DIGITAL & *MENTAL HEALTH* RECOVERY ACTION PLANS

ORCHA

Digital and Mental Health Recovery Action Plans

Even before COVID-19, mental health was a global crisis. The World Health Organization reported that almost 1 billion people have a mental health disorder, and that by 2030 depression will be the world's biggest illness.[1]

With mounting evidence that mental health problems have become even more prevalent since the pandemic, in the UK, the government has developed a Mental Health Recovery Action plan.[2] Backed by £500 million, it aims to respond to escalating mental health issues, specifically targeting groups which have been most impacted including those with severe mental illness, young people, and frontline staff.

During lockdown, services turned to digital, switching from in-person help to a range of digital services, such as patient-to-clinician platforms, digitally-enabled treatments, mental health and wellbeing apps, chatbots and social support networks.

As services put in place additional services in light of the recovery action plan, it is essential we recognise the massive leap forward in the use of mental health apps by citizens during the pandemic, and increasing evidence of their popularity and efficacy, and embed digital for the long term.

ORCHA helps government bodies, health providers and innovators across the world to make informed decisions on digital health, ensuring vital standards are met.

In this report we ask: what is the role for digital now? To help answer this question, our insight team answers the questions: do patients want digital? What is available? Is it safe and effective? What are the best practice examples? And what is needed to allow digital to extend and enhance services?

Adoption of digital health

Digital health is convenient and discrete, easily accessed with a tap of the button. It is particularly relevant to those targeted by the Government's Mental Health Recovery Action Plan. The charity Young Minds report that young men and boys in particular are concerned about the stigma of receiving mental health support and say they would prefer online support, advice and counselling.[2] In addition, fears of stigma, mean our key workers are also amongst the least likely to engage with traditional mental health services.[3]

For mental health services, the positives are clear too. An app can reduce the time people are left without help, becoming an early support system or safety net, whilst waiting for face-to-face care. Later, after a therapist has been seen, apps can reinforce strategies and track information. The mental health foundation highlights the financial benefits, highlighting that online or blended approaches are likely to be cost effective, and can possibly reduce the direct costs of treatment compared to treatment as usual.[4]

ORCHA provides digital health support to NHS services in 70% of regions and to national bodies across the world, including Holland, Israel and Finland, serving a population of ~20 million. This reach gives ORCHA unique insights into exactly how the UK, and world, is engaging with digital health.

ORCHA has seen the numbers of people searching for mental health apps increase by over 200% during lockdown, showing a clear appetite for psychological mHealth solutions.

Growth has varied across conditions.

Condition	% increase in searches
Anxiety	328%
Depression	156%
OCD	422%
Fear	221%
Stress	113%
Mood	202%
Mindfulness	2483%
Relaxation	437%
Anger	324%

This should provide confidence to commissioners and developers of such technologies that technologies are likely to be well received by those with unmet needs for psychological services.

The growing supply of apps

The increased demand for mental health apps has been met by a growing supply of solutions. This started before the arrival of COVID-19, with 2020 continuing to see this growth. There continues to be an increasing number of apps to help manage mental health conditions, with now almost 3,857 to choose from.

Growth of Mental Health Apps on iOS & Android Stores

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Volume of Apps (Cumulative)

Time
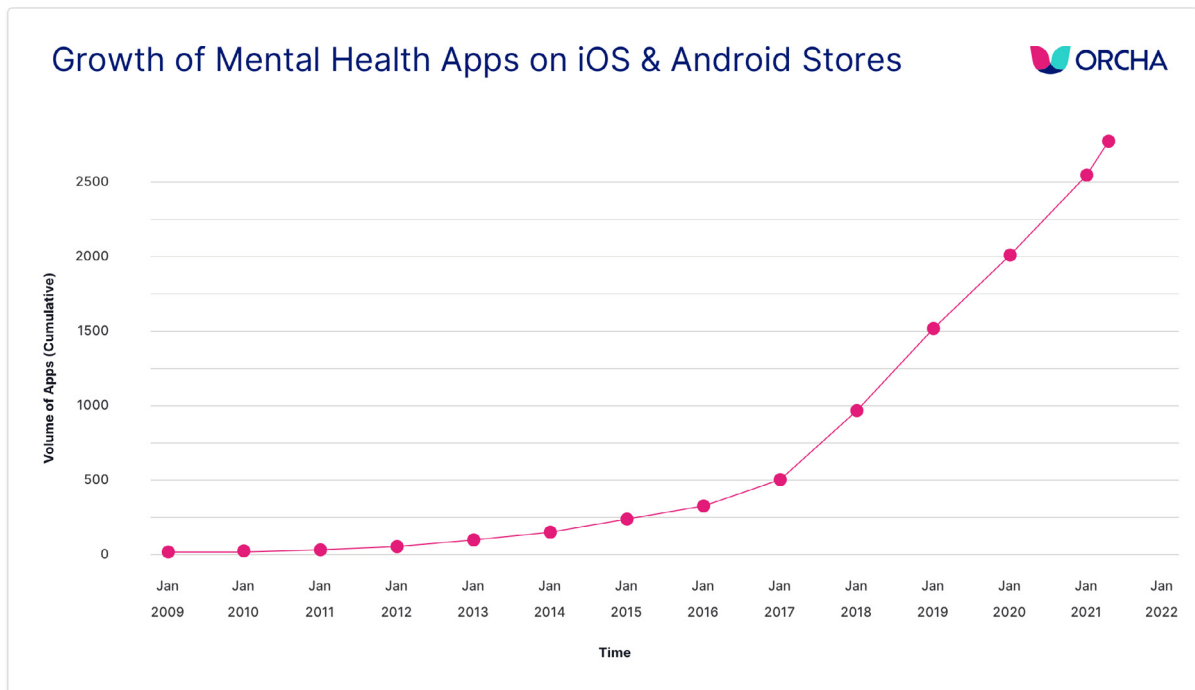
Is digital health safe and effective?

