AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
ON **SAFETY** AND **QUALITY** IN **HEALTH CARE**

National Safety and Quality
**Digital Mental Health
Standards**

FACT SHEET
for service providers

Conducting a virtual assessment to the NSQDMH Standards

Assessment of digital mental health services can be conducted either on-site or virtually. A hybrid assessment, where assessors attend on-site and virtually, is also possible. This fact sheet outlines the processes involved and best practice for service providers and accrediting agencies participating in virtual assessments.

Technical requirements for a virtual assessment

A range of information and communications technology (ICT) strategies and processes can be used to facilitate assessments using digital technology, including but not limited to:

- Video conferencing, screen sharing capability and teleconferences, including programs such as Zoom, Webex, and Microsoft Teams. Note that using the provider's preferred platform may reduce issues with firewalls and facilitate ease of use for the provider.

- Documents and records review by virtual access, either synchronously in real time or asynchronously using secure platforms and filesharing services such as Microsoft Teams, SharePoint and Dropbox.

Virtual assessment versus on-site assessment

The decision to conduct a virtual or on-site assessment can be mutually agreed between the accrediting agency and the digital mental health service provider. Factors to consider include the size, complexity and type of service. For example, where the digital mental health service forms part of a wider site-based organisation and some operations and facilities are shared, an on-site assessment is preferable. For a small service providing self-guided mental health tools, a virtual assessment may be more appropriate.

A hybrid assessment where one assessor is on site and another assessor is remote is also possible. This may be useful, for example, if specific technical expertise is required for certain aspects of the assessment.

A virtual assessment may be essential where:

- There is restricted access to all or part of a digital mental health service provider's premises due to public health orders, natural disasters or similar restrictions

- The safety of patients and assessors is affected because the digital mental health service provider is considered high risk

- There are public health or border restrictions limiting movement of assessors across state and territory borders

- An on-site assessment has commenced but cannot be completed due to changes in public health or border restrictions

- Delay of an on-site assessment would not allow sufficient time for a digital mental health service provider's accreditation assessment to be completed prior to the current accreditation expiry date

- The provider does not have physical business premises.

Virtual assessments cannot be conducted where:

- There has been a report of significant risk (see **AHSSQA Scheme Policy**)
- Privacy, security, due process or impartiality cannot be guaranteed
- It is not feasible due to the limited availability, connectivity or performance of relevant technology

Requirements for virtual assessments

- Accrediting agencies and assessors must comply with the requirements of the **AHSSQA Scheme** and ensure the assessment processes are rigorous
- Assessors must take all necessary steps to ensure that the integrity of the assessment is not compromised
- All relevant areas within the digital mental health service must be viewed and assessed including interactions with service users. This should be with the permission of service users – see below for further information)

Prior to a virtual assessment

Desktop review

Prior to both on-site and virtual assessments, a desktop review must take place (see **Assessment to the National Safety and Quality Digital Mental Health Standards** from the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care). This consists of a review of evidence submitted by the service provider to demonstrate conformance to the Standards. The assessor who completes the desktop review should have appropriate skills in the area of digital mental health and the NSQDMH Standards. This may mean that specific skills from either the agency's clinical assessor or technical specialist are required to ensure the submitted materials meet the requirements set out in the Standards. This expertise should also be utilised in both the verification assessment and in the writing of the final assessment report.

