

# RESEARCH ROUNDUP

## Virtual Mental Health Support Services for Older Adults



NATIONAL INNOVATION HUB • CENTRE NATIONAL D'INNOVATION

## Introduction

At APPTA, we strive to find relevant and timely research that has the potential to influence policy decision making for the aging population. One way of doing this is through our Research Roundup series. Our team devotes time to reading and prioritizing academic papers and grey literature, and investigates programming and products that foster innovation related to how we care for older adults. We then summarize that information for a quick and consumable product. These periodical documents will summarize evidence based on relevant policy topics that are discussed through our ongoing stakeholder engagement.

If there are particular topics of interest you would like us to investigate, please let us know by emailing Daniel Smiley, Research & Logistics Specialist, at [daniel.smiley@dal.ca](mailto:daniel.smiley@dal.ca).

For this roundup, we are looking at *virtual mental health support services for older adults* and would like to acknowledge the contribution of Amy Dodge, Research Assistant with APPTA.

## Literature Review

### Effective modalities of mental health care to deliver mental health and addictions services in Canada

Lo, B.; Strudwick, G.; Mah, L. Mushquash, C.J.; McKenzie, K.; Khenti, A.; Crawford, A.; Bhattacharya, O.; Allen, U. Bodmer, N.S.; Born, K.B.; Perkhun, A.; Razak, F.A.; & O'Neil, B.

2022, Ontario

[Link to article](#)

This paper explores the extent to which virtual care is effective for improving mental health outcomes. It also investigated considerations and needs to make virtual mental health care effective for certain groups, and what is required for quality selection and delivery by health care professionals in the clinical environment.

The authors found that virtual health care was effective for supporting patients with depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. However, there is limited comparative evidence between in-person and virtual modalities, or for severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Further, while virtual mental health care has the potential to address barriers to access to care for rural and underserved communities, it may also propagate existing inequities in mental health care for under-resourced populations. Enhancing technological literacy and access for clinicians and clients, and delivering culturally competent care that aligns with the needs of the local population and community is a largely unaddressed priority for advancing transparency, trust and equity.

The authors determined that deliberate consideration of the specific needs and issues, preferences, culture and values of individual patients and communities is important to deliver culturally-competent virtual mental health models of care for equitable, accessible recovery. This should be done through close engagement and collaborative co-creation with patients, mental health researchers, practitioners, and communities.

### Generational Perspectives on Technology's Role in Mental Health Care: A Survey of Adults With Lived Mental Health Experience

Woerner, M.; Sams, N.; Rivera Nales, C.; Gorstein, T.; Johnson, M.; Mosser, B.A.; & Areán, P.A.

2022, United States

[Link to article](#)

This report investigates the adoption of digital mental health tools, such as smartphone apps and wearable devices, focusing on the perspective of individuals aged 60 and older. Through a mixed-methods approach, the authors analyzed results from a one-time cross-sectional survey that included 998 participants aged 18-83 who have lived experience with mental health concerns, the research finds that while respondents across all age groups generally view digital mental health positively, older adults tend to rate the acceptability of these tools lower than middle-aged and younger adults. Most participants believe that technology should play a complementary role in mental health care, emphasizing administrative and supportive functions. The study suggests that future developments in digital mental health should align with these preferences.

## Literature Review (continued)

### Effects of Internet-Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Routine Care for Adults in Treatment for Depression and Anxiety: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

Etzelmueller, A.; Vis, C.; Karyotaki, E.; Baumeister, H.; Titov, N.; Berking, M.; Cuijpers, P.; Riper, H.; & Ebert, D.D.

2020, International

[Link to article](#)

This study systematically reviewed 19 studies with 30 groups from Australia, Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and the United States to assess the effectiveness of guided internet-based cognitive behavioral therapy (iCBT) for depression and anxiety in routine care. The results showed clinically relevant improvements in depression and anxiety, with effect sizes ranging from 0.42 to 1.88 (Hedges' g) for depression and 0.94 for anxiety. The interventions demonstrated moderate to high acceptability based on uptake, participant characteristics, adherence, and satisfaction. The average deterioration across studies was 2.9%.

The findings suggest that guided iCBT is both acceptable and effective for treating depression and anxiety in routine care, but given the heterogeneity, healthcare providers should choose interventions proven in randomized controlled trials for optimal results. The successful use of iCBT could enhance healthcare delivery in various contexts.

### Barriers to older adults' uptake of mobile-based mental health interventions

Pywell, J.; Vijaykumar, S.; & Coventry, L.

2020, U.K.

[Link to article](#)

This article explores barriers faced by older adults in adopting mobile-based mental health interventions offered by the National Health Service (NHS). As demand for mental healthcare for older adults rises, providers seek cost-effective solutions like mobile apps.

The research, involving semi-structured interviews of 10 adults aged 50 or above, identifies six barriers: low awareness of mental e-health, challenges in interacting with technology, discontinuation issues, the importance of a visible therapeutic alliance, incongruent role of general practitioners, and concerns about privacy and confidentiality.

Older adults experience a number of barriers to uptake ranging from the individual level to a macro, organizational level. The findings emphasize the need for increased awareness among older adults about mobile-based mental health interventions.

## Literature Review (continued)

### Bridging the “digital divide”: A comparison of use and effectiveness of an online intervention for depression between Baby Boomers and Millennials

Schneider, B.C.; Schröder, J.; Berger, T.; Hohagen, F.; Meyer, B.; Späth, C.; Greiner, W.; Hautzinger, M.; Lutz, W.; Rose, M.; Vettorazzi, E.; Moritz, S.; & Klein, J.P.

