Digital Mental Health Summit

10 December 2024

Executive Summary

On the 10th of December 2024 the Digital Health Association (DHA) hosted and facilitated the inaugural Digital Mental Health Summit at Parliament's Grand Hall in Wellington. The Summit was sponsored by The Wise Group, Whakarongarou Aotearoa, Ember Korowai Takitini, Emerge Aotearoa, and Healthpoint, and brought together stakeholders from across six diverse areas of the Mental Health sector from around Aotearoa to brainstorm and share ideas on how digital solutions can better support mental health and addiction services in New Zealand.

Digital Mental Health Hub

Earlier in 2024, as part of a potential long-term vision for digital mental health and addictions, the DHA presented their concept of a Digital Mental Health and Addictions Hub to Minister for Mental Health and, at the time, Minister for Youth, Hon Matt Doocey.

The idea was for a Digital Mental Health Hub to work in conjunction with current face-to-face services, providing a centralised, highly accessible platform connecting digital tools, virtual care, and support services to better meet the needs of all New Zealanders. The concept aims to address the choice people have and the options available to our mental health and addictions workforce for support, ensuring people can access timely, personalised care anywhere and anytime.
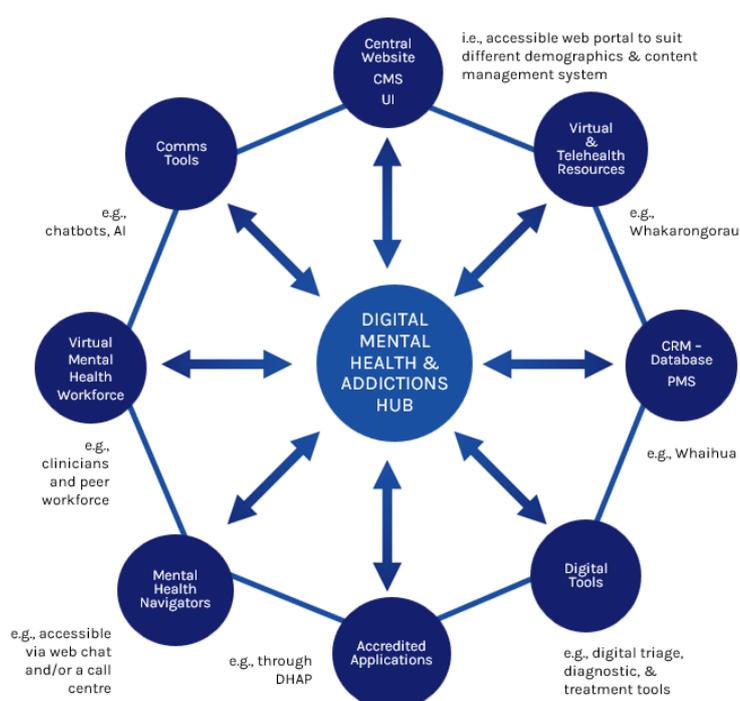

The meeting held between the Minister and the DHA produced three potential objectives:

1. Seek advice from mental health and addictions officials.
2. Explore potential legislative change – in Pae Ora legislation.
3. Host a summit with the mental health sector.

This vision sparked the idea for the Summit to explore how the mental health sector can shape the future of digital mental health and work collaboratively toward long-term solutions like the hub.

The Summit working group formed by the DHA put a focus on youth for the day. Youth are digital natives with a substantial body of statistics available and reflected the Minister's role, at the time, as Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Youth. By centring discussions on youth, the aim was to create scalable solutions that can be adapted to support all demographics across the mental health and addictions sector.

Pre-Summit Survey

To help gather insights and accelerate thinking ahead of the Digital Mental Health Summit registered attendees were sent a pre-Summit survey. Through the survey attendees were asked to identify the biggest challenges, gaps, and opportunities in digital mental health and addictions support, as well as current experiences with digital tools and future goals for the system. The feedback was then used to help shape the questions that were workshopped during the Summit.

