

Getting Started with Digital Mental Health: For Users

WHO IS THIS FACTSHEET FOR?

This factsheet is for individuals looking for digital resources and services to help support their mental health. Health Professionals can also share this factsheet with clients and patients.

WHAT ARE DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH (dMH) RESOURCES?

Digital mental health resources are digitally delivered mental health tools, information, support and treatment. They can be divided into five general categories:



Information sites



Apps



Online programs



Telephone & online chat services



Online forums

HOW DO I USE THEM?

STEP 1 : Consider what you want from dMH resources

There are hundreds of digital mental health resources available, and it can be difficult to know where to start. It can help to think about what role you want them to play for you - this can help you narrow down what category of resources to look for:

I want information about mental health...

Information sites provide comprehensive and up-to-date information on a range of mental health issues. They are usually freely accessible and don't require registration to use.

I want a quick strategy, skill or brief tips to help me cope...

Some **information sites** provide brief tips and advice for mental wellbeing, as well as information.

Apps are great for standalone strategies and skills, including mood tracking, breathing and relaxation, mindfulness, in-the-moment coping strategies and brief advice. Some require registration details (e.g. email address), while others do not.

I want a full course of treatment for a mental health issue...

Online programs usually comprise complete treatment programs (e.g. a full course of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, similar to what you might get in face-to-face treatment) for a range of mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, OCD and PTSD. They usually require registration with an email address, but can otherwise be accessed completely in private and completed at a pace that suits you.

I want to connect with others going through the same thing...

Online forums are a great place to connect with others experiencing similar issues, or even just to read other's stories. Mental health forums are often professionally moderated to keep them safe. Registration with an email address is usually required to be able to post, although users can (and are usually encouraged to) use pseudonyms.

I want someone to talk to right now...

Telephone & online chat services are typically designed to provide brief mental health support to those in crisis or feeling suicidal. However, some services also provide support to those feeling lonely and just needing someone to talk to. They can also provide information or referral options for family members, friends or carers wanting to help a loved one.

STEP 2 : Familiarise yourself with Digital Mental Health Directories

There are two main sources that collate and regularly update all available digital mental services from trusted Australian service providers, and these are a great place to start. As they are both funded by the Australian government, they only promote Australian, evidence-based, publicly funded services and programs. You can be confident that services listed on these sites meet high standards of quality in terms of evidence, safety, security and confidentiality.

Head to Health

Developed by the Australian Government, Head to Health is a digital mental health gateway to help Australians search for and access evidence-based, free (or low-cost), digital mental health services. The site allows you to filter search results appropriate to your preferences, including age, demographics and mental health issue/s.

eMHPrac website

While eMHPrac was originally designed to help health practitioners, it also contains a useful **Digital Mental Health Directory** that anyone can use. The directory provides an index of Australian digital mental health resources, including a search function that can filter results by delivery mode (e.g. apps, online programs), mental health condition (e.g. anxiety, eating disorders, trauma) and crisis services.

STEP 3 : Narrow down your search to one or two dMH resources

Picking a dMH resource is about quality, not quantity. Using more resources won't have a quicker or bigger benefit. In fact, using too many resources at once could be overwhelming and make it difficult to get the full effect out of any of them - it would be like going to the gym and trying to use every single machine every time you went. It is much more important to find one or two resources that meet your needs (see Step 1), and then using them diligently in order to get as much benefit from them as you can.

In narrowing your search down, it is critical to make sure that the resources you pick are:

- **Suitable** (Does it suit what I'm looking for and when/where/how I want to access it?)
- **Scientifically-based** (Is it based on scientific evidence and can I expect it to be beneficial?)
- **Safe** (Is it unlikely to cause any harm/detrimental effects?)
- **Secure** (Is my data kept securely and confidentially?)

The 'Checklist for Choosing a Digital Mental Health Service' from the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care' explores these questions in more detail and will help you establish whether a resource will be suitable to use.

Because of the high standard of quality required by eMHPrac and Head to Health, services and resources listed on these sites will usually meet most (if not all) criteria relating to scientific basis, security and confidentiality. Whilst many unlisted resources (e.g. overseas or privately developed resources) may also meet these criteria, it is the responsibility of users to assess this for themselves. You may also end up finding several resources that are suitable, so the deciding factor may simply be personal preference (e.g. you might like the look and feel of one resource over another).

STEP 4 : Give the resource/s a try

Once you have narrowed down your selection, give the resources a try. Following the tips below will ensure you get the most out of them, particularly online programs:

1. Be patient with the registration process and any initial questionnaires - you only have to do it once!
2. Choose a regular time and day to work on the program (and a space without interruption) - treat it as you would a weekly appointment with a professional.
3. Don't try to do the program all at once. Give yourself time to practice the skills or exercises as these are what help the information 'stick'.
4. Make sure you complete the program or tool - this will give you the best chance of experiencing improvement. And have patience - it can take months of work for new thinking and behaviour patterns to develop.
5. If you have a health professional also helping you with your mental health (e.g. GP, Psychologist), feel free to share your progress with them.