



Rationale for seeking access to internet technologies **to support clinical interventions with young people**

The following document is intended as a starting point to assist you in negotiating with your managers or organisation boards for access to computers, the internet or social networking sites for the purposes of supporting the young people in your practice.

Background

- Despite ongoing attempts to improve the use of technology in mental health, limited changes are occurring
- The NSW Youth Health Policy states that organisations and individuals need to embrace technology in order to better work with young people.
- Additionally, key policy documents such as The 4th Mental Health Plan, The Health and Hospitals Reform Commission, The National Primary Health Care Strategy and The National Health Strategy (2008) highlight the need for the use of innovative services to treat individuals with mental health disorders.
- Despite the focus on youth mental health, the majority of young people who need help do not seek help through mental health services ^[1].
- Young people want to access mental health support in a manner that suits them, in the time and place that it will be most beneficial ^[2].
- The internet has been identified as a key source of advice and support by young people ^[3] and is not restricted by geographical, psychological or physical barriers so can reach those that would otherwise be difficult to reach ^[4-6],

Rationale

- Having access to the internet, and having an online presence, may facilitate reaching individuals who do not yet realise they have a problem ^[24].
- Embracing technology many help to overcome generation awkwardness or barriers such as shyness or lack of confidence in communication.
 - o Emails for example, have been shown to increase the directness in help-seeking and the reporting of physical complaints by adolescents to healthcare professionals ^[10].
- Technology also spans the digital divide and may help marginalised young people gain access to services ^[11].
- Likewise, using technology can help young people living in rural areas to access specialist services.
- Using the internet during consultations with young people can result in the young person feeling empowered and more in control ^[8]. It allows them to be 'able to dip their toe in or out' and moderate the intensity and duration of contact – particularly around sensitive topics ^[1, 9].
- E-mental health services are likely to enhance access to those who are unable to access basic treatments ^[14]. Technology enables connection and enables better ways of building partnerships and sharing information, helping to overcome a current challenge for organisations.
- The effectiveness of online therapy can be a beneficial adjunct to standard therapy ^[15-18] or as a brief intervention ^[4], particularly in areas of limited resources, such as in youth mental health ^[19, 20].

- Internet based interventions may be more scalable^[21] and cost effective when compared to traditional therapy^[22, 23].
- The use of technology as an adjunct to face-to-face consultation may result in more sustained resolution of symptoms^[18].
- Without the ability to demonstrate the safe use of tools to the young person within consultations, it is difficult to ensure the young person is using the tool correctly and/or safely.

A failure to provide access to technology may;

- Limit the organisations ability to promote events and publications, opportunities to be consulted, or advocate for issues;
- Limit the ability of the organisation to be accessed by young people;
- Limit the awareness of the organisation;
- Reduce the perception of trustworthiness by young people through a lack of online presence;
- Hinder engagement with clients, other organisations, and the local community;
- Restrict the access to and use of tools to better engage young people;
- Limit communication pathways that young people are likely to use;
- Limit the skills and access to knowledge and resources of the staff.

Being connected means the organisation

- Can communicate widely and rapidly;
- Can access innovative communication pathways;
- Is visible and perceived by the youth and youth health sector as a key player (e.g. alongside Headspace, Inspire foundation, Australian Youth Studies Clearinghouse, etc);
- Has the ability to enhance the organisations profile locally, in Australia and globally.

“I think health care professionals working with young people should try to embrace the use of technology as a way of making help seeking more relevant and accessible to young people. Like, when I went and saw a Psychiatrist, and sat on her floral couch in her medical room - I felt like I was stepping back in time and it made me automatically awkward. When I chatted online or wrote an email to a counsellor I felt like I was in my own world and could be myself and I think that really helped me!” [Meke, Reach Out Pro Interview with a young person](#)

Examples of organisations with an active online presence

Examples of organisations using twitter

- @Bandaged Bear | Westmead, Sydney, Australia
- @AustDrug | Aust Drug Foundation | Australia
- @whonews | WHO News | Geneva
- @ACYS youth info | Australia
- @salvos | Australia
- @NSW Health | NSW Australia
- @Inspire_AUS | Inspire Foundation | Australia
- @headspace_au | ReachOut_AUS | Reach Out | Australia
- @MissionAust | Mission Australia | Australia
- @Auburnyouth | CanTeen | Australia
- @NSW Police | Sydney, Australia
- @Sydney Kids Hospital | Sydney
- @Youth_Advocacy | YATI | Toronto, ON
- @MPHAustralia | Make Poverty History | Australia
- @LifelineAust | Lifeline Australia | Australia
- @headspaceCC | headspace CC
- @youthrep09 | UN Youth Rep | Melbourne, Australia
- @SmithFamily_org | The Smith Family | Australia
- @Oxfam | Oxfam International
- @salvationarmy | The Salvation Army | Wherever there's a need
- @RO_teachers | Reach Out Teachers
- @HomelessnessNSW | Homelessness NSW | Sydney Australia
- WorkCoverNSW | WorkCover NSW | Gosford, NSW
- @rcpsych | RC of Psychiatrists
- @NHSChoices | NHS
- @mentalhealthnsw | Mental Health NSW

Examples of conferences using twitter

- @MentalHealthConf | Gold Coast, Australia
 - @TheMHS | Sydney, Australia
 - @Mind & Its Potential | Australia
 - @Happiness | Australia
 - @IYMH_conference | International Youth Mental Health Conference
 - @RuralMH | Rural Mental Health Conference
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