Administration

Accrediting agency

- Agree the format of reviews including
    - if and how service users are to be involved
    - if a virtual tour of the organisation at the commencement of the assessment is necessary
    - time zones for assessors and the digital mental health service provider when planning the assessment schedule
    - means of communication with digital mental health service providers during the assessment
    - the contact person from the organisation in the event of any issues arising during the assessment
- Ensure all assessment team members
    - know and understand their roles and responsibilities during the assessment, and that the tasks are well defined
    - have the skills and/or the support to use the ICT equipment
    - understand the risks and limitations of virtual assessments, particularly in relation to evidence gathering, the robustness of the assessment and privacy and data security issues
- Ensure sufficient time is allocated to testing of ICT equipment prior to the virtual assessment, using the same equipment that will be used during the assessment, and in areas where the assessment will be conducted
- Identify the tool by which assessors will keep in contact during the assessment, individually and through group chat. Ensure this tool is secure at all times and that the record of the conversations can be fully deleted at the end of the assessment
- Develop a contingency plan, that includes actions and responsibilities for situations including when
    - video link is disconnected
    - voice link is unavailable
    - WiFi is unavailable
    - assessment has to be discontinued
    - digital mental health service provider's workforce is unable or does not comply with the reasonable requests during the assessment

- Clearly articulate to the digital mental health service provider, in writing if necessary
  - the contingency plan and process should the assessment not be able to proceed
  - the consequences of members of the digital mental health service provider's workforce not following an assessor's reasonable direction, particularly in regard to the movement and placement of the camera, microphone volume and sharing of documents

Digital mental health service provider

- Advise service users that the service provider is undergoing an assessment, and should an individual wish to participate, provide them with information about the assessment process and a consent form to participate
- Provide assessors with a time-limited clearance to all of the relevant programs and areas in the organisation's ICT systems
- Provide assessors with a security briefing or instructions, if required
- Ensure ICT devices are fully operational and charged
- Nominate an ICT support person to be responsible for the integrity of the ICT systems during the assessment
- Ensure the nominated ICT support person is available to the assessors throughout the assessment
- Exchange contact details with assessors for all key contacts in the digital mental health service provider and members of the assessment team
- Agree to a contingency plan with the accrediting agency in the event the assessment cannot be finalised as scheduled
- Ensure that participants in the assessment are afforded privacy to speak with the assessors

Information and communications technology systems

Accrediting agency

- If the ICT platform is specified by the digital mental health service provider, the assessor must test the ICT programs and equipment to be used prior to the commencement of the assessment. This ensures the IT equipment has the functionality and flexibility required for a robust and seamless assessment

- If the ICT equipment is not specified by the organisation, determine which platform will be used by assessors after considering
  - capacity of the program to share screens for the review of documents
  - ability of the assessor to take control of the screen
  - availability of breakout rooms for different assessors to undertake review independently
  - capacity to view documents in real time, including clinical and personnel files, using high resolution camera/photography
  - mobility of ICT equipment, including stability of the network

Digital mental health service provider

- Confirm with the accrediting agency the videoconferencing software and ICT platform to be used during the virtual assessment
- Ensure there is sufficient and appropriate ICT equipment available for the assessment to proceed If the assessment includes multiple sites, ensure there are sufficient supports and equipment at each site for the assessment to proceed
- Ensure documents to be presented as evidence can be made available securely to assessors, using, for example, drop box or other secure sites
- Test the IT equipment with those to be involved in the assessment. Ensure all of the workforce involved in the assessment have the IT skills and/or support to operate the IT equipment, including camera focus, volume and screen sharing
- Check all locations where the assessment will be conducted to identify areas where the WiFi signal may be weak or not accessible. Address any issues identified with the WiFi coverage

