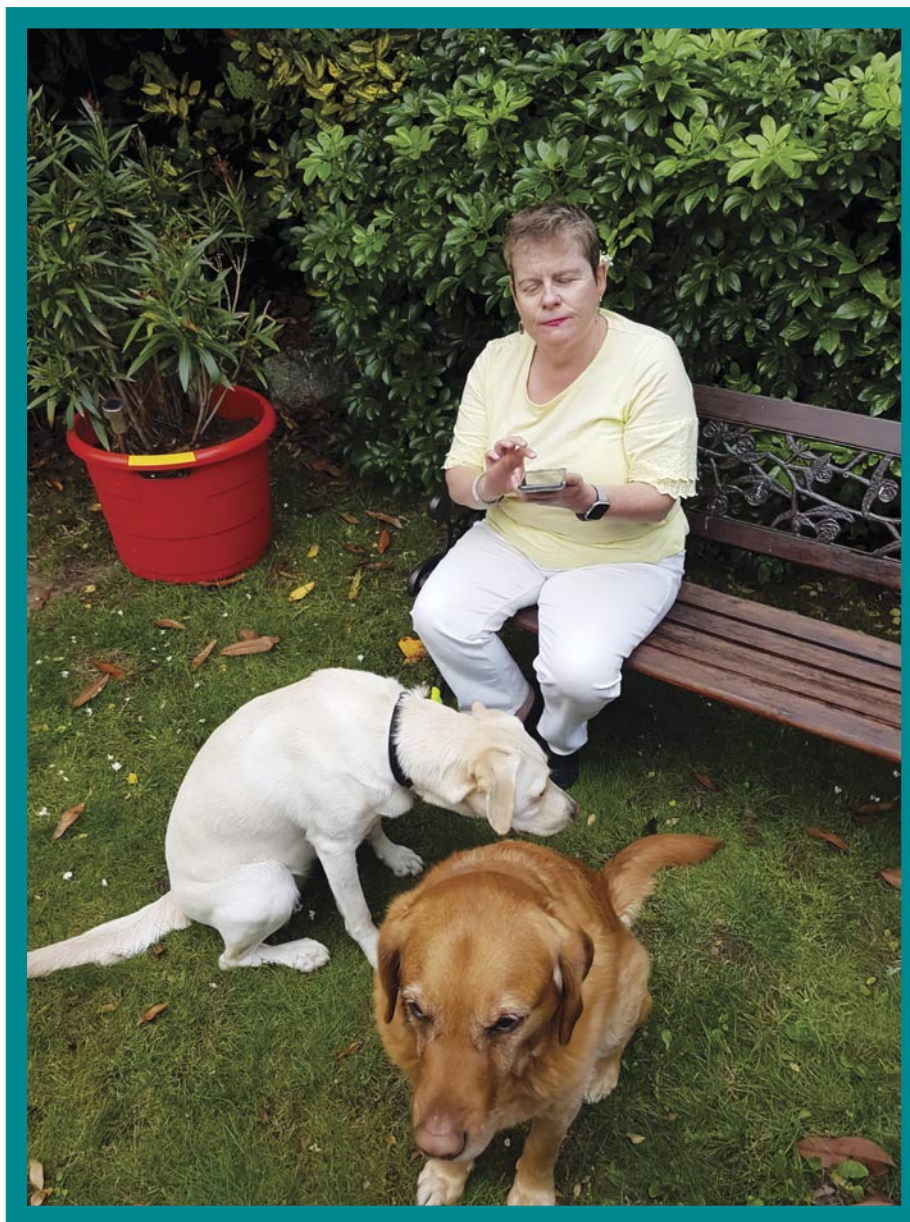


# For Dominique, it is both!

speaker, and it can play music, tell the weather and I ask it for recipes or anything I want.

“I got my first mobile phone in early 2000s, which was the Nokia 6600 phone. I went through all the Nokia phones and the first Nokia phone to have "TALKS". At the time "TALKS" was the most useful software for your phone. Things were different then, "TALKS" had to be put on to your phone and this meant that you would be a week or two without a phone. Now iPhones and Apple devices have voiceover installed, ready to go.

