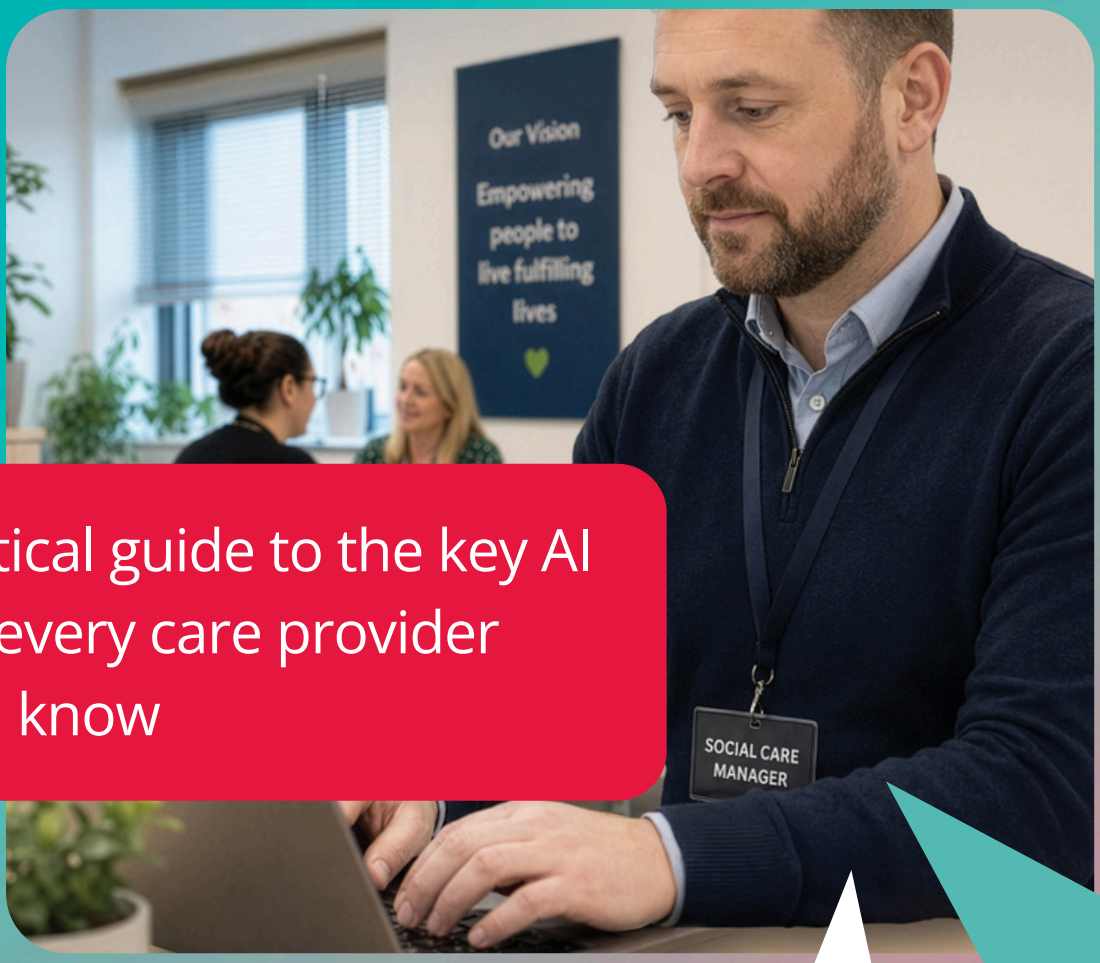
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The Essential AI Glossary for Health and Social Care



