



Aotearoa New Zealand Digital Tools for Mental Health and Wellbeing

March 2021

Stocktake

Digital Mental Health Lab
Te Kura Tātai Hauora | School of Health



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF
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Introduction

In this document, we outline key considerations and summarise Aotearoa New Zealand public facing self-help apps, websites and etherapies (digital tools) that explicitly focus on mental health and wellbeing. We provide an initial list of such tools, then present some examples in more detail.

Key considerations

A broad range of public facing digital mental health and wellbeing tools are currently available in Aotearoa New Zealand. We have provided a rapid overview of these tools, building on previous Te Hiringa Hauora/HPA reports. Digital tools change rapidly and can be defined in various ways. We acknowledge that some tools may have been omitted from this report and we welcome additions and new information. This stocktake took place in February 2021. Health Navigator and the Mental Health Foundation maintain lists of digital mental health and wellbeing tools, which should be considered alongside this document.

Alongside digital tools with an explicit focus on mental health and wellbeing, there are many sites, social media sources and apps that include wellbeing content but are not explicitly or primarily for this purpose. These form an important part of the online health and wellbeing landscape. Some reach large numbers of people and provide opportunities for collaboration and shared impact.

For example:

- Many kōhanga reo, kura, iwi and other Māori focused sites include resources to support identity, language, connectedness, wairua and other areas of wellbeing. These areas are vital for mental health.
- Many Pacific and other cultural community focused sites include important resources to support identity, language, connectedness, wairua and other important areas of wellbeing.
- Many education, church, sports and community websites include links or material relevant to mental wellbeing.
- Websites for community agencies such as Rainbow Youth, Outline and others frequently include important resources for connection, support and mental wellbeing.
- Health organisations and groups for those with health conditions, from Parkinson's disease to childhood illnesses, frequently include significant mental wellbeing content on their pages and sites.
- Sites and tools that provide support for health or social issues, from racism and discrimination to family violence and substance use, also include many resources, tips and tools that support wellbeing.

Many of the above sites and tools are funded or supported by New Zealand government agencies or reputable organisations with clinical, cultural or other expert oversight and review.

In addition to tools provided 'to' the public, it is important to consider how people use the internet or engage online for their own wellbeing and mental health. For example, many young people tell us they would search Instagram rather than use Google or search the internet. Likewise, many people search directly on YouTube or other social media platforms and might follow particular channels over time. Many people of diverse ages use social sites such as Facebook and even chat functions within online games, and some use these avenues to ask for, give, receive or share support and content that can benefit mental health and wellbeing. Community pages on social media platforms provide support for diverse groups, from new parents, to retirees, to those in specific neighbourhoods or interest groups. Understanding users' online behaviour can provide important insights for agencies in making content highly accessible and shareable.

Internationally, there are tens of thousands of apps targeting health and wellbeing available via app stores and websites.^{1,2} A minority of these have been formally tested or endorsed by public agencies, however many include evidence-based content.³ Globally, a handful of mental health apps dominate this market.² At the time of writing, Headspace and Calm together account for over 50% of app use for anxiety or depression.^{2,3} These are likely to be widely used in Aotearoa New Zealand too. Some evidence-based international tools are free while many employ a 'freemium' model,

with some free content or a free trial supplemented by further content at a cost to the user.

Finally, communities and research inform us that digital tools are an important but small part of how we support each other. These should be part of a comprehensive strategy that includes long-term efforts to promote health and wellbeing as well as community supports and health services.

Conclusion

This stocktake provides an overview of Aotearoa New Zealand public facing self-help apps, websites and etherapies (digital tools) that explicitly focus on mental health and wellbeing. There are many other Aotearoa and international tools and sites, some of which will also support wellbeing. At the same time, many people will not find useful information or links when they need it. To achieve wide reach and uptake in this complex environment, agencies might consider:

- Collaboration with existing sites and tools that reach target audiences
- Active use of multiple social media channels and building on target groups' current online behaviour
- A clear value proposition, such as reaching Aotearoa priority audiences and offering content that is not freely available to Aotearoa audiences
- A strategy of digital mental health tools as an ongoing service requiring continued development and promotion.