Key Themes from the Survey

Biggest Challenges

- **Integration of digital and in-person care:** A significant need to link digital tools seamlessly with traditional services to create comprehensive support pathways.
- **Digital equity:** Socioeconomic barriers, lack of infrastructure in rural areas, and low digital literacy hinder accessibility.
- **Cultural misalignment:** Absence of culturally tailored solutions, especially those grounded in Te Ao Māori, making services less accessible to diverse populations.
- **Evidence and evaluation:** Lack of robust data on the effectiveness and long-term impact of many digital tools.
- **Workforce readiness:** Insufficient training for professionals to recommend, implement, and use digital tools effectively.
- **Fragmentation of services:** Poor coordination across digital and traditional services leading to inefficiencies and gaps in care.

Gaps in Support

- **Early intervention:** Opportunities to use digital tools for identifying and addressing mental health issues before escalation, especially among youth. "Catching people before they fall".
- **Culturally responsive solutions:** Development of tools that respect and reflect Māori values and other cultural frameworks.
- **Accessibility in rural areas:** Digital tools are a means to reach underserved communities.
- **Youth-focused resources:** addressing the specific needs and preferences of young populations through engaging and relevant solutions.
- **Customised and multilingual support:** Tools offering options in Te Reo Māori and other languages to cater to New Zealand's diverse population.
- **Digital navigation:** Lack of unified or easy-to-navigate systems to guide individuals to appropriate tools and resources.

Future Goals

- **Universal access:** Future, user-friendly, and widely available digital platforms, adaptable to various devices and user needs.
- **Integrated systems:** Digital tools working in harmony with in-person care for a hybrid model of support.
- **Cultural alignment:** Co-designed and culturally safe tools, especially for Māori communities with adherence to Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles.
- **AI and personalisation:** Use of AI to deliver tailored recommendations, triage support, and streamline service delivery.
- **Robust privacy and data security:** Ensuring high standards for safeguarding user information.
- **Evidence-based innovation**: Regular evaluation and refinement of tools to ensure effectiveness and relevance.
- **Sustainability and national strategy:** A long-term, well-funded, and coordinated approach to digital mental health across Aotearoa.
- **Digital mental health hub**: Create a unified digital mental health hub to provide early and consistent access to mental health services for every single New Zealander.

Current Experience with Digital Tools

- **Mixed effectiveness:** Some tools, such as "Just a Thought" and telehealth platforms, show promise, but face challenges like retention and inconsistent use.
- **Telehealth and remote support:** Effective for group sessions and engaging individuals in remote or underserved areas.
- **Cultural gaps:** Tools often lack cultural resonance, reducing their effectiveness for Māori and other ethnic communities.
- **Youth engagement:** Digital tools tend to work better when integrated into care plans or used in collaboration with trusted professionals.
- **Evaluation challenges:** A shortage of structured assessments for determining the long-term impact and quality of digital tools.
- **Prominent tools and platforms:** Examples like SPARX, Mentemia, and Calm are mentioned as having potential, but they require better integration and tailored use cases.

Attendees were asked to:

Participate in two brainstorming discussions.

Work together during a facilitated summary session to collate achievable, measurable, and meaningful ideas.

Present these ideas back to Minister Doocey, focusing on what can be done now within a fiscally constrained environment, what to aim for in the medium term, and a long-term vision for digital mental health.

Summary of the Day

In total 92 participants from 52 organisations attended the Summit. Attendees were assigned seating across nine tables in mixed groups of ten with a facilitator and a scribe placed at each table to support and capture the ideas and input from everyone.

The Ask

A key focus for the Summit was developing ideas for the short-term, medium-term, and a long-term vision for digital mental health and addictions. These discussions culminated in a presentation of ideas back to Minister Doocey.

The Summit focused on three high level objectives:

1 **Optimise current resources:** identify and build on the digital tools and platforms already in place to improve mental health support today.

2 **Define future opportunities:** explore unmet needs and imagine new digital solutions that could shape mental health services for the future.

3 **Create a collaborative vision:** develop a shared vision for a connected, effective digital mental health system that supports people and providers alike.