A practical guide to the key AI terms every care provider should know

Understanding the Language of AI

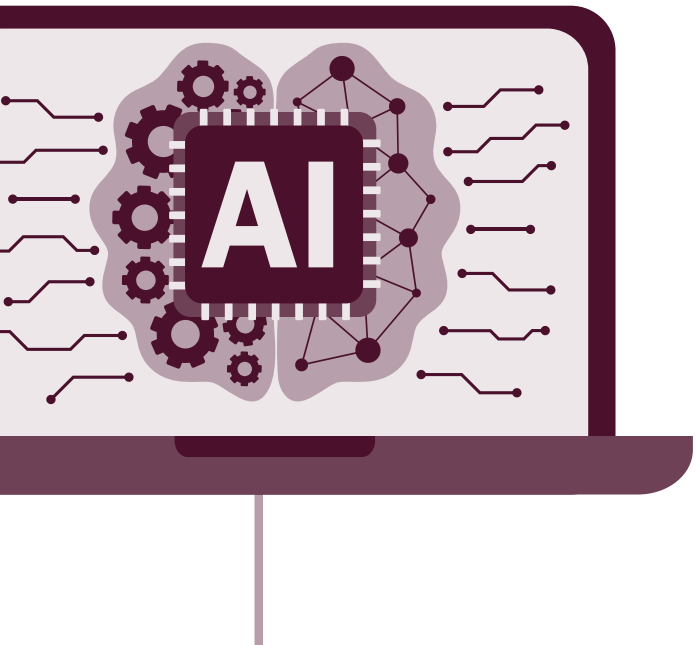
Artificial intelligence is transforming health and social care, but with that comes a growing number of new terms, acronyms and technologies that can feel unfamiliar or overwhelming.

Whether you're exploring AI for the first time or beginning to introduce it across your organisation, understanding the language is an important part of building confidence. From concepts such as machine learning and large language models to practical terms like prompts, shadow AI and human in the loop, having a shared understanding helps teams make informed decisions and engage more confidently with new technology.

This glossary has been created specifically for health and social care providers. Rather than providing highly technical definitions, it explains common AI terminology in clear, practical language, with examples and context relevant to the sector.

Use it as a quick reference whenever you encounter an unfamiliar term, share it with colleagues to build a common understanding across your care service, or return to it as AI continues to evolve.

The more familiar the language becomes, the easier it is to have informed conversations about how AI can support your organisation and, ultimately, the people you care for.



Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Technology that enables computers to perform tasks that traditionally require human intelligence, such as understanding information, recognising patterns, learning from data, solving problems and generating content.

In health and social care, AI can support professionals by helping to reduce administrative tasks, identify patterns, improve access to information and support better decision-making. AI does not replace human judgement, compassion or accountability.

AI Agent

An AI system designed to complete tasks with a greater level of independence by analysing information, planning actions and carrying out specific activities within defined boundaries.

Unlike traditional AI tools that respond to individual requests, AI agents can support more complex workflows, such as helping coordinate processes, gather information or automate repetitive tasks while keeping people involved in oversight and decision-making.

AI Bias

When an AI system produces unfair, inaccurate or unequal results due to limitations or biases within the data it was trained on or the way it was developed.

Responsible AI development includes identifying, testing and reducing bias to help ensure technology supports fair and inclusive outcomes.

AI Ethics

The principles and practices that guide how AI is designed, developed and used responsibly.

In care settings, ethical AI means ensuring technology respects privacy, protects individuals, supports human decision-making and is used in a way that benefits people receiving care and the professionals supporting them.

AI Governance

The policies, processes and responsibilities an organisation puts in place to ensure AI is used safely, effectively and responsibly.

An AI governance framework may include guidance on approved tools, data protection, staff training, risk management, accountability and ongoing monitoring.

AI Guardrails

The rules, controls and safeguards designed to ensure AI systems operate safely and within defined boundaries.

Examples include restricting access to sensitive information, requiring human approval before actions are taken and preventing inappropriate use of AI tools.



AI Hallucination

When an AI system generates information that appears accurate but is incorrect, misleading or not supported by available evidence.

AI hallucinations can happen because AI predicts responses based on patterns rather than understanding information in the same way humans do. This is why human review and professional judgement remain essential.

AI Model

A system trained to recognise patterns within data and generate outputs, such as text, predictions, recommendations or insights.

Different AI models are designed for different purposes, from understanding language to analysing images or identifying trends.

AI Prompt

The instruction, question or information provided to an AI system to generate a response or complete a task.

The quality of an AI output often depends on the quality of the prompt. Clear, specific instructions usually help AI produce more useful results.

Example:

Instead of:
"Write a report."

A stronger prompt:
"Create a summary report of this incident, highlighting key events, actions taken and any follow-up recommendations."

Ambient AI

AI technology that works quietly in the background to support people without requiring constant manual input.

In health and social care, ambient AI could support activities such as automatically capturing conversations, generating documentation or reducing administrative tasks while allowing professionals to remain focused on the person receiving care.

