

Aide-Mémoire

Digital solutions for mental health

Date due to MO:	3 April 2024	Action required by:	N/A
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Health Report number:	H2024037540
To:	Hon Matt Dooney, Minister for Mental Health		
Consulted:	Health New Zealand: <input type="checkbox"/> Māori Health Authority: <input type="checkbox"/>		

Contact for telephone discussion

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To: Hon Matt Doocey, Minister for Mental Health

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE

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Context: You met with the Digital Health Association on Thursday 7 March 2024, where the need for a digital mental health strategy was raised.

This report responds to your request for information on recent investment and strategic settings that enable digital mental health solutions, and opportunities for digital solutions to be emphasised in the future.

Comment: **Strategic direction for digital mental health**

- Technology is a key system enabler for transforming mental health and addiction. We are working towards a future mental health and addiction system that is progressively more digitally enabled, with virtual access to advice and specialised expertise that is not available locally and to tailored tools and supports for targeted population groups.
- The strategic direction for digital mental health solutions has been guided by *Kia Manawanui Aotearoa: Long-term Pathway to Mental Wellbeing* and *Oranga Hinengaro System and Services Framework*. Both *Kia Manawanui* and the *System and Services Framework* have a focus on improving the design and delivery of mental health services. This includes telehealth and digital services that support self-management and provide widespread early access and information.
- To support safe and effective digital mental health tools, the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) also commissioned the development of a new framework, the Digital Mental Health and Addiction Assessment Tool, with input from whānau, clinicians, developers, researchers, e-mental health and IT experts. It sets guidelines, standards and baseline expectations up-front for those developing digital mental health tools for the safe delivery of e-mental health in New Zealand.
- The Assessment Tool was published in 2021 and includes consideration of domains such as safety, usability, relevance, cultural safety, technical security, privacy and data sovereignty. It can be accessed online here: <https://emhf.emhicglobal.com/guide/>.
- The Ministry and Health New Zealand are also engaged in international networks to support digital mental health solutions and knowledge sharing, such as the eMental Health International Collaborative or eMHIC.

Recent investment in digital mental health solutions

- There has been good progress towards building a digital ecosystem of support that ensures people have the knowledge and tools available to help look after their own physical and mental health.
- COVID-19 prompted change in the way people were seeking mental health support, stimulating innovation from digital mental health service providers, and the use of digital platforms to support mental wellbeing increased significantly. This momentum helped build a significant case for further investment and focus on digital mental health tools and resources.
- There has been a greater use of digital ways of working for both physical and mental health services. We are seeing virtual consultations and e-prescribing happening more frequently since the COVID-19 period and this trend is expected to continue.
- Health New Zealand has invested in a range of digital tools to expand accessibility and reach for mental wellbeing support. A few examples are listed below:
 - Health New Zealand | Health Promotion (previously Te Hiringa Hauora | Health Promotion Agency) funded the development of Small Steps, a website with a range of digital tools to support people to take steps to improve their wellbeing.
 - Health New Zealand funds Groov, a free digital tool to support people 19 years and older with their day-to-day mental wellbeing and at times of increased stress or distress.
 - Health New Zealand funds Headstrong, a chatbot platform co-designed with young people. Aimed at 12–18-year-olds, it supports brief interactive chat sessions.
 - Health New Zealand funds both SPARX (an online tool for 12–19-year-olds that utilises Cognitive Behavioural Therapy through gameplay) and Beating the Blues (a service that provides adults with evidence-based computer administered therapy for the treatment of common mental health problems).
 - Le Va, a Pacific mental health provider and workforce development centre, delivers Aunty Dee, a free online tool for people who need help to work through a problem or problems from a Pacific world view.
- Going forward as we continue to evolve our digital mental health landscape it is important to have buy-in from wider government agencies, not just health agencies, given the need for other agencies to be part of the solution for positive mental wellbeing. For example:
 - Ministry for Primary Industries and Health New Zealand have created a new Rural Wellbeing Support web page to make it easier for rural communities to find support.
 - There is a new rural after-hours telehealth service improving access to primary health care including mental health for almost 900,000 New Zealanders.

- Increasing accessibility through zero-rated access that makes many government websites and health information free to access, which can be found at: www.zero.govt.nz.
- We have also made changes to support digitally-enabled practice. The Mental Health Act was amended in 2021 to enable the effective and safe use of audio-visual link (AVL) technology for patient assessments and examinations when the physical presence of the patient is not practicable and when it is appropriate in the circumstances. Using AVL in mental health consultations is supported by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, which notes that ‘telepsychiatry can greatly improve access to psychiatric services for people in rural and remote areas, and in other situations where face-to-face consultations are impracticable’.

Future opportunities for digital mental health solutions

- There are opportunities to include a focus on a digitally enabled mental health and addiction system as part of upcoming strategic work. For example, as part of developing the work programme for your Mental Health portfolio (proposed to be presented to Cabinet in June 2024), including a refreshed cross-government implementation plan to supersede the action plan in *Kia Manawanui*.
- If the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022 is amended to require a new Mental Health Strategy, this would also present an opportunity to strengthen the strategic focus on digital mental health, particularly when thinking about intervening early and providing comprehensive primary-level care and wellbeing support that is accessible to all.
- Digital supports are also useful for communities where they are underserved by general services or who have additional needs that can be met by digital services. For example, people with disabilities or chronic conditions, people in remote areas, rainbow communities, and new parents. More can be done to support increased access for these groups through digital means and to encourage integration of digital mental health support in wider practice.
- For example, as part of implementation planning for new legislation to repeal and replace the current Mental Health Act, there will be opportunities to explore how digital approaches can be integrated to support efficient and consistent application of any new legislation. Including, for example, ensuring advance directives under new legislation are accessible to tāngata whaiora and clinicians when they are needed.
- This aide-mémoire discloses all relevant information.



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**Clinical, Community and Mental Health |
Te Pou Whakakaha**

Date: 3 April 2024

PROACTIVELY RELEASED