How did it all come together?

The day began with welcoming words from host DHA Chief Executive Ryl Jensen followed by a Karakia before the day was officially opened by Minister Doocey who shared his priorities as Minister for Mental Health and what the current gaps are in relation to the unmet need youth mental health is experiencing. Minister Doocey also announced Mental Health Promotion funding of $5 million over 3 years which was received enthusiastically by the Summit's participants. The group was asked by the Minister to create a roadmap of targeted actions that would use available and emergent technologies to improve the needs currently being met and identify the role digital mental health has in meeting the targets of the outlined priorities. Following Minister Doocey, keynote speaker Chris Boyd-Skinner, Director Clinical Governance, Australian Digital Health Agency presented five keys to the development of Mental Health Digital Technology:

Ryl Jensen

1. **Transparency and communication** - User trust is key to building tech solutions.
2. **Rigorous standards of accreditation** - Independent regulation standards - applied consistently.
3. **User-centric design** - Lived experience, meet consumers where they are, ready and able services, continual improvement.
4. **Data security and privacy** - Indigenous data sovereignty.
5. **Ethical considerations** - Technology is used to augment human contact; it does not replace human contact.

Changing Minds CEO Kevin Harper gave some thought-provoking challenges to the room that created momentum and anticipation heading into the brainstorming sessions:

Hon Matt Doocey

1. **Don't build digital mental health solutions with the same faults and limitations** as the existing system.
2. **Peoples and services expectations are different** - We need both.
3. **It is easier to choose with your thumb than your feet** - Engage and listen to insights.

Chris Boyd-Skinner

Other speakers during the session included Associate Professor Terry Fleming from Victoria University of Wellington who outlined youth mental health statistics and Anil Thapliyal, Director eMHIC, painting the picture of the global digital mental health scene. Following a quick overview of the day and setting objectives the tables started with whakawhanaungatanga (introductions) before moving into a 10-minute silent brainstorming session to ensure each voice had a space to contribute and bring a diverse range of insights to the table.

At the end of the two brainstorming and summary sessions a representative/s from each table took to the stage to present their ideas back to Minister Doocey in a 3-4 min presentation with time to answer questions from the Minister who engaged with genuine interest and inquisitiveness picking up each solution and idea.

The final guest speaker of the day was Professor Miranda Wolpert MBE, Director of Mental Health at Wellcome, a UK-based global charitable foundation. She shared valuable insights into the work Wellcome is undertaking in the Mental Health Digital Technology space on a global scale. Professor Wolpert captured significant interest in the room, particularly with the funding opportunities Wellcome is offering to drive transformational change in the delivery of mental health interventions.

The day concluded as it began, with DHA's Chief Executive Ryl Jensen sharing some final thoughts and outlining the next steps, before the closing Karakia brought the day to an end.

Groups discussed the following questions based off a thematic analysis from a pre-summit survey:

- **Current State**
  How well are we digitally enabled today in mental health and addictions? What strengths do we currently have, and where do we fall short?
- **Challenges and Barriers**
  With the Minister's key targets in mind and greater access to mental health and addictions services, what are the key challenges, gaps, and barriers preventing progress in this area?
- **Solutions Across Time Horizons**
  What practical solutions can we implement in the short-term (zero-budget), medium-term (small-budget), and long-term (broader vision)?
- **Immediate Priorities**
  What are the most important actions we can take now to deliver tangible progress in digital mental health and addictions?
- **Refining the Hub Vision**
  Thinking about the proposed Digital Mental Health Hub:
  a) Do you have any comments or suggestions about the concept?
  b) Are there other opportunities or complementary ideas we should consider?
  c) Where could we improve enablement and integration to make this vision a reality?
- **Strategic Direction**
  With the Digital Mental Health Hub in mind, what strategic direction should we take to ensure a future-ready, integrated approach to digital mental health and addictions?

Core & Common Themes from Brainstorming Sessions

The remainder of this section looks to highlight the core and common themes from an industry sector/provider specific perspective following the Summit's three objectives. We have grouped the themes by question rather than by table group as each table was made up of different organisations and individuals who work in the sector.

