



## FACT SHEET for service providers

# Developing a model of care for a digital mental health service

Service providers implementing the **National Safety and Quality Digital Mental Health Standards** are required to have a clearly described model of care consistent with best practice and evidence, and that service users receive care consistent with this model of care.

A model of care outlines the way a digital mental health service is to be delivered. As well as providing a structured guide to service delivery, and supporting best practice, the model of care can be made available to service users, helping them to make an informed choice about whether the service is right for them.

The checklist below will help you develop a model of care, or review your existing model, to ensure it is comprehensive and robust. Service providers may wish to include other elements in the model of care such as governance frameworks and workforce development policies so the model provides a comprehensive introduction to all aspects of the service. It is important to avoid jargon and use plain English when writing a model of care that will be made available to service users.

Actions in the Model of Care Standard may apply differently in each different type of service. The overall aim is to support the delivery of safe and high-quality care and to minimise the risk of harm to service users and their support people.



### Criteria in the Model of Care Standard

- Establishing the model of care
- Delivering the model of care
- Minimising harm
- Communicating for safety
- Recognising and responding to acute deterioration

## Key elements of a model of care

The model of care should include:

1. The purpose and intent of the service
2. The context in which the service operates
3. The intended service user demographic
4. The level and mechanism to involve service users in the design, implementation, delivery and evaluation of the model of care
5. An outline of the evidence that supports the model of care
6. Principles to ensure all communications are safe and effective
7. Processes to identify service users at risk of harm and the strategies in place to prevent and manage these risks
8. Systems to recognise and respond to acute deterioration in the mental state of service users
9. The process for referral to follow-up services
10. Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the performance and effectiveness of the model of care and who is responsible for these processes.

### 1. The purpose and intent of the service

The model of care should clearly describe the aim of the service and its key characteristics. Consider the following questions:

- What mental health issue or issues is the service designed to address and at what degree of severity?
- Is the service based on a particular therapeutic approach (e.g. cognitive behavioural therapy, positive psychology or peer support)?
- What activities does the service include (e.g. meditation techniques, mood questionnaires)?
- Is the service time-limited or available as an ongoing service?



## **2. The context in which the service will operate**

The context refers to how the service is delivered. Consider the following questions:

- Does the service use a self-help approach or is it guided by a therapist?
- Is it online, web-based, app-based, telephone-based or hybrid?
- What are the technical requirements? Will these be readily accessible to the target user?

## **3. The intended service user demographic**

Even if you think your service is suitable for a wide range of people, is it best suited to a particular population group? Clarifying the target user will help consumers decide if the service is right for them and ensure you have the right policies and procedures in place to meet the needs of the target demographic. Consider the following questions:

- Is there a target age or cultural group? Is the style of language used by the service the most appropriate for a particular demographic?
- What level of English is required to successfully use the service?
- What level of technical expertise is required?
- On what basis are people excluded from using the service?
- Is the service not suitable for certain kinds of mental health issues or level of severity of the issue, or age groups?

## **4. The level and mechanism to involve service users in the design, implementation, delivery and evaluation of the model of care**

Partnering with service users is recognised as an important way to ensure a positive and effective service user experience, high-quality healthcare and improved safety. Consider the following questions:

- To what extent is the model of care focused on users?
- To what extent does the model of care consider equity of access for all users?
- Are the goals of care and actions for treatment developed in partnership with service users?
- What mechanism is available for users to contribute to the design, implementation, delivery and evaluation of the model of care?

## **5. Outline of the evidence for the model of care**

One of the most important elements of the model of care is the research or evidence on which it is based. Consider the following questions:

- Is there a body of research that is current and robust to support the treatment model?
- Were any adverse effects reported in the evidence?
- Is the model considered current best practice care for the intended user group?
- How are changes in the evidence base noted and incorporated into the model of care? Is it periodically reviewed?

## **6. Principles to ensure all communications are safe and effective**

Communication is a key safety and quality issue, and no less so because services are delivered digitally. The model of care should encompass safe and effective communication principles. Consider the following questions:

- Does the service provider have available concise and easy-to-understand [product information](#)?
- Does the product information meet the needs of the full range of service users accessing it?
- Are service users encouraged to provide feedback on the product information?
- Is the product information reviewed regularly?

## **7. Processes to identify service users at risk of harm and the strategies in place to prevent and manage these risks**

For digital mental health service providers in-person interactions and environmental cues are often not available to signpost risks. Screening for risk is therefore very important. Consider the following questions:

- What screening tools are used?
- How are these tools managed?
- Is there a risk management flow chart?
- Who is responsible for identifying, preventing and managing harm? Do they have the skills needed for this role?



## 8. Systems to recognise and respond to acute deterioration in the mental state of service users

When there is acute deterioration in mental state, emergency assistance may be required. A documented process to respond and escalate care will provide staff and service users with confidence in the service provision. Consider the following questions:

- Does the model of care describe how to respond to distressed service users or those who have expressed thoughts of self-harm or suicide or who have self-harmed?
- Does your service have defined parameters to recognise acute deterioration in mental state that requires care to be escalated?
- Does your service have protocols that specify criteria to call for emergency assistance?
- Does your service have systems in place to respond to service users whose mental state is deteriorating?
- Are these systems clearly articulated to the service user when they sign up and then explained to them as part of the referral process?

## 9. The process for referral to follow-up services

In some cases a user may need to be referred to another service for more specialised care. The model of care should document how this process occurs. Consider the following questions:

- Are service user responses analysed by a clinician? Are distressed responses followed up? How and when?
- Does the model of care specify the process for referral and transfer of care?
- Have service users been consulted on the process for referral of care?
- Are service users fully informed of the process for referral of care when they sign up for the service?

## 10. Mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the performance and effectiveness of the model of care and responsibility for these processes

The effectiveness of the model of care needs to be regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to be aligned with services provided. Consider the following questions:

- Is there monitoring of compliance with the model of care?
- Is there ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the model of care?
- Who is responsible for these reviews?
- How is the effectiveness of the service measured?
- How are service users involved in evaluation?

For more information on the model of care and the types of documents that can be included in a model of care, see the [NSQDMH Standards: Guide for service providers](#).

## Questions

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

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