“My first iPhone was iPhone 4S which had voice over installed. I thought what a brilliant phone, but it took me ages to get used to it because I had always had phones with keypads. Using a touchscreen was a whole new learning curve for me, but I got there. Then I went from the iPhone 4S to the iPhone 8 and now I'm on the SE 2020 version. Even with the complete deterioration of my sight, I find the iPhone hasn't changed for me because I've been so used to the gestures. I know where everything is on the screen.



**Dominique Farrell, with her guide dogs, Mini (left) and Opel.**

“I also have an Apple Watch, Series 5 which I got for my birthday it can take phone calls, read my emails and read my text messages. It can also download my ECGs and my heart rate. I use the watch when I am out walking and it can detect when I am exercising. It is like having a tiny iPhone but on your wrist.

**Continued on Page 18.**



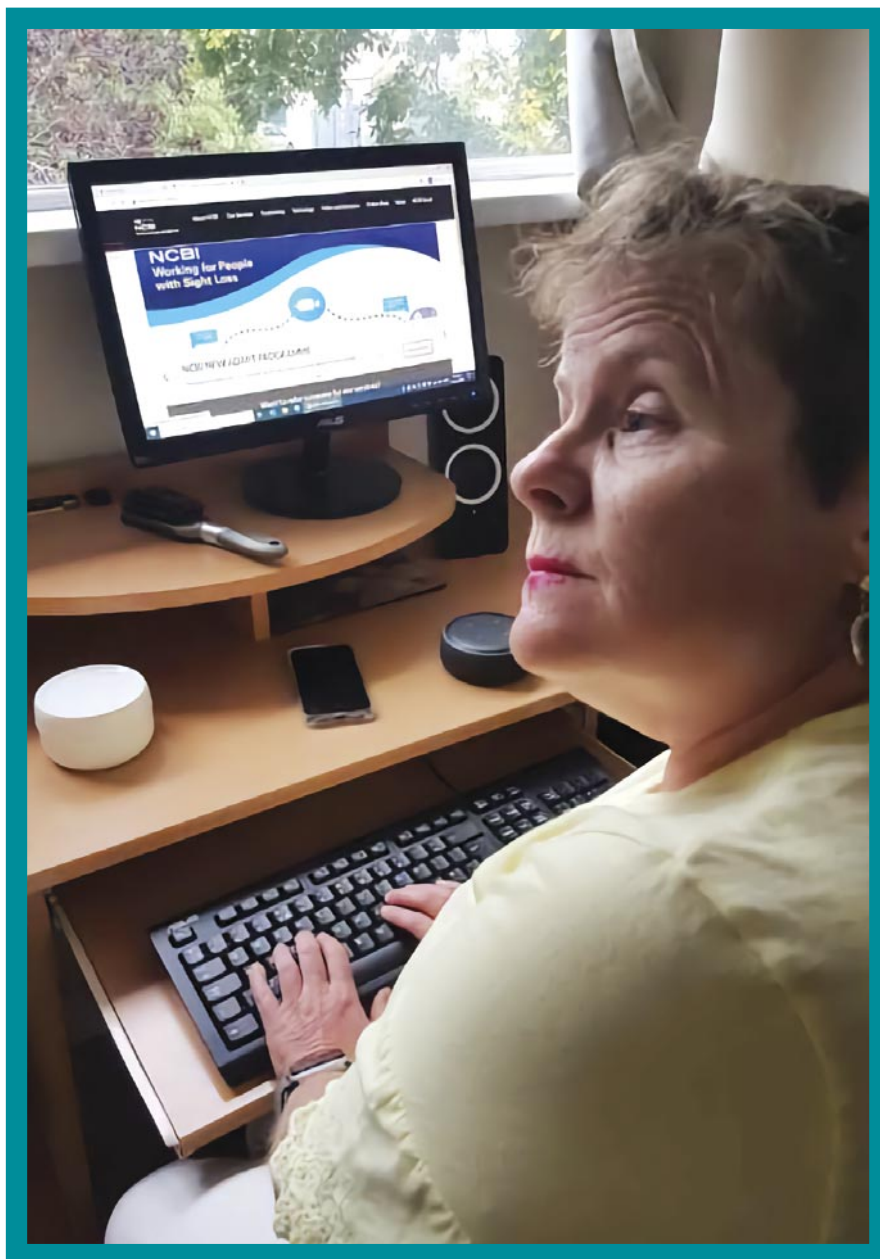
**Continued from Page 17.**

"I have Apple air pods too which are great, they are wireless and connect by Bluetooth.

