FACT SHEET
for service providers

Overview of the NSQDMH Standards

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) partnered with service users, consumers, carers, families, clinicians, service providers and technical experts to develop the NSQDMH Standards. The Standards were released in November 2020.

The National Safety and Quality Digital Mental Health (NSQDMH) Standards aim to improve the quality of digital mental health service provision, and to protect service users and their support people from harm.

The three NSQDMH Standards include 59 actions related to clinical and technical aspects of digital mental health services. They describe the level of care and the safeguards that a digital mental health service should provide.
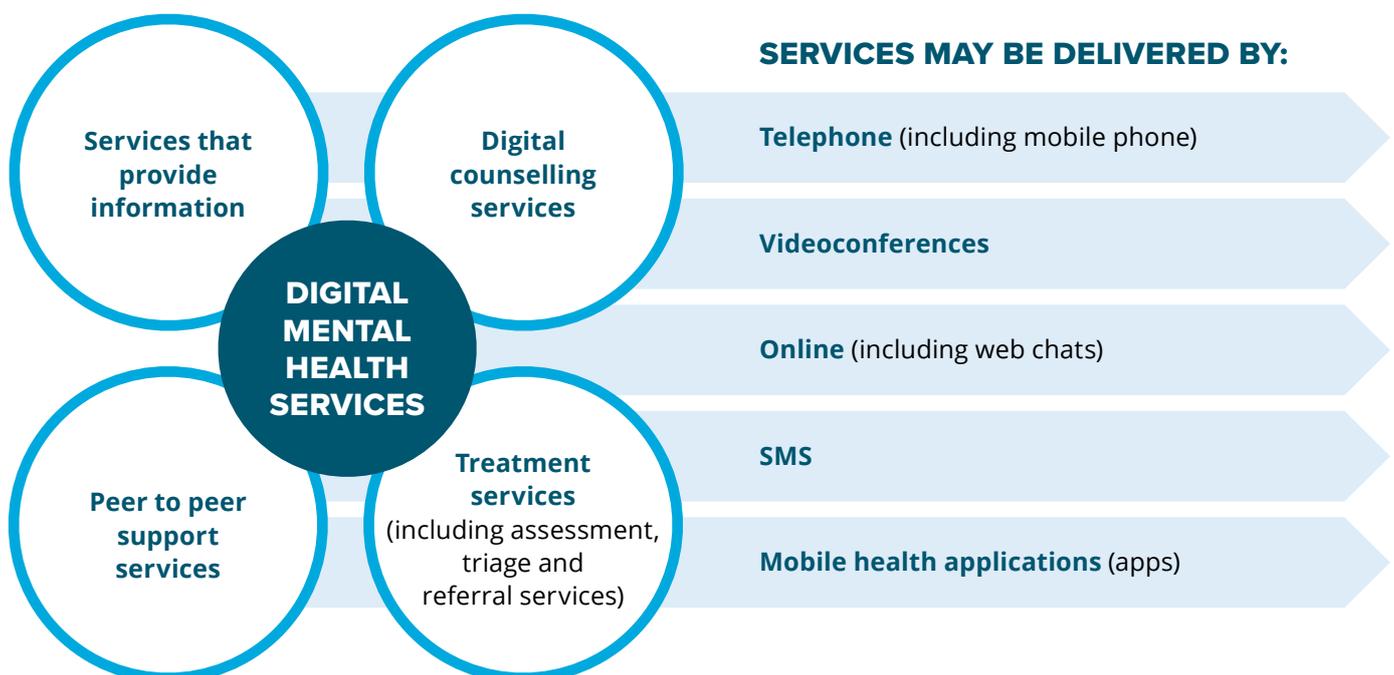
Implementing the NSQDMH Standards is voluntary for digital mental health service providers. Providers include non-government, public or private organisations, or individuals who make a digital mental health service available for others to use.

What is a digital mental health service?

In relation to the NSQDMH Standards, a digital mental health service is defined as a mental health, suicide prevention or alcohol and other drug service that uses technology to facilitate engagement and deliver care.

Although mental health, suicide prevention, and alcohol and other drug services are recognised as separate specialist sectors that provide services to often distinct cohorts, the NSQDMH Standards refer to these digital services collectively as 'digital mental health services'.

