RACGP | *e-Mental health*
A guide for GPs

The RACGP has developed a new resource designed to assist general practitioners (GPs) in using e-mental health resources with their patients. *e-Mental health: A guide for GPs* is available for download at www.racgp.org.au

What is e-mental health?

The term 'electronic mental health' (e-mental health) refers to the use of the internet and related technologies to deliver mental health information, services and care. The use of online interventions for the prevention and treatment of mental illness is one of the major applications of e-mental health.

There is strong evidence to suggest that these e-mental health interventions are effective for use in the management of mild to moderate depression and anxiety, and can be disseminated in the primary care setting.

Benefits of e-mental health

- **Convenient and flexible** – can be accessed anytime and anywhere, and material can be reviewed as often as required.
- **Low or no service cost to patients** – many interventions are free, although related costs like mobile data or internet download limits should be taken into account.
- **Fills service gaps** – can provide an introduction to therapy, or an alternative for people averse to face-to-face treatment.

- **Saves practitioners' time** – allows mental health professionals to focus on patients for whom e-mental health approaches are not appropriate, thereby reducing wait lists.
- **Cost-effective to the health system** – inexpensive to deliver and can be disseminated to large populations.
- **Easily accessible** – can provide support to patients who are unable to attend face-to-face treatment.
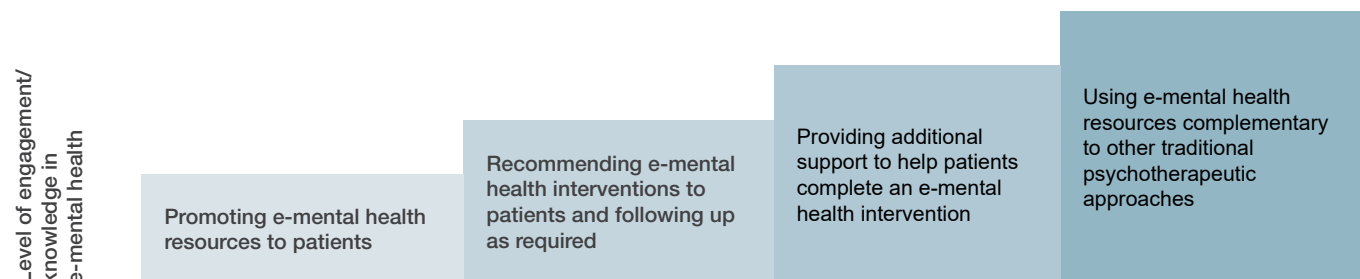
Patients who are most suitable for e-mental health

While evidence has yet to identify ideal candidates for e-mental health, it is likely that these interventions are an appropriate option for people who have an increased risk of developing mental illness, or who are already experiencing mild to moderate symptoms of mental illness. There is less evidence for the use of e-mental health interventions with people who have complex or severe mental illness, comorbid personality disorders, substance dependence, or people who have an elevated risk of self-harm or suicide and require urgent clinical management.

Deciding how to use e-mental health

There is a range of applications for e-mental health interventions. Programs can be used for prevention or early intervention, first-line treatment, adjunctive treatment, and as a tool for relapse prevention.

GPs can choose the level at which they would like to use e-mental health.

Level of engagement/ knowledge in e-mental health

Promoting e-mental health resources to patients

Recommending e-mental health interventions to patients and following up as required

Providing additional support to help patients complete an e-mental health intervention

Using e-mental health resources complementary to other traditional psychotherapeutic approaches

Healthy Profession.
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Key e-mental health resources

eMHPrac
E-MENTAL HEALTH IN PRACTICE

Head to Health

A project funded by the Australian Government to provide free e-mental health training support for health practitioners. Under the eMHPrac project, e-mental health promotion, training and support for GPs are led by Black Dog Institute.

Head to Health is an online portal to digital mental health care funded by the Federal Government. It provides reliable information about mental health and a range of mental health conditions. It also provides an interactive chatbot and a set of filters that allow users to find evidence-based online resources and treatment programs to meet their specific needs.

www.emhprac.org.au
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/emphrac

https://headtohealth.gov.au

Use for:
- Watching introductory videos
- Downloading fact sheets
- Viewing Black Dog Institute webinars
- Joining Black Dog Institute's online community, with GP discussion forums, blog posts, and useful links
- Completing Black Dog Institute's e-learning modules
- Following links to particular interventions and supporting evidence

- Browsing programs by topic
- Discovering more about particular interventions, such as length, target audience, cost and language options
- Reviewing the efficacy of particular interventions
- Maintaining a list of favourite resources upon login
- Rating and commenting on particular resources upon login
- Finding educational resources for patients about mental health
- Links to Australian e-mental health interventions

Talking to patients about e-mental health

- You can introduce your patients to e-mental health by promoting resources in the waiting area of the clinic or on the clinic's website, training other staff in the use of e-mental health, providing fact sheets, and logging in to particular programs with patients during the consultation.

- In recommending e-mental health to your patients, consider discussing:

    – the benefits and limitations

    – potential financial costs, including mobile or internet data charges

    – the need to refer to the terms and conditions of service before agreeing to treatment

    – the extent to which you will be involved in the delivery of treatment and support you will provide

    – the schedule for follow-up

    – processes for arranging alternative treatment and crisis support

    – how you will handle information you receive from the service as a referring provider.

- Patients are more likely to use e-mental health if they have positive expectations about the treatment, belief in the credibility of the program, and a feeling that the benefits of the treatment outweigh the costs.

Managing patients who are using e-mental health

- A GP Mental Health Treatment Plan can be used to document an e-mental health recommendation, outline the schedule for follow-up, and present the plan for alternative or additional referral in the event that the recommendation is not suitable or effective.

- Patients referred to an e-mental health intervention, you should ensure the patient is followed up in a timely manner and the treatment plan is adjusted in the event that the patient is unwilling to engage, still unwell, or deteriorating.

- Patients might drop out of e-mental health interventions for the same reasons they drop out of face-to-face therapy. However, some people dislike the lack of therapist contact inherent to e-mental health interventions.

- Providing additional support might help people to stay in e-mental health treatment. This might be as simple as providing regular reminders to continue use of the program.

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