Documentation

Accrediting agency

- Develop a virtual assessment privacy policy for assessors to follow

Digital mental health service provider

Nil

During a virtual assessment

Administration

Accrediting agency

- Limit the length of each session to ensure the virtual assessments are manageable for assessors and mindful of the health, safety and wellbeing of all participants with opportunities to stand or take a break
- At the commencement of each interview or assessment session, clarify for participants
  - if the meeting is being recorded
  - how and what documents will be accessed for review during the session
  - how security of data will be maintained
  - that the assessor will be able to request a change of camera direction, placement and movement at all times
- Assessors should
  - ensure their camera is positioned so the assessor's full head and shoulders are visible to those in the organisation
  - be located in a private, quiet environment to avoid interference, background distractions and noise
  - be mindful of the background view of their location, and ensure it is appropriate
  - use headphones or other equipment to maximise the capacity to hear and focus their attention, for example, headsets with a microphone or noise-cancelling headphones
  - remain in control of the camera viewing the digital mental health service provider at all times
  - issue clear and direct instructions to members of the digital mental health service provider's workforce if they are physically responsible for moving and positioning the camera
  - use check-back techniques to ensure what has been said is clearly heard and understood, particularly where there are poor or unstable IT connections
  - terminate the interview, observation, or the assessment if there is continued poor connections or inability to retain a connection, or where the digital mental health service provider fails to comply with reasonable directions from the assessor
  - implement the contingency plan if the assessment is terminated

- Where virtual breakout rooms are used, ensure privacy is maintained by inviting participants, nominating rooms and if required, virtually locking the room once a meeting has commenced
- Where meetings are recorded, assessors are to seek agreement from all participants before the meeting commences and provide a clear statement on how the recording will be used and if/when it will be deleted
- For hybrid assessments, ensure that communication between assessors who are on-site and assessors who are present using virtual access digital technology occurs regularly to share findings
- For hybrid assessments, direct assessors who are on-site to follow up issues that have been identified by assessors using virtual access digital technology

Digital mental health service provider

- Obtain permission from any service users involved in the assessment and provide them with information on the virtual assessment processes
- Recognise that a general wide sweep of the camera does not need permission and is similar to an assessor being on-site

Information technology systems

Accrediting agency

Nil

Digital mental health service provider

- Ensure the ICT equipment being used during the assessments
  - can be moved on a stable surface, such as a trolley to all locations where the assessment is to occur
  - when being moved through a facility, the camera is facing forward
  - complies with infection prevention and control requirements for equipment being moved between clinical areas, if relevant
  - is fully charged and includes backup power supply, if required
- Do not use virtual backgrounds during assessments. These reduce the likelihood of opportunistic observation of practice and environment

Documentation

Accrediting agency

- Document in the final assessment report to the organisation
  - actions that could not be evidenced or not fully evidenced by virtual assessment
  - barriers, technical difficulties or enablers during the assessment
- Where an assessment is prematurely terminated and does not recommence, document
  - the actions still to be assessed
  - the plan and timelines for the assessment to be finalised
  - reasons for changes to assessment schedule
  - areas not yet reviewed or not fully reviewed by the assessment process
  - other options, including ICT systems considered or used to complete the assessment
  - the proposed action for the completion of the assessment, including
    - date for the completion of the assessment
    - format for the completion of the assessment
    - additional costs, if any
    - implication and/or consequences of the delay

Digital mental health service provider

At assessment:

- Ensure all relevant documents are readily available or easily accessible so meetings are not delayed waiting for documents to display
- Ensure ICT system has the functionality to enlarge documents if necessary so they can be read by assessors.

After a virtual assessment

Administration

Accrediting agency

- Remove and delete any documents, images, or recordings accessed through the ICT system at the conclusion of the assessment
- Use the agency's monitoring systems to evaluate the effectiveness of the sessions of the assessment conducted using virtual access digital technology and ways to improve its effectiveness, including but not limited to
  - understanding and use of technology
  - training of assessors
  - information and instructions provided to the digital mental health service provider
  - design of the assessment schedule
  - mix of on-site assessors and those present via virtual access digital technology
  - role of assessors present via virtual access digital technology compared with role of assessors on-site
  - planning processes
  - contingency planning

Digital mental health service provider

- Revoke assessors' ICT and security access
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the virtual assessment and provide feedback to the accrediting agency and the Commission

Documentation

Accrediting agency

- Assessment reports and testimonials are to state the assessment was a virtual assessment

Digital mental health service provider

Nil

Further information

Further information on the NSQDMH Standards and accreditation can be found at:
www.safetyandquality.gov.au/dmhs

Email: **Advice.Centre@safetyandquality.gov.au**

Phone: 1800 304 056.

safetyandquality.gov.au