Question 1: Current State: How well are we digitally enabled today in mental health and addictions?

1a. How well are we enabled?

Core Themes

- **Inadequate tools and resource:** Can hamper operational efficiency and overall effectiveness.
- **Insufficient training:** Insufficient training in digital literacy, mental health first aid, and data analysis which can directly undermine team performance.
- **Fragmented communication channels:** This leads to silos, misalignment, and delays, posing risks of decreased cohesion and inefficient resource utilisation.
- **Inefficiencies and frustration among team members:** Redundant processes, unclear workflows, inadequate support systems, and bureaucratic hurdles are primary sources of inefficiency and frustration.

Interesting / Stand Out Thought:

The frequent mention of fragmented communication channels and tools indicates a significant impact on efficiency. This detail suggests the need for exploring the need for streamlined information and knowledge flow.

1b. What strengths do we currently have?

Core Themes

- **Strong team collaboration and cohesion:** Teams exhibit exceptional collaboration and cohesion, enabling effective problem-solving across various projects and tasks.
- **High levels of expertise and skill diversity:** A workforce with diverse skills and high levels of expertise allows complex challenges to be tackled with innovative and well-rounded solutions.
- **Positive organisational culture and support:** A positive organisational culture fosters a motivating and inclusive work environment that encourages employee engagement.

Interesting / Stand Out Thought:

The high levels of skill diversity in the team's stand out. This diversity presents an opportunity to explore cross-functional projects and initiatives, leveraging varied expertise to drive innovation and problem solving.

1c. Where do we fall short?

Core Themes

- **Integration of digital tools:** The adoption of digital tools aims to streamline mental health care delivery and improve efficiency, but we are lacking the implementation of these tools.
- **Use of data analytics and AI:** Employing data analytics and AI facilitates personalised treatment plans and predictive insights for better patient outcomes but AI is yet to be fully realised in the sector.
- **Enhancing accessibility through Telehealth and Mobile Applications:** Telehealth and mobile applications are crucial for making mental health services more accessible, particularly for remote or underserved populations and should be considered in the mental health strategy as a core enabler.

Interesting / Stand Out Thought:

The significant gap between public and private health services in adopting digital health solutions highlights an urgent need for systemic change. Exploring successful international models, such as those in Scotland and Denmark, could provide valuable insights for bridging this gap and fostering innovation.

Question 2: Challenges and Barriers: With the Ministers key targets in mind and greater access to mental health and addictions services, what are the key challenges, gaps, and barriers preventing progress in this area?

Core Themes

- **Quality of care:** Ensuring all mental health services maintain high standards in treatment protocols and patient care to achieve effective outcomes.
- **Integration of primary care:** Seamlessly integrating mental health services with primary healthcare systems to provide holistic and coordinated care for patients.
- **Workforce development:** Focusing on building a skilled, adequately staffed workforce to meet the growing demand for mental health services.

Interesting / Stand Out Thought:

The persistent stigma surrounding mental health and addictions significantly hinders progress. Addressing this through sustained, impactful public awareness campaigns could shift perceptions and encourage greater utilisation of services, ultimately driving more meaningful engagement and support for those in need.

Question 3: Immediate Priorities: What are the most important actions we can take now to deliver tangible process in digital mental health and addictions?

Core Themes

- **Digital transformation:** Accelerate the adoption of advanced digital tools and platforms to enhance service delivery and accessibility in mental health and addictions.
- **Customer centricity:** Focus on designing user-centric solutions that cater to the unique needs and preferences of individuals, ensuring a seamless and supportive experience.
- **Operational efficiency:** Streamline processes and integrate systems to reduce redundancies, improve coordination, and maximise resource utilisation across mental health and addictions services.
- **Workforce development:** Invest in continuous training and support for the workforce to ensure they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively leverage digital tools and deliver high-quality care.