"I also use the app Seeing AI a lot. It is beneficial for things like reading barcodes on products, so I know exactly what product I have in my hand. It also will read all different currencies, so I know what notes I have, this is so important to me.

"With the rapid pace that accessible technology is moving, I enjoy testing new products or devices. I got NCBI Labs team to show me how to use the Orcam, these are portable, artificial vision devices that allow visually impaired people to understand text and identify objects through audio feedback, describing what they are unable to see. These would be great, but you have to have a higher level of vision to be able to use it so you know where signs are so you can point the camera in the location. Finally, Dominique's sound advice to anyone worried about using technology to aid their sight loss:

"Go for it because technology enriches and enhances your life so immensely and



**Dominique at her computer workstation.**

significantly. And it enables you through functions like True FaceTime to communicate with your friends and family, especially those living abroad. Also with the support of NCBI Labs, who are only a phone call or an email away, they can access your computer and assist you on your phone. I would advise people don't be afraid and excuse the pun, but you will never look back."

# Dunboyne Shop Opening

NCBI opened its latest store in Dunboyne Co.Meath with the help of local resident and former Taoiseach John Bruton. This latest addition to the chain of stores brings a new fresh look with use of recycled materials to modernise the image of charity shops. We hope you like it. Pop in and see the great collection of quality clothes, accessories and books on offer.

**RIGHT: Former Taoiseach John Bruton (left) speaking at the opening of the new NCBI Retail Shop in Dunboyne, with (centre) Ruairi McGinley, NCBI Director of Corporate Services, and (right) Chris White, Ceo, NCBI.**



## Karen Meagher – RIP

NCBI Retail are still in shock at the sudden passing of Karen Meagher, NCBI Retail Area Manager for South West.

Karen joined NCBI in March 2018 and brought energy, passion and experience to the role which was evident in all the stores she was connected with. She was hugely respected by all those who worked with her.

Her passion for people was recognised last year as she took several team members through a training programme she had designed and curated. This enthusiasm and support for her team, along with her positive and friendly way is what all who worked with her will remember her for.

Karen leaves behind husband Joe and three boys. Her love for her family always shone through and was her main motivation in life.

It is with sadness and shock that we say goodbye to our colleague and friend.



**Above: clothes display at Dunboyne NCBI.**



**The late Karen Meagher.**

# The Rise of Video Conferencing Apps amid the Covid-19 Pandemic

Video conferencing software and video chat applications have seen a huge surge in demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of the growth is due to increasing adoption of platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom as businesses switch to remote working to limit the spread of the virus.



Social distancing has also meant that people have had to move their social lives online. There has been an increase in the numbers using video conferencing software to connect with friends and family as well as to attend virtual quizzes and exercise classes.

**Let's take a look at some popular apps that can be used for video conferencing:**

## **Microsoft Teams**

Microsoft Teams is essentially a communication and collaboration platform within Office 365 that combines persistent workplace chat, video meetings and file storage.

It enables users to schedule meetings for up to 250 participants, or live events for up to 10,000 participants. Full integration with Microsoft 365 means that calls can be easily scheduled and invites shared among the organisation, while external guests can join from their web browser or by downloading the application.

Microsoft Teams also provides the full range of features expected from a leading video conferencing software provider, including screen sharing and call recording, live captions,

background blur technology, and chat functionalities. Integration with Microsoft 365 has helped make Teams become the market leader in video conferencing and digital workspace integration.

The Teams app is fully accessible and there are lots of resources available for screen reader users. What's more, if you need to be reminded of any keystroke at any time you can press the Control + full stop keys. This will bring up a list of shortcuts on the screen which you can read with your arrow keys. From here you can skip down through the different sections by pressing H for headings.

