SAVING LIVES
WITH NATIONALLY INTEGRATED eMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

DID YOU KNOW?

Less than half (45%) of the 3.2 million Australians experiencing mental illness each year access formal mental health assistance?

Evidence-based self-help websites such as myCompass reduce the symptoms of depression and anxiety as effectively as face-to-face psychological treatment?

Formal integration of eMental Health programs to our health care system will significantly reduce the social and financial burden of mental illness?

Australia is a world leader in the research, development and delivery of cost-effective evidence-based eMental Health (eMH) services. These services address serious access gaps to mental illness education, prevention and treatment services. Investment in eMH services has led to a strong body of research supporting their clinical and cost effectiveness.

What eMental Health services are there?
eMental Health involves the delivery of services targeted at common mental health problems through online, telephone and online crisis services, smartphone Apps, interactive mobile websites, sensor-based monitoring devices and computers. These services are accessible through multiple settings including home, workplaces, schools and clinicians’ offices.

Demand exceeds supply
Demand for mental health services dramatically exceeds supply and the group most in need is the 600,000 Australians experiencing mild-to-moderate mental illness. Recent data suggests less than half of people who require treatment receive it. These individuals are the very target group who stand to gain most benefit from evidence-based eMH services.

THE BENEFITS OF eMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
✓ IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE 24/7 to support families and individuals in need
✓ INEXPENSIVE to make SCALABLE
✓ Based on world leading CLINICAL EVIDENCE
✓ PROMOTE health seeking behaviour and treatment among groups who may not use traditional services
✓ CREATE LINKS between eMH and traditional mental health services
✓ SUSTAINABLE, EFFECTIVE and NON-STIGMATICISING
✓ LOW COST to consumers and cost effective for healthcare providers and budgets
✓ Already MAINSTREAM but need to be funded as an integrated component of a stepped care model of mental health services
✓ A vital role in both PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR mental health care delivery
What next? Five recommendations to take eMental Health services to the next level

The vital next steps include integrating eMH systems into the current mental health service delivery model using a stepped care model, engaging clinicians and consumers to boost eMH service uptake of these services and ensuring a sustainable funding is in place.

This snapshot of the current status, recommendations and solutions for the future of delivering nationally consistent integrated eMH programs is provided by the eMental Health Alliance, a core group of 18 eMental Health service providers and representative groups.

1. Build a linked and integrated eMH services referral environment
   - eMH services need to be linked across health systems by making sure there are multiple cross referral and access opportunities.
   - Integrated referral pathways are required to include community self-referral, community-based organisation referrals, direct referrals via telephone, a GP referral pathway, and referrals via private mental health providers.

2. Raise community awareness
   - Community awareness needs to promote the availability and effectiveness of eMH programs through promotions and direct to consumer advertising.
   - Nationally consistent key messages require development to promote eMH.
   - Awareness raising of eMH services is a requirement for all federally funded mental health programs.
   - Community awareness is required to grow demand for eMH services and to foster eMH service referrals from health and allied health professionals.
3. Educate health and non-health professionals

Education of health professionals is a crucial step in the process of integrating eMH services and programs into mental health systems. Education programs, similar to the education program eMHPrac online, are urgently needed to:

- Disseminate clear, practical and relevant information to specific health and allied health practitioners about currently available eMH programs.
- Develop systems that incorporate referral to eMH services and follow-up into face-to-face clinical consultations.
- Work with organisations and professionals in community roles such as school counsellors to expand experience, usage and referral to eMH services.
- Train non-health professionals to build awareness about self-referral to eMH programs and systems for client referrals.

4. Build a sustainable funding model

It is vital that a sustainable funding model is created for eMH services. Such a model should include:

- Financial incentives for GPs and selected allied health to make eMH service referrals.
- Funding for innovation that addresses new service delivery models.
- Support for technical and content enhancements to existing programs.

5. Reestablish the eMental Health Advisory Committee to ensure the work is done

- Time limited governance arrangements are required to ensure the above recommendations are implemented and standardised nationally. The eMental Health Alliance recommends the reestablishment of the eMental Health Advisory Committee for this task.
Economic benefits and return on investment

- Very low cost to deliver to individuals but as effective as face-to-face therapy
- Volume saving benefits conferred by increasing numbers of people using eMH services
- Reduced per patient costs while maintaining efficacy and quality
- Triage effect results as less people referred to secondary or tertiary services which increases clinic throughput and reduces clinic ‘episode of care’ costs
- Earlier engagement is more likely because the services are anonymous and convenient so less time is lost to disability and therefore reduced productivity.

“Increasing awareness and use of eMH services will lead to many more Australians seeking and receiving the help they need at a much lower cost to patients and health providers than traditional face-to-face services.”

Prof Helen Christensen, Director, Black Dog Institute

Five types of eMH services currently being delivered nationally

- **Health and wellness promotion programs** e.g. beyondblue, ReachOut.com, KidsMatter, HeadsUp and Man Therapy
- **Prevention and early intervention programs** e.g. BiteBack, Kids Helpline, BraveOnline, MoodGYM and eCouch
- **Crisis intervention and suicide prevention programs** e.g. Lifeline, Healthy Thinking and iBobby
- **Treatment programs for a range of mental health issues** e.g. MyCompass, eCouch, eHeadspace
- **Recovery and peer support programs** e.g. BlueBoard and telephone support lines

The Australian eMental Health Alliance

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