Automation

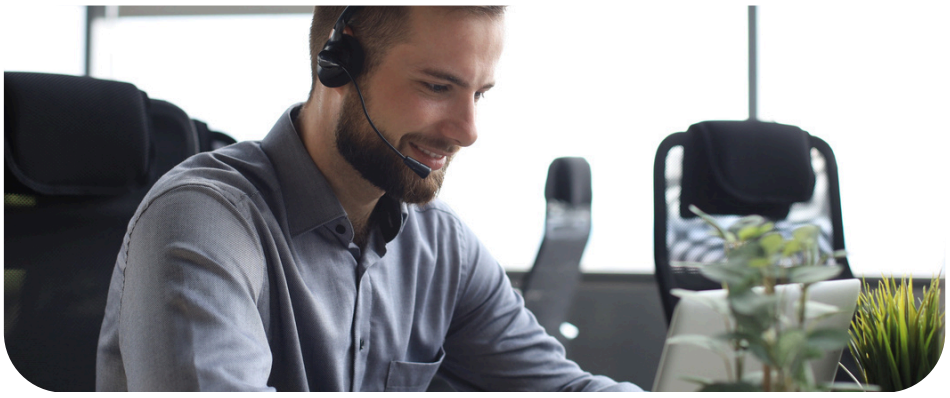
The use of technology to complete tasks automatically with limited human input.

AI-powered automation can help organisations reduce repetitive administrative work, improve efficiency and allow teams to focus on higher-value activities.

Chatbot

An AI-powered tool designed to communicate with users through text or voice conversations.

Chatbots can help answer questions, provide information and support users with routine tasks. In care settings, they must be carefully managed to ensure information remains accurate and appropriate.



Deep Learning

A type of machine learning that uses complex networks inspired by the human brain to identify patterns and process large amounts of information.

Deep learning is commonly used in advanced AI applications, including language understanding, image recognition and predictive technologies.

Generative AI

A type of AI that can create new content, including text, images, audio, summaries and other forms of information, based on instructions provided by users.

For care providers, generative AI can support tasks such as drafting communications, summarising information, creating reports and reducing administrative workload.

Human in the Loop

An approach where people remain involved in reviewing, approving or making decisions based on AI-generated outputs.

In health and social care, maintaining human oversight is essential because AI should support professional judgement rather than replace it.





Large Language Model (LLM)

A type of AI model trained on large amounts of text data to understand and generate human language.

LLMs power many generative AI tools and can help with tasks such as summarising information, answering questions and generating written content.



Machine Learning (ML)

A type of AI that enables computers to learn from data, identify patterns and improve performance over time without being explicitly programmed for every task.

Examples in care may include analysing trends, identifying risks or supporting operational planning.



Natural Language Processing (NLP)

A branch of AI that enables computers to understand, interpret and generate human language.

NLP is used in technologies such as voice recognition, digital assistants, automated transcription and AI-powered documentation tools.



Predictive Analytics

The use of data, statistical analysis and AI techniques to identify patterns and predict potential future outcomes.

In care, predictive analytics may help providers identify trends, understand risks and make more informed decisions. Predictions should always support, rather than replace, professional judgement.

Prompt Engineering

The process of creating effective instructions or prompts to help AI systems generate more accurate and useful outputs.

Good prompt engineering involves providing clear context, defining the desired outcome and explaining how information should be structured.

Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG)

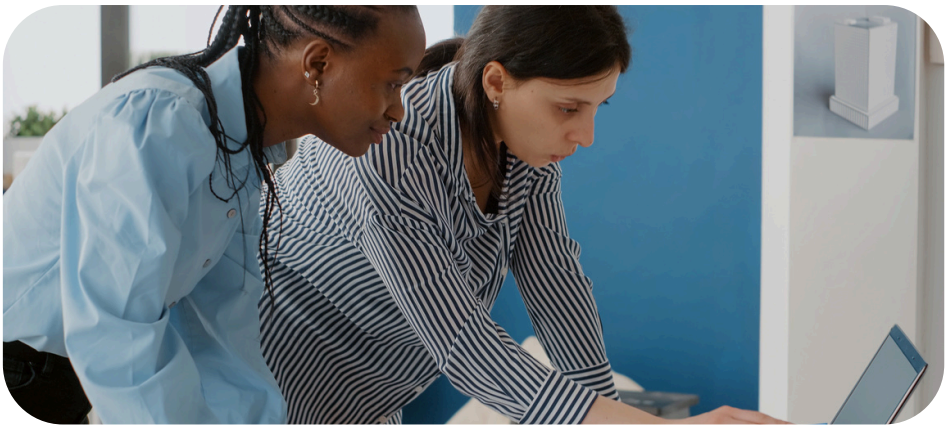
A method that allows AI systems to retrieve information from trusted sources before generating a response.