Interesting / Stand Out Thought:

An immediate priority is enhancing customer experience through digital channels. This not only addresses current consumer expectations but also sets a foundation for sustained engagement and loyalty.

Question 4: Refining the Hub Vision: Thinking about the proposed Digital Mental Health Hub

4a. Do you have any comments or suggestions about the concept of the hub?

Core Themes

- **Centralised collaboration (comment):** Centralising collaboration within the hub can break down silos and foster a more cohesive approach to mental health services.
- **Resource optimisation (suggestion):** Conduct a comprehensive resource audit to identify overlaps and gaps, then allocate resources efficiently based on identified needs and priorities.
- **Innovation and agility (suggestion):** Implement an iterative development process with regular feedback loops to allow for continuous improvement and quick adaptation to new technologies and insights.
- **Enhanced communication (comment):** The hub's potential to enhance communication between service providers and users can lead to better coordination and more effective care delivery.

Interesting / Stand Out Thought:

A key insight is that the hub can significantly enhance organisational agility by centralising communication and collaboration. This not only streamlines processes but also fosters innovation through collective problem-solving and shared knowledge, ultimately driving more efficient and effective outcomes.

4b. Are there other opportunities or complementary ideas we should consider?

Core Themes

- **Emerging technologies:** Exploring integrating emerging technologies such as AI and VR to enhance user engagement and provide innovative mental health solutions.
- **Strategic partnerships:** Establish strategic partnerships with tech firms and healthcare organisations to leverage their expertise and resources for co-developing advanced digital tools.
- **Diversification of services:** Diversifying services within the hub can address a broader range of mental health needs, ensuring more comprehensive support for users.
- **Continuous improvements:** Emphasising continuous improvement through regular evolution and user feedback will ensure the hub remains effective and relevant in addressing evolving mental health challenges.

Interesting / Stand Out Thought:

Exploring strategic partnerships with tech firms can open new avenues for innovation and growth. By leveraging external expertise and resources, the sector can accelerate its R&D efforts, bringing cutting-edge solutions to market faster and more efficiently.

4c. Where could we improve enablement and integration to make this vision a reality?

Core Themes

- **User-centric design:** Engage users in the co-design process to ensure the hub's features and functionalities are tailored to their specific needs and preferences.
- **Seamless integration:** Integrate the hub with existing healthcare systems and platforms to create a seamless user experience and improve data flow across services.
- **Data security and privacy:** Ensuring robust data security and privacy measures is critical to maintaining user trust and protecting sensitive information within the hub.
- **Continuous support and training:** Continuous support and training for staff will be essential to maximise the effective use of digital tools and maintain high standards of care.

Interesting / Stand Out Thought:

A key insight is that user-centric design is crucial for the success of the digital mental health hub. By prioritising the needs and preferences of users in the design process, the hub can significantly enhance user engagement and satisfaction, leading to better mental health outcomes and increased adoption rates.

Question 5: Strategic Direction: With the Digital Mental Health Hub in mind, what strategic direction should we take to ensure a future-ready, integrated approach to digital mental health and addictions?

Core Themes

- **Stakeholder engagement:** Foster ongoing collaboration and communication with relevant stakeholders, including healthcare providers, users, and community organisations, to ensure their insights and needs are reflected in the development and implementation of the hub.
- **User-centric and accessible design:** Prioritise a design approach that centres on the user experience, making the hub intuitive and accessible to all individuals, regardless of their technological proficiency or background.
- **Integration of services:** Seamlessly integrate the hub with existing healthcare systems and services to provide a unified platform that enhances coordination and continuity of care for users.
- **Workforce development:** Invest in comprehensive training and continuous professional development for the workforce to equip them with the skills and knowledge required to effectively utilise digital tools.

Interesting / Stand Out Thought:

There is strategic emphasis on co-designing solutions with diverse stakeholders. Involving youth, marginalised groups, and other key stakeholders in the design will ensure the services and tools developed are truly reflective of and responsive to the needs of those they aim to serve.

