

Report shows Digital Technology could play Important Role in Mental Healthcare in Ireland

A report published today by Mental Health Reform, the national coalition on mental health, has found that digital technology could play an important role in mental healthcare in Ireland. The report, entitled eMental Health: State-of-the-Art & Opportunities for Ireland, was launched today by the Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, Jim Daly, TD as part of the eMEN project funded by the Interreg North-West Europe Programme and the HSE.

The report, by Kevin Cullen of the Work Research Centre (WRC), provides an overview of eMental Health applications that may be helpful for the large numbers of people with common mental health conditions such as mild-to-moderate anxiety and depression, as well as applications relevant for people with more severe and enduring conditions.

Speaking at the launch of the report, Director of Mental Health Reform, Shari McDaid, said, "Valuable opportunities exist to exploit eMental Health technologies within the mental healthcare system in Ireland. eMental Health offers people easier access to mental healthcare, and increased choice and control over their own treatment. Rooted in Mental Health Reform's value of empowerment of individuals who use mental health services, we are particularly interested in the possibilities digital technology can open up for people to take the lead in their own recovery."

eMental Health also can help overcome some of the very significant challenges mental health services currently face in Ireland including the large treatment gap.

Maurice Farnan, Programme Manager in Mental Health services stated, "HSE Mental Health Services welcomes this timely report on eMental Health services. eMental Health provides considerable potential for an improved service offering in Mental Health services. It offers opportunities to provide information, supports and treatment to people with mental health issues and the wider population. The HSE is pleased to note that the report parallels work that is on-going in the area of eMental Health in the Mental Health Services. HSE Mental Health Services looks forward to working with all stakeholders across NGO and statutory sectors to provide enhanced eMental Health services."

Kevin Cullen, author of the report, noted that, "The eMental health field is broad in scope. Research evidence is important to guide policy and practice in this field in Ireland. The growing body of available evidence suggests a potentially valuable contribution of eMental Health, both in the delivery of mental health services and in supporting self-help activity by people with mental health difficulties themselves. However, the evidence also underscores the continued importance of traditional face-to-face talking therapies and these will continue to have a central role in mental health treatment and recovery for many people. A key challenge is to find the best way to offer eMental Health as a component of responsive mental healthcare pathways that can tailor services to meet different needs and accommodate user preferences as much as possible."

Dr. McDaid concluded, “We hope stakeholders will find that this report provides them with a useful framework for developing a shared understanding of the eMental Health space which can inform the preparation of a national eMental Health strategy.”

ENDS

Contact:

Dominika Topolska (eMEN Project Officer), dtopolska@mentalhealthreform.ie, mobile: 0851597175

Ray Burke (Communications and Campaigns Officer) rburke@mentalhealthreform.ie, mobile: 086 171 1920

About Mental Health Reform

Mental Health Reform is the national coalition promoting improved mental health services and the social inclusion of people with mental health difficulties. The coalition currently has 64 member organisations. See www.mentalhealthreform.ie for more details. Mental Health Reform acknowledges the support of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government’s Scheme to Support National Organisations 2016-2019.

About the author, Kevin Cullen, Work Research Centre

Kevin Cullen, the author of the report is a founding director of WRC, the Dublin-based independent health and social research centre. His work focuses especially on policy-support research at Irish and European levels, including health & social care system innovation, mental health, eHealth, older people, disability, supportive housing, and carers and caring. He has also carried out a large body of work on technology assessment in these fields.

Notes to the editor:

The event is being organised by Mental Health Reform as part of the [eMEN project](#), a six country European Union project, funded by the Interreg North-West Europe Programme and the HSE in Ireland. Mental Health Reform is the sole Irish partner in eMEN.

The research to prepare this report was grant-funded by Mental Health Reform & the Health Service Executive (HSE).

Report key findings:

Potential benefits of eMental Health:

- Wider reach of mental health services and access to these
- Cost-efficiencies in delivering high-volume services
- Treatment innovation and enhancement
- More user involvement and empowerment
- Expansion of self-help and access to peer support

However, “...despite the undoubted opportunities presented by eMental Health, it is not a simple ‘plug-and-play’ game-changer or panacea.”

Recommendations:

- eMental Health Strategy

“It may be helpful to develop and resource a dedicated eMental Health Strategy to encourage broad consideration of eMental health opportunities across the mental healthcare ecosystem and to support accelerated deployment of useful applications. This should be embedded within wider mental health policy/strategy, such as currently being developed in the refresh of A Vision for Change.”

- Stakeholder engagement/consultation

“It is essential that all stakeholder groupings are involved in driving the future development of eMental health in Ireland. Effective mechanisms for engagement and informed discussion are necessary to support consultation with professional bodies, practitioners, user groups and service users, NGOs, and other stakeholders.”

- Quality assurance; Guidance for users & practitioners

“Given the large and growing number of online and mobile services and applications on offer, development of Irish quality assurance systems and guidance for eMental health users and practitioners is also important. Quality assurance systems (e.g. official certification systems or listing of endorsed products) encourage development and offering of proven good-quality products and services, and help users and practitioners to select which to use.”

- Implementation pilots

“It would also be useful to consider design, implementation, and evaluation of pilots/trials of eMental health in targeted fields in Ireland. This might include large-scale pilots of telemental health and eTherapies for common mental health conditions and more targeted pilots of telepsychiatry for specific purposes. ”

- Supporting innovation

“More generally, it would be useful to establish a lasting support structure to lead knowledge-sharing, foster innovation, and support implementation of eMental health across the system in Ireland. The most effective way to foster useful innovation in eMental health is through collaboration between clinicians, technology developers, and people with lived experience of mental health issues. Establishment of a dedicated eMental health innovation ‘hub’ might be the most effective way to do this.”

- eMental health research

“Finally, a range of important aspects of eMental health require attention in mental health research in Ireland. This includes efficacy and effectiveness evaluation of eMental health offerings, translational and implementation research on putting useful innovations into practice, eMental health user experience research, and wider population research on utilisation patterns and their implications.”

[Here is a link to the executive summary](#)

[Here is a link to the full report](#)