RAG can improve accuracy by allowing AI tools to reference specific organisational information, documents or knowledge bases rather than relying only on general training data.

Responsible AI

The approach of developing and using AI in a safe, ethical and transparent way.

Responsible AI focuses on principles such as fairness, privacy, security, accountability, human oversight and ensuring technology benefits people.



Shadow AI

The use of AI tools without approval, oversight or guidance from an organisation.

Examples include employees entering workplace information into publicly available AI tools without understanding the potential risks.

Shadow AI can create concerns around data protection, security, accuracy and governance, highlighting the importance of clear AI policies and approved solutions.

Synthetic Data

Artificially created data designed to replicate patterns found in real-world information without using identifiable personal data.

Synthetic data can support testing, research and development while helping organisations reduce privacy risks.

Voice AI

AI technology that allows computers to understand and respond to spoken language.

In care settings, voice AI can support activities such as documentation, transcription and hands-free access to information, helping professionals reduce administrative tasks.

AI Readiness

The level at which an organisation is prepared to adopt and use AI effectively.

AI readiness includes having the right technology, policies, governance, staff confidence, training and leadership support in place.

Digital Transformation

The process of using digital technologies to improve how an organisation operates, delivers services and supports people.

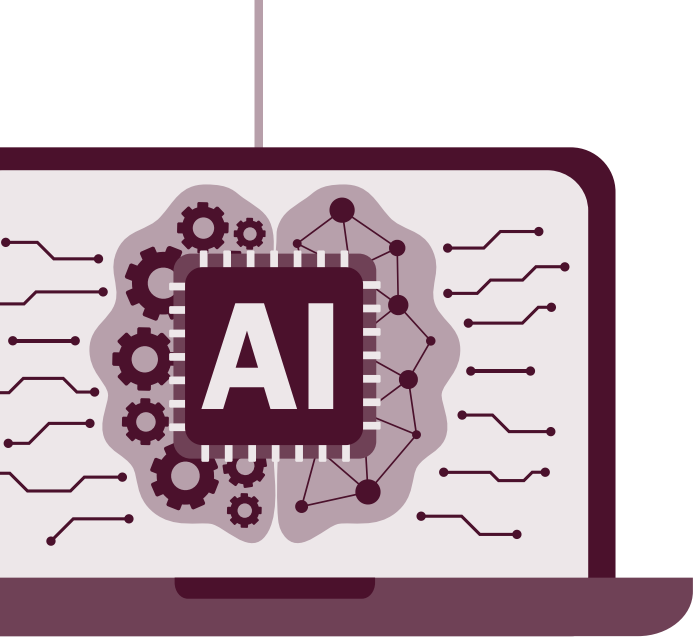
AI is one part of wider digital transformation, alongside technologies such as digital care records, cloud systems and connected platforms.

Machine Learning Training Data

The information used to teach an AI system how to identify patterns and generate outputs.

The quality, accuracy and diversity of training data can significantly influence how effectively and fairly an AI system performs.





AI Is Evolving. So Will This Glossary.

Artificial intelligence is developing at an extraordinary pace, with new technologies, capabilities and terminology emerging all the time. While this glossary explains many of today's most important concepts, it is not intended to be exhaustive.

As AI continues to evolve, so too will the language surrounding it. The most important thing isn't remembering every technical term. It's understanding the principles behind them and recognising how they apply within your organisation. By building a shared understanding of AI, care providers can make more informed decisions, ask the right questions and adopt new technologies with greater confidence.

Whether you're a registered manager, care professional, operational leader or simply beginning your AI journey, developing a common language is one of the first steps towards using AI safely, responsibly and effectively.

Keep this glossary close by, revisit it whenever you need to and continue building your confidence as AI becomes an increasingly valuable part of health and social care.

Continue your AI journey



This glossary is designed to accompany our new AI guide for care providers: **From Curious to Confident**

Explore the full guide for practical advice on understanding artificial intelligence, building organisational confidence, implementing AI responsibly and discovering how AI can help transform the future of health and social care.

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Our expert team of software specialists are ready to show you how you understand the journey to adopt and benefit from AI with confidence.

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