1 Marshall, J. M., Dunstan, D. A., & Bartik, W. (2020). Apps with maps—Anxiety and depression mobile apps with evidence-based frameworks: Systematic search of major app stores. *JMIR Mental Health*, 7(6), e16525. <https://doi.org/10.2196/16525>

2 Wasil, A.R., Gillespie, S., Shingleton, R., Wilks, C.R., & Weisz, J.R. (2020). Examining the reach of smartphone apps for depression and anxiety. *Am J Psychiatry*, 177(5), 464–465. doi: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2019.19090905. PMID: 32354266.

3 Wasil, A.R., Gillespie, S., Patel, R., Petre, A., Venturo-Conerly, K.E., Shingleton, R.M., Weisz, J.R., & DeRubeis, R.J. (2020). Reassessing evidence-based content in popular smartphone apps for depression and anxiety: Developing and applying user-adjusted analyses. *J Consult Clin Psychol*, 88(11), 983–993. doi: 10.1037/ccp0000604. Epub 2020 Sep 3. PMID: 32881542.

Summary List

This list outlines websites, apps and etherapy programs explicitly for mental health or wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand. We have focused on public facing self-help tools created by or funded through Aotearoa New Zealand providers. We acknowledge there are many other sites and tools that include wellbeing content and are likely to support wellbeing.

All Right?

Website, tools and resources targeting people in the Canterbury area. Includes significant evidence-based content. For more information, see the Examples section below.

Aroha

Chatbot aimed at teens dealing with stress. Includes significant evidence-based content and further research is underway. For more information, see the Examples section below.

Atu-Mai

Website with culturally based tools to support young Pacific people to unleash their full potential. Includes tools to strengthen and discover identity and cultural values and apply these in relationships and intergenerational communication. Includes significant evidence-based content. atumai.nz

Aunty Dee

Online problem solving app targeting Pacific youth. Works via an evidence-based technique. See the Examples section below.

Beating the Blues

Cognitive behavioural therapy program ('etherapy') for depression and anxiety. Available on referral from primary care provider (government funded) or purchase access privately. This program has been trialed extensively and is evidence-based. info.beatingtheblues.co.nz

CALM Computer Assisted Learning for the Mind

Website with wellbeing and mindfulness tools. Includes significant evidence-based content. See the Examples section below.

Changing Minds

Changing Minds is an Aotearoa New Zealand organisation led by people with lived experience of mental health issues or addiction. Website includes information, resources and opportunities to connect with others with lived experience. Includes significant evidence-based content. changingminds.org.nz

Clearhead

Online platform designed by New Zealand doctors, with quizzes to check symptoms, personalised recommendations, and links to therapists and online tools. Includes significant evidence-based content. clearhead.org.nz

Dear Em

Website to inform and empower young women, providing stories, activities and links. Topics include challenges and skills such as dealing with emotions, gratitude, meditation, calming activities, sexual consent, healthy relationships and mental health. Supported by Auckland City Council and the Help Foundation. Includes significant evidence-based and user-generated content. dearem.nz

Depression.org.nz

Te Hiringa Hauora/Health Promotion Agency website with multiple resources aimed at adults. Includes significant evidence-based content. See the Examples section below.

E Tū Whānau

Website and movement for positive change, developed by Māori for Māori. Includes significant evidence-based content. See the Examples section below.

FLO: Pasifika for life

FLO is part of Waka Hourua – New Zealand’s national suicide prevention programme for Māori and Pacific communities – delivered in partnership by Te Rau Matatini and Le Va. The website includes online information and tools, including family and community facing resources. Includes significant evidence-based content. leva.co.nz/our-work/suicide-prevention

HeadFirst

Website created by New Zealand Rugby with the Mental Health Foundation targeting rugby communities. Topics include cultural identity, sleep, gratitude and travel. Includes self tests, videos and diverse evidence-informed tools for ‘mental fitness’, depression, anxiety, addiction and suicidality. headfirst.co.nz

Ignite

Curated collection of wellbeing content, including articles, videos and online workshops (fees apply for workshops). Provided by Ignite Aotearoa, a wellbeing social enterprise backed by Emerge Aotearoa. ignite.org.nz

Just a Thought

Free online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) courses for anxiety, depression and 'staying on track'. Provided in New Zealand by the Wise Group and adapted from 'This Way Up' programs (developed and tested by a research unit from St Vincent's Hospital and the University of New South Wales). Courses demonstrated to be effective for adults with mild to moderate disorder and include optional links to the user's clinician.
justathought.co.nz

Mana Restore

Website targeting gamers, provided by Le Va. Includes significant evidence-based content. See the Examples section below.