Consumers may be drawn to digital health to support mental health conditions. But is it effective? There is mounting evidence to support digital health as a major aid to managing and improving the population's mental health.

Research has found that digital therapies can achieve comparable outcomes to face-to-face therapy, when the content is right and supported by a suitably trained therapist.[5] A review of all randomized control trials (RCTs) confirms smartphone interventions deliver significantly greater reductions in anxiety than leaving a patient on a wait list.[6]

Indeed, in 2019, NICE updated its depression in children guideline, recommending that clinicians offer digital CBT to young people with mild depression. Commenting on the move, NICE said *"We reviewed evidence for the most effective psychological interventions for children and young people with depression. The guideline update emphasises the importance of a child or young person's personal choice when receiving treatment for depression.*

"We want to ensure children are offered a range of therapies to suit their needs and individual preferences are placed at the heart of their care. The evidence showed digital CBT and group therapy were most effective at reducing depressive symptoms and we have recommend these as first-line options for children and young people with mild depression.".[7]

But with 3,857 mental health apps to choose from, are they all effective? How can you find the best and avoid the ineffective or dangerous ones?

ORCHA has assessed 676 mental health innovations to date, reviewing against more than 350 measures and all major standards.

From this research, we are able to identify the quality level of apps across each of the mental health categories and help primary care, community settings and mental health services make informed decisions on the best apps for their patients.

Based on testing 676 mental health apps, around one third (32%) meet ORCHA's minimum quality threshold. This dips lower within certain condition areas:

Condition	Percentage achieving 65% ORCHA score or more
Mental Health (All)	32%
Addiction	52%
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy	45%
Self Harm Prevention	44%
Panic Attack	42%
Stress and Anxiety	38%
Insomnia	32%
Eating Disorders	30%
Suicide Prevention	29%
Bullying	29%
Depression	28%
Schizophrenia	26%
Bipolar	20%
Borderline Personality Disorder	18%
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	14%

Only **32%** of mental health apps that ORCHA has reviewed meet our quality thresholds

Testing to avoid the poor quality apps is vital. For example, a review published in 2014 by the Karolinska Institute showed that some apps developed for the purpose of suicide prevention included some potentially harmful content, such as featuring descriptions of suicide, and could in fact be used as a source of ideas by highly vulnerable people. This wasn't the apps' intended use, but because they hadn't been adequately tested, this significant safety issue hadn't been addressed.[8]

Examples of best practice

In a field where people want to engage with digital health, where a high number of solutions are available, but there is a wide range in quality levels - from clinically proven to sub standard - services should not be put off including digital in services, but should put governance in place to ensure the best solutions are selected.

ORCHA supports a range of mental health services to pinpoint the best solutions and embed them into practice. For example:

- **National Accreditation**: ORCHA delivers standardised quality assessments of apps for mental health care for the **Dutch Foundation for Mental Health**.
- **Mental Health Trust**: ORCHA has worked closely with the clinical team to embed health apps into the CAMHS pathway at Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.
- **Community services**: ORCHA assessed digital health technology to inform digital health choices for the Good Thinking services, from the Healthy London Partnership.
- **Telephone support**: Papyrus is the national charity dedicated to the prevention of young suicide. ORCHA has delivered an app library with prescription tools that is used by its HOPELINE **helpline service**.