Digital mental health services can be standalone supports that are self-managed or therapist-guided, or they can complement in-person services.

Services that provide information

Digital counselling services

DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Peer to peer support services

Treatment services (including assessment, triage and referral services)

SERVICES MAY BE DELIVERED BY:

Telephone (including mobile phone)

Videoconferences

Online (including web chats)

SMS

Mobile health applications (apps)

Why have the NSQDMH Standards been developed?

There is growing evidence of the importance of digital mental health services in the delivery of services to consumers, carers, families and support people.[1] The Commission developed the NSQDMH Standards to help service providers ensure that the safety and quality of their digital mental health services meet the expectations of service users and their support people.

The Commission's research and consultation has shown that service users, consumers, carers, families and support people want convenience, reliability, transparency and quality when it comes to accessing health services. They want control of decisions about their own health and access to their personal health information that supports these decisions. Service users and consumers expect their privacy to be respected and their rights protected. They expect strong safeguards to ensure their health information is safe and secure, and that their data are used only when necessary and when they choose.[1]

Clinicians also have a strong desire to make greater use of digital health tools and services in their work, but need assurance that the digital systems they might recommend to consumers are safe and effective. This includes keeping service users' health information secure and private, and ensuring that health data will be used safely and appropriately to improve outcomes.[2]

Service providers that use the NSQDMH Standards will have systems and processes in place to reduce the risk of harm, protect privacy and increase confidence and assurance in the safety and quality of their digital mental health services. This may take time for some service providers to achieve.

The NSQDMH Standards

There are three NSQDMH Standards:

The Clinical and Technical Governance Standard

The Clinical and Technical Governance Standard aims to ensure that the service provider has systems in place to maintain and improve the reliability, safety and quality of care. This includes protecting the privacy of users and being transparent about how their data are used. It also includes ensuring the technology is secure and stable.

Find out more in the *Clinical and Technical Governance Standard* fact sheet.

The Partnering with Consumers Standard

The Partnering with Consumers Standard aims to ensure that service users – and, where relevant, their support people – are:

- Included in shared decision making
- Partners in their own care
- Involved in the development and design of quality digital mental health care.

Find out more in the *Partnering with Consumers Standard* fact sheet.

The Model of Care Standard

The Model of Care Standard aims to ensure that a service provider has systems in place to make sure that digital mental health services are based on the best available evidence and best practice. It aims to ensure that service users, consumers and support people are provided with information about the services. The Model of Care Standard requires that service providers have systems for minimising harm to service users and others, for effective communication to support coordinated and safe care, and for recognising and responding to acute deterioration in a person's mental state.

Find out more from the *Model of Care Standard* fact sheet.

Applying the NSQDMH Standards

Services can use the self-assessment tool to monitor their progress towards meeting the NSQDMH Standards. See the *Conducting a self-assessment* and the *Using a risk management approach* fact sheets for how to do this.

By conducting a self-assessment, service providers can identify both areas of compliance and areas for improvement. Implementing the NSQDMH Standards in areas where improvement is required will improve the safety and quality of service provision to service users.

The Commission is developing an independent assessment scheme that can verify a service provider's self-assessment and conduct independent reviews. The scheme is expected to be available for implementation from late 2021.

Services providers must not declare that they meet the NSQDMH Standards until they have successfully completed an independent assessment.

Find out more

The complete NSQDMH Standards, including the 59 actions, and associated fact sheets and other materials are at **www.safetyandquality.gov.au/dmhs**.

You can contact the project team for more information at **dmhs@safetyandquality.gov.au**.

References

1. Titov N, Dear BF, Nielssen O, et al. User characteristics and outcomes from a national digital mental health service: A review of the Australian MindSpot Clinic. Lancet Digital. 2020 Nov [cited 2020 Nov 26]; 2:e582–93. Available from: **https://www.thelancet.com/journals/landig/article/PIIS2589-7500(20)30224-7/fulltext**
2. Australian Digital Health Agency. Australia's National Digital Health Strategy: Safe, seamless and secure: evolving health and care to meet the needs of modern Australia. Sydney; ADHA; 2017.

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