2018, Germany

[Link to article](#)

In this study, the researchers aimed to compare the use and effectiveness of an online intervention for depression called Deprexis among Millennials (18–35 years) and Baby Boomers (50–65 years). They conducted a secondary analysis on a subset of 577 participants from the EVIDENT trial, which was a randomized controlled study funded by the German Federal Ministry of Health. The main outcome measured was the change in self-rated depression severity (PHQ-9) at 3 months (post-assessment) and 6 months (follow-up). Baby Boomers used the intervention more often and for a longer duration compared to Millennials, and they also showed more positive attitudes towards online interventions. However, there was no significant difference in the change in depression severity between the two age groups. Overall, the online intervention was considered superior to usual care and equally effective for both Millennials and Baby Boomers.

The study suggests that Baby Boomers participating in online interventions may have more positive attitudes towards them compared to Millennials. However, the authors realize that age-based dichotomization may not accurately represent participants' experiences with and use of technology.

## Program Review

### Wellness Together Canada

Canadian Federal Government

Est. 2020

Canada-wide

Wellness Together Canada was created in response to a rise in mental health and substance abuse concerns during COVID-19. This program is funded by the Government of Canada. It is a collaborative project whose mission is to provide high-quality resources to all Canadians. Users can learn by browsing free articles and videos, practice skills with comprehensive courses, connect with others sharing mutual experiences, track their journeys with regular wellness assessments, and get in touch with a counsellor. Users may also enter information on their age, what they would like support with, and the type of support they are seeking to help customize their experience and gain access to resources best suited to their needs. They have a variety of trusted service providers/partners including Kids Help Phone, Strongest Families Institute, Homewood Health, Breaking Free: Wellness, and more.

### Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) - Supporting Older Adults

Opening Minds

Canada-wide

This course is provided by Opening Minds, a not-for-profit established by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC). This is an elective course within the Geriatric Certificate Program. MHFA is an online course designed for people who have frequent contact with older adults (caregivers, family members, community health workers, volunteers, etc.) aimed at teaching members of the public how to recognize symptoms of mental health crises as they develop in older adults, provide initial help to seniors, guide them toward professional help, and offer recovery strategies. The cost of the course is \$125-\$350 (most recent courses listed at \$249) and takes 10 hours to complete. It includes a self-directed module and virtual classroom modules. Through the course, participants will gain an understanding of the five basic actions of ALIFE, which stands for Assess safety: risk of suicide, serious physical deterioration, and/or harm to others; Listen non-judgmentally; Information and reassurance; Facilitate the senior getting appropriate professional help; and Encourage support for the senior and caregiver.



## Program Review (continued)

### Focus Mental Wellness

Focus Mental Wellness

Est. 2017

Canada-wide

This program is focused on enhancing the mental wellness of Canadians and businesses by connecting them with qualified, compassionate online therapists to ensure they get the best possible support to feel and live better. Users have access to text, video, or phone therapy. Users choose a therapist from a diverse network of qualified professionals and choose the mode of therapy they prefer. Users pay securely online and can submit receipts for reimbursement if covered by private health insurance. This program partners with online healthcare providers and online pharmacy services to provide access to the support needed as well as addiction treatment centres. Physicians can refer their patients to this program. They are compliant with the *Personal Health Information Protection Act* (PHIPA), the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* (PIPEDA), and all equivalent provincial legislation in Canada.

### MindBeacon

Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario

Est. 2010

Canada-wide

Mind Beacon is a virtual mental health therapy clinic funded by the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. Users create an account and access services through a secure virtual mental health therapy clinic delivered by licensed professionals. Services offered include guided cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) programs, live sessions, and in-person sessions and assessments are available via CBT associate clinics. The program is covered by most Canadian benefits plans. Pricing is \$130/session for access to social workers and psychotherapists, and \$195/hour for access to psychologists. There is also a wide range of mental wellness content available for free on their website. They say that 88% of users are satisfied with the support they receive and more than 600 Canadians connect with MindBeacon each day.

## Program Review (continued)

### Edgewood Health Network (EHN) Online

EHN Canada Network

Canada-wide

EHN Online is the virtual extension of EHN Canada's network of treatment facilities, offering online counselling for mental health, trauma, and addiction. More than just an app, it is a comprehensive, virtual treatment program with proven results. It serves as a more convenient, flexible and affordable alternative to the network's inpatient programs, allowing participants to recover without leaving their home. EHN Online's Intensive Outpatient Programs offer evidence-based and comprehensive treatment with proven results. Their website has a short quiz to help you determine if this may be right for you. The Intensive Outpatient Programs (IOP) include 9 hours of therapy per week, combining both individual and group sessions. Their Wagon app accompanies the program, offering one year access to help track and maintain recovery. Fees for the program are modular, and are determined by the needs of each participant.

### First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) Virtual Substance Use and Psychiatry Service

First Nations Health Authority

Est. 2020

British Columbia

The First Nations Virtual Substance Use and Psychiatry Service provides individuals with access to specialists in addictions medicine and psychiatry as well as mental health and wellness care coordinators. This is a referral-based service and is available at no cost to all First Nations people and their family members living in BC, including family members who are not Indigenous. Specialists and care coordinators are dedicated to the principles and practices of cultural safety and humility, and to delivering trauma-informed care. Counselling and therapy sessions are available through virtual or telehealth options. The program includes harm reduction support, relapse prevention, education about treatment centres and referrals, diagnosis of psychiatric disorders support, medication review, and treatment care planning with clients. Scheduled check-ins are based on client requests. Referrals may come from trusted health and wellness providers, Knowledge Keepers, and Elders. Participants can utilize the First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day to obtain a referral.