Solutions To Focus On

Short Term

- **Audit current tools and systems:** Identify what's working in a national review of mental health services and what needs improvement to optimise resources.
- **Assign roles to match skills:** Leverage team strengths to boost productivity and satisfaction.
- **Centralise access to resources:** Simplify finding care options.
- **Identify service gaps:** Find where services are lacking so we can improve access to mental health support.
- **Simplify care options for youth:** Make it easier for young people to navigate and access mental health support.
- **Implement a quick-win digital solution:** Quickly deploy an effective tool to improve user experience and show value.
- **Establish a governance structure:** Define roles and responsibilities for smooth operation and accountability.
- **Integrate emerging technologies:** Enhance services by adopting new tech like AI and VR.
- **Engage with stakeholders:** Build strong relationships and gather insights from various groups e.g., schools, industry partners, community groups.
- **Incorporate youth input in redesign:** Ensure the system meets young people's needs by involving them in the design process.
- **Accredited and validated Apps:** With so many options available adopt an accreditation framework and links to validated online resources. (**Note:** Healthify developed the DHAP tool for this purpose).

Medium Term

- **Develop targeted training sessions:** Address skill gaps, particularly in digital health.
- **Evaluate and optimise existing tools:** Regularly improve tools to maintain their effectiveness.
- **Improve internet access:** Ensure digital services are accessible in underserved areas.
- **Invest in remote access solutions:** Expand mental health support available digitally.
- **Utilise advanced access analytics tools:** Gain better customer insights to refine services.
- **Integrate systems:** Streamline operations by connecting different systems.
- **Pilot new technologies:** Test new tech on a small scale before wider implementation – Proof of Concept (PoC).
- **Co-design with stakeholders:** Collaborate with users, including youth and marginalised groups, to create effective solutions.
- **Establish national standards of competency:** For providers of the integrated hub, gaining accreditation on technology competency and clinical efficacy will be required to join or offer their app on the hub 'ecosystem'.

Long Term

- **Monitor and adjust changes:** Continuously evaluate and refine changes for sustained improvement.
- **Promote continuous learning:** Build-in and encourage ongoing education and innovation to keep skills relevant.
- **Establish clear leadership and vision:** Provide strong leadership and direction for digital mental health initiatives.
- **Embed ESG considerations:** Integrate sustainability and social responsibility into strategic planning.
- **Scale successful models:** Expand effective models to other regions or departments to maximise benefits.
- **Invest in research and development:** Stay ahead of technological advancements through ongoing R&D.
- **Maintain an agile system:** Build a flexible system that can adapt to new technologies and improvements.
- **Adapt funding models:** Ensure funding supports and entices providers to adopt of new technologies and practices.
- **Foster collaboration:** Design funding models that promote collaboration rather than competition among providers.

Next Steps & Actions

Calls to action – Accelerating the establishment of the Digital Mental Health and Addictions Hub

Many of the improvement ideas generated by our workshop participants align well and contribute towards and outcome of the Mental Health and Addictions Hub. Many of the components of the Hub already exist but they are operating in silos and not working collaboratively to deliver outcomes for our people in the most effective manner. There are three main priorities:

Priority One: **Accelerating the establishment of the Hub**

Priority Two: **Access and Choice**

*Priority Three:* **Volunteer Collective Working Group**

There are opportunities to achieve quick wins that enhance the digital mental health support available. Central to this effort is the **accelerating the establishment of the Hub**, the creation of the hub will bring stakeholders together and drive tangible outcomes. The Hub aims to foster actionable solutions that effectively address the needs of youth with careful consideration on supporting youth with information coming to them, where they are, without them actively having to search.

One tangible initiative that can be enhanced by the Hub is '**Access and Choice'**, which plays a vital role in immediately improving access to mental health support. The deployment of the digital hub can break down geographical barriers, enabling individuals in urgent need to receive prompt assistance virtually, reducing barriers to care and providing timely interventions.