From across the 676 mental health apps that ORCHA has tested, more than 200 solutions pass international standards and meet our quality threshold. From amongst this pool, please find below a short list of good apps that can make a difference to people struggling with their mental health:

📱 Anxiety

7 Cups:
Anxiety & Stress Chat

Developer:

7 Cups of Tea

Platforms:

Apple iOS   Google Android

Cost:

Free chat 24/7 or paid upgrades available for further features

Description:

Founded by a licensed psychologist, 7 Cups is 100% confidential and offers over 160,000 trained listeners and licensed therapists to choose from. Listeners provide support across 189 countries and in 140 languages. Each listener has a profile with reviews and a list of categories that they specialise in, ranging from panic attacks and bullying to eating disorders, surviving a breakup, and more. A user said, "*I got undivided attention from someone who cared for the first time in a really, really long time.*" Another said, "*Talking anonymously with a listener made me feel safe enough to really open up.*"

ORCHA Score

79%

Level 3

📱 Depression

Feeling Good:
positive mindset

Developer:

Positive Rewards

Platforms:

Apple iOS   Google Android

Cost:

Free with additional in app purchases

Description:

This app uses relaxation, cognitive behavioural therapy and resilience building techniques from sport to help improve positive feelings, self-esteem and self-confidence. The main offering is a 12-track positive mental programme which is available as an in-app purchase. The programme has been used by the NHS in Edinburgh for the last 12 years to help those recovering from stress, anxiety and depression. One user said, *"This is the best thing that ever came into my life. My mental health nurse recommended it to me."*

ORCHA Score

79%

Level 2

📱 Teen mental health

MeeToo

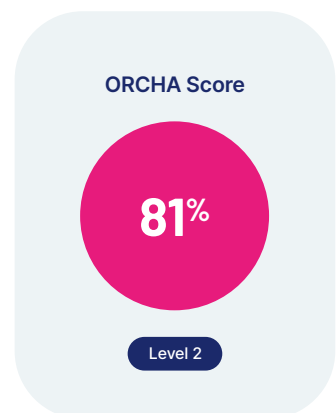**Developer:**

MeeTwo Education Ltd

Platforms:

Apple iOS   Google Android

Cost:

Free

Description:

MeToo makes it easy to talk about difficult things and is for anyone aged 11+. Age banding means you chat with people who are a similar age to you, so you can get advice from people of a similar age. And every single post is checked by a moderator before it goes live, so there is no bullying, grooming or harassment. A user said, *"MeeToo really turned my life around, no exaggeration! 2020 had been a really crap year for me, then my social worker and crisis worker introduced me to MeeToo. The atmosphere of this community is just amazing! The members are so sweet and the advice is really helpful."*

ORCHA Score

81%

Level 2

📱 Sleep

Pzizz
Sleep, Nap, Focus

Developer:

Pzizz

Platforms:

Apple iOS   Google Android

Cost:

Classic Pzizz is free. Pzizz Pro requires a subscription after a trial period

Description:

Pzizz helps you quickly quiet your mind, fall asleep, stay asleep, and wake up refreshed. It uses "dreamscapes" — a mix of music, voiceovers and sound effects designed using the latest clinical research — to help you sleep better at night or take power naps during the day. Well known users have said: "*I love Pzizz... Best I've used by a mile*" - J.K. Rowling, Author "*Give Pzizz a try! Love that app and it helps me fall asleep or nap on command.*" - Daniel Weinard, Co-founder of Shopify

ORCHA Score

73%

Level 2

📱 Self-harm and suicide

distrACT

Developer:

Expert Self Care Ltd

Platforms:

Apple iOS   Google Android

Cost:

Free

Description:

This app provides easy, quick and discreet access to general health information and advice about self-harm and suicidal thoughts. It helps you understand urges to self-harm and encourages you to monitor and manage your symptoms. There's advice and support information, including emergency contact numbers, how best to work with healthcare professionals and safer alternatives to self-harming. The app has been created by UK health professionals together with people with lived experience of self-harm and experts in self-harm and suicide prevention.

ORCHA Score

81%

Level 2

What's next for digital health?

Evidence shows that early interventions and home treatment for mental health problems can reduce hospital admissions, shorten hospital stays and require fewer high-cost intensive interventions. Convenient, instant and scalable, the right digital therapeutics can meet this need.

As the world seeks to put in place the support needed to help the growing numbers of people with mental health issues, to tackle the scale of demand, it is important we factor digital into our plans.

In the Mental Health Recovery Action Plan, the Government sets out plans for: new models of care; a £38m investment in talking therapies; the need to give people more choice and autonomy over treatment; and the importance of supporting students and young people, who have been hit particularly hard during the pandemic. In each one of these cases, health apps have the potential to support lives and provide significant returns on investment to a health service under pressure.

But to be effective, services must act to engage patients with the best solutions. systems to ensure quality thresholds are identified and enforced, and that patients are safely activated. Only a closed loop quality system will govern that the right tools are given to the right patients at the right time.

To find out more about the support ORCHA provides to mental health services, visit: orchahealth.com

To access ORCHA's library of digital health reviews, featuring 200 mental health apps with scores above 65%, visit: appfinder.orcha.co.uk

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Research relating to various groups of key workers.
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For teachers:
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