## **Zoom Meetings**

Zoom is a video conferencing platform that is used to conduct meetings and video conferences via the web. People mainly use this app to be involved in online digital clubs, family quizzes, casual classes, webinars, and generally to just stay connected during this time of social isolation. It is also fully accessible for screen reader and low vision users.

Users with a free account can host video conferences for up to 100 participants, but conferences of 3 members or more are limited to 40 minutes.



You can upgrade to a paid plan to remove these restrictions, or simply keep your conferences short and sweet. There are no limits on the number of meetings you can host, so you could simply host a new call once you've hit the limit.

Zoom allows participants to join via the web, dedicated apps, browser extensions, and mobile devices using iPhone and Android apps. Users can call in via phone if they need to. Free users can also record video or audio locally and share screens with other conference participants.

### **WhatsApp**

WhatsApp is a very popular instant messaging app that has video calling included. This free app is available on iOS, Android, MacOS and Windows. You can now make video calls with groups of up to eight people with WhatsApp.

It is also excellent for sharing all kinds of files such as short videos, PDF documents and sound files. It has end to end encryption (which means only you and the person at the other end can read what you send) and works very well with Voiceover and Talkback.

### **Apple FaceTime**

FaceTime comes with any Apple device, such as iPhone, iPad, Mac laptop and iMac computer. It offers a seamless video chatting experience, but only with contacts who also use an Apple device.

FaceTime also allows you to make audio calls, which may be preferable if you are in a place with a poor Wi-Fi or data connection.

It recently introduced video calling for groups of up to thirty-two people. You can also set up a Group FaceTime call through the Messages app by tapping on the FaceTime option in a group chat.

FaceTime works really well with VoiceOver and it is also very good for low vision users, especially when used on an iPad.

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## **Things to try on your Smart Speaker**

Did you know you can ask your smart speaker to help you work out at home?



For example, you can say Alexa or Hey Google, "open the body coach"? Your smart assistant will talk you through your workout. You can take breaks anytime and do it at your own pace. Alexa also has other popular skills available such as five-minute workout and seven-minute workout.

On your smart speaker there is a vast selection of games available too. As all the games are played by voice, they are fully accessible for blind and visually impaired people as there are no visual aspects. Two games that are great fun to play either on your own or with all the family are Song Quiz and Akinator. Song Quiz will play thousands of songs from the last 60 years and the object is to guess the correct title and artist. To begin, say Alexa or Hey Google "Play song quiz". Your Smart Speaker will talk you through the set-up and you can play against your family or against someone online.

Akinator is a fun game that attempts to read your mind and guess who you are thinking of by asking you a series of questions. To play say Alexa or Hey Google "Play Akinator". Try it — it's great fun!

If you don't currently have a smart speaker don't worry as you can always download the Alexa or the Google Assistant app on your smart phone instead.

## Exciting New Accessibility Features Coming on Apple

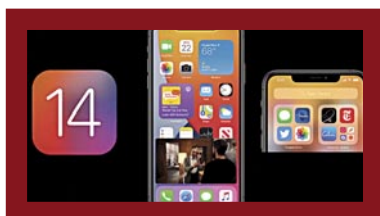
Many new accessibility enhancements revealed by Apple are set to benefit users who are blind or have low vision, expanding on Apple's efforts over the years to make its devices and software more accessible. Here's a rundown through some of the highlights.

### Changes to the Home Screen

In iOS 14, Apple will allow widgets to be added to the main Home screen and right alongside your apps. To add them, there will be a new "widget gallery" where users will be able to easily add and customise widgets. There will also be a new "Smart Stack" widget that will automatically show relevant apps based on the time of day.

Apps are being organised much better too with the introduction of App Library. This will let you hide pages to streamline your Home Screen. For example, if you have several pages of apps, but only ever use two, you will be able to hide the rest. If you need to access the hidden apps you will be able to go all the way to the right in your pages of apps until you find the new App Library, which arranges all your installed apps in alphabetical order. This will make it much easier to find a specific app, or find one buried in a folder from a long time ago.

Widgets and App Library are added to the iPhone's Home Screen in iOS 14.