The creation of a **volunteer collective working group** is a priority. The group will be dedicated to driving sector changes needed for youth mental health, leveraging the expertise of clinicians, policy, community, and sector professionals is essential. Their mission would be to continuously advocate for and implement reforms that lead to significant, lasting improvements. In tandem, a sub-youth working group consisting of representatives from diverse backgrounds would be beneficial where they would be able to share their lived experiences to guide and inform the design of initiatives, ensuring they are grounded in a combination of clinical best practices and fit-for-purpose for youth.

Recommendations on the next steps:

There was consensus amongst the tables/groups that an end-to-end Mental Health and Addictions Hub would be hugely valuable, with digital tools and solutions being core enablers of a rich and diverse range of services, providing choice and addressing gaps in the current care model. As next steps, it would be helpful to understand what an end-to-end coordinated service across a person's care pathway could look like, enabled by digital tools. The DHA's special interest group in mental health and wellbeing would be willing to pick up this important mahi in early 2025.
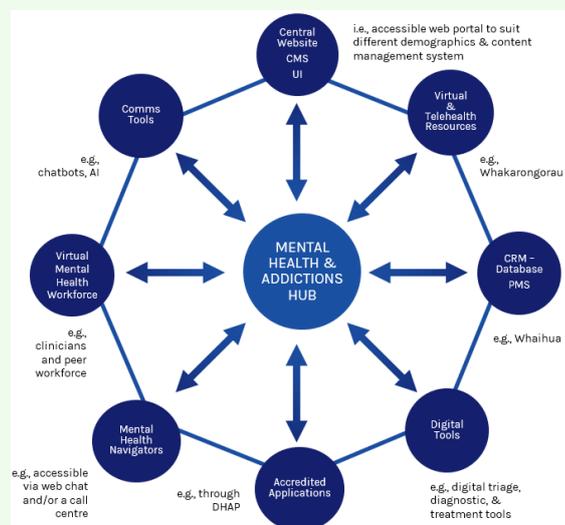
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Principal Sponsor: Wise Group

Created in 1989, the Wise Group is a whānau of charitable organisations that work collectively to create one of the largest providers of mental health, addiction and wellbeing services, operating nationwide in Aotearoa New Zealand. About Us | Wise Group

The entities within the Wise Group provide a range of services and resources across Aotearoa. They include:

- Blueprint
- Here to help u
- Just a Thought
- Le Va
- LinkPeople
- Pathways
- Real
- Te Pou
- The People's Project
- Westella
- Wild Bamboo
- Wise Management Solutions
- Work Counts
- Workwise

Whakarongorau Aotearoa

Running free to the public, virtual health, mental health, and social services - available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Giving everyone in Aotearoa the opportunity for wellness. We focus on the connected world of digital care, where we can help join all the dots, and select the right services, advice, support and help for the right need. https://whakarongorau.nz/

Healthpoint

Providing up-to-date information about healthcare providers, referral expectations, services offered and common treatments. https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/

Healthpoint empowers users to make informed healthcare decisions while enabling providers to maintain visibility and share accurate service details with the public.

Ember Korowai Takitini

Ember Korowai Takitini (Ember) is a group of companies comprising five entities:

- The Ember Wellbeing Trust
- Ember Services
- Ember Innovations
- Ember Systems
- Kāinga Haumaru

Ember Services is the largest, together with the other four it blends professional expertise and lived experience to offer a range of services and supports for anyone with mental health, addiction, or intellectual disability needs. Their shared goal is to help people live the lives they choose while challenging systems that hold them back. They envision a society that better understands and responds to mental distress, addiction, and intellectual disability. https://ember.org.nz/

Emerge Aotearoa

Emerge Aotearoa is a New Zealand-based organisation committed to enhancing the holistic well-being of individuals and families. They provide a wide range of support services across mental health, disability, housing, addiction recovery, and youth services. With a focus on empowerment and long-term stability, Emerge Aotearoa's person-centred approach ensures that clients receive tailored care to improve their overall quality of life. Their services are designed to foster independence, resilience, and a sense of belonging within the community. https://emergeaotearoa.org.nz/

Deloitte.

DHA | TE RŌPŪ HAUORA MATIHIKO
Digital Health Association