

# Tips for recommending a digital mental health service

Digital mental health services offer information, counselling, treatment, or peer support that are accessed through technology such as phones or computers.

Health professionals, peer workers, carers or others may suggest or recommend digital mental health services to support people. There are many digital mental health services available so choosing one that addresses safety and quality issues is important. This fact sheet describes tips on what to look for in a digital mental health service before recommending it to others.

## 8 tips before recommending a digital mental health service

1. Check to see if the service is accredited
2. Determine who the service is designed for
3. Use services based on evidence and best-practice
4. Ensure services have ways of managing harm
5. Know if fees or advertising are part of the service
6. Confirm that the service users were involved in the design
7. Understand how they use the data they collect
8. Find out more information if you are unsure

### 1. Check to see if the service is accredited

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care has developed the National Safety and Quality Digital Mental Health Standards (Digital Mental Health Standards) to support services address safety and quality issues. Accredited services have demonstrated that their programs are based on evidence, respond to the feedback of their users and have systems in place to keep users and their health information safe.

If a service has been accredited, it provides information on the other tips below to support users to identify safer and high quality services. The Australian Government's Medicare Mental Health website provides a directory of digital mental health services that includes the accreditation status.

## **2. Determine who the service is designed for**

Digital mental health services typically help with a mental health condition, suicide prevention, or alcohol and other drug problems. Knowing what conditions the service has been designed for is important for understanding if the service is appropriate for someone. Some services can be used by anyone, whereas some are specifically for certain groups such as young people, parents or people from a specific cultural background.

Some services offer the ability for carers, family members and other support people to work together with the user.

## **3. Use services based on evidence and best-practice**

Digital mental health services are safer and more effective when they are based on scientific evidence. Best-practice guidelines and research relevant to the type of service being provided are important elements of a service. Services that evaluate their effectiveness are able to demonstrate that their digital mental health service is goal-directed and can achieve the stated outcomes of care. It is useful to understand how much time a user would be spending with the service to see the intended outcomes.

Peak bodies, workplaces and government agencies may also have advice on recommending digital mental health services for people so it's important to check other guidance that is relevant to the person making a recommendation.

## **4. Ensure services have ways of managing harm**

Digital mental health services should have systems and processes to reduce the risk of harm to service users and their support people. This may include responding to users who are at higher risk of harm and actively working to reduce those risks. Services should regularly seek and act on feedback from their service users and resolve complaints in a timely way to manage and improve the safety and quality of care.

## **5. Know if fees or advertising are part of the service**

Many digital mental health services are free and low-cost. Understanding the costs associated with a service is an important aspect for service users which may include direct costs but also elements such as data usage or storage. Some services include advertising or in-product sales which may not be appropriate or supportive for all users.

Some services may use advertising or in-product sales to support their business model, which may not be appropriate for all users. Sale of data may also be a part of the way a service makes money so it is important to determine how services use information.

## **6. Confirm that service users were involved in the design**

Digital mental health services that have partnered with the intended users and support people in development are more likely to be user-friendly, accessible and meet users requirements. If a service is difficult to use or not engaging, those using it may not persist with it long enough to get the intended benefit. Online reviews may also give insights on how others have found the service.



## 7. Understand how they use the data they collect

Some digital mental health services collect information to better understand and care for the service users. Information that is personal or sensitive should be handled according to privacy legislation and outlined in a providers privacy policy. Sharing results, summaries or updates with health professionals or support people might be desirable to the user, if that's the case it is useful to understand if the user can easily provide or withdraw consent to sharing this information.

## 8. Find out more information if you are unsure

Digital mental health services should provide contact information to help people who use and recommend understand more about the programs they provide. High quality digital mental health services ensure that users can provide feedback to improve services or raise concerns.

### Note

Services that meet the Digital Mental Health Standards have things in place to address safety and quality issues, and ensure that the risk of harm is reduced.

Digital mental health services aren't for everyone, but they can provide excellent support when they address safety and quality issues.

### For more information

Please visit: <http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/DMHS>

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