### VoiceOver Enhancements

VoiceOver, Apple's technology that translates on-screen text into speech, gets some exciting updates with iOS 14 and iPadOS 14. One of the

first accessibility improvements was VoiceOver Recognition. With this feature, VoiceOver will have the power to identify elements on a web page even if they are not labelled or laid out correctly. Instead, VoiceOver will be able to change them on the fly and make the websites easier to understand. What's more, when it comes to images or photos, VoiceOver will be able to read complete sentence descriptions to detail what's on the screen. It will also automatically detect user interface controls like buttons, labels, toggles, sliders and indicators.

### Improved Magnifier gets its own App Icon

The Magnifier feature on the iPhone and iPad, which is designed for people with low vision, is set to have new capabilities in iOS 14 and iPadOS 14.

**iOS 14 Magnifier interface (left)**  
**iOS 13 Magnifier interface (right).**



For starters, Magnifier will feature an

updated interface that makes controls more easily available and offer clarity on what each tool does. There will be options for adjusting brightness and contrast or adding a filter to change what's being magnified to a colour that's easier for an individual to see. It will also be possible to rearrange all of the controls to best meet a user's needs and customise the filter options so you can set the one that you need and toggle it on with a tap.

Magnifier will also feature a new multi-shot option

allowing users to take multiple photos at one time. This could be helpful when, for example, capturing different pages of a menu and then reviewing them all at once, rather than having to take single shots that need to be reviewed one by one.

For frequent Magnifier users, it will be possible to add an app icon to the Home Screen to activate the Magnifier function. This will be possible by accessing the App Library, searching for Magnifier, and then dragging it over to one of the app pages or long pressing and choosing “Add to Home Screen.” The feature can continue to be accessed with a triple tap on the side button as well.

### **Back Tap**

Back Tap was designed with accessibility in mind but may turn out to be a feature lots of people will want to use. With Back Tap, you will be able to perform various actions by a double or triple tap on the back of your iPhone. These include launching many of the system actions like opening the app switcher or Control Center, as well as accessibility features like enabling Magnifier or VoiceOver, performing gestures, and even launching Shortcuts. Initial reports indicate that Back Tap will be supported on the iPhone X and newer, but the full list of supported devices may be longer and may also change between now and the public release of iOS 14.

### **macOS 11.0 Big Sur**

Apple has completely revamped the Mac operating system this year with macOS Big Sur, which adds some interesting new features to the Mac. macOS Big Sur brings the Control Center to the Mac for the first time, and just like on iOS 14, Mac users will have quick access to rich, dynamic widgets. Although macOS has had widgets since OS X Yosemite, now it will be possible for the widgets that you have on

macOS Big Sur to be the same ones that are available on iOS 14. That means if you’re running a universal iOS app that contains a widget, you’ll also get it on Mac.

### **Siri has a new view**

Instead of Siri taking over your whole screen when you activate it, there will be just a small overlay at the bottom of the display of the animated Siri icon. There will also be new features, for example, Siri will now be able to send audio messages in addition to just dictated messages.

### **Siri’s new Compact Interface on the bottom of an iPhone Screen.**



iOS 14 will let you change your default email and web browser apps.

As part of iOS 14’s new features, users will be able to switch their default app preferences for the first time. This is a long-requested feature, as iOS 13 and prior versions of the operating system will always direct taps on links to Safari, and new emails start in Apple Mail.

Accessibility has long played an integral role at Apple’s Worldwide Developers Conference, and this year things were no different. With improvements to Voiceover’s ability to recognise and describe unlabelled elements in apps and websites, a redesigned Magnifier, a new back tap gesture in iOS14 as well as other notable enhancements, Apple device users who are blind or vision impaired have much to look forward to.





Invites anyone interested in how technology can help overcome barriers in daily life to participate in their Virtual Clubs.

- Each club has a NCBI Technology Trainer who is available to answer questions.
- When you join you will be given a Microsoft Teams link where you can join a meeting on your computer or smart device.
- Clubs are run virtually throughout the country.

**To join please  
contact NCBI Labs  
on [labs@ncbi.ie](mailto:labs@ncbi.ie)**