Mentemia

App with information and tools to support being well, staying well and dealing with stress, especially to support users throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Includes significant evidence-based content. mentemia.com/nz/covid-19

Melon App

Health and wellness app with a variety of programmes, including 'Living Well' (a COVID-19 wellbeing-focused program), health journal/trackers, community support and coaches. Includes significant evidence-based content.
melonhealth.com/covid-19

Mental Health Foundation Website

Resources, information and extensive links to promote mental wellbeing. Offers access to diverse help and support options, including help in a crisis, suicide prevention and connection. Includes significant evidence-based content. mentalhealth.org.nz

Mental Wealth

Website focusing on mental wealth, provided by Le Va. Includes significant evidence-based content. See the Examples section below.

Play Kindly

The Play Kindly app was developed by Dr Esther Cowley-Malcolm with Pacific experts and artists. It supports parents with children's behaviour and interactions. Evidence-informed, with further research in progress.
facebook.com/ECM2412

Quest | Te Whitianga

Youth focused micro-interventions. Includes significant evidence-based content with further research underway. See the Examples section below.

Skylight Resilience Hub

Online articles and links focusing on dealing with grief, loss and trauma. Provided by the Skylight Trust. Includes significant evidence-based content. skylight.org.nz

SPARX

Evidence-based cognitive behavior therapy for teenagers with depression, presented in a game like format. Shown to be effective for symptoms of depression and anxiety and tested with adolescents, including rangatahi Māori and Alternative Education students. Modified version (SPARX-R) effective for depression prevention in a large Australian trial. Currently freely available in Aotearoa as a self-help tool, funded by the Ministry of Health. sparx.org.nz/home

Te Au

Website showcasing initiatives supported by Te Au and the Māori Suicide Prevention Fund. Includes significant evidence-based content. See the Examples section below.

The Kite Program

Apps with 'microlearning' wellbeing modules for mums, business organisations and COVID-19 support. Developed by New Zealand entrepreneur Hannah Hardy-Jones. thekiteprogram.com

The Lowdown

Te Hiringa Hauora/Health Promotion Agency website with multiple resources aimed at young people. Includes significant evidence-based content. See the Examples section below.

Togetherall (previously BigWhiteWall)

Clinically managed site with social support, self-help courses and creative tools to connect with others and support wellbeing. Funded by the Auckland District Health Board (ADHB) with free access to those with an ADHB postcode. Large numbers of users globally and significant research to support the program. togetherall.com/en-gb

Tough Talk Men's Mental Health

Website with videos, blog and tools for relaxation, cognitive restructuring, motivation and more created by Sam O'Sullivan, clinical psychologist. Free "Focus Toolkit" mindfulness and cognitive behavioral therapy course. Includes significant evidence-based content. toughstalk.nz

Voices of Hope

Aotearoa New Zealand website with campaigns, videos and blog to share stories of hope for surviving mental illness or distress and thriving. thevoicesofhope.org

Whaiora Online

Website with support for Whaiora (people wanting improve their health and wellbeing). See the Examples section below.

What's Up

Phone and webchat plus a website with information for kids, teens and families. Includes concise child and youth orientated information and tools for topics such as making friends, dating, identity, worries, depression and more. whatsup.co.nz

Youthline

Website with information and resources about wellbeing, common problems, mental health and other urgent challenges for young people, whānau and schools. Also offers links to webchat, phone and text support and includes opportunities to get involved and for inspiration – e.g. the Good2Great video series. youthline.co.nz

No longer funded

Aotearoa New Zealand has also developed and provided some digital mental health tools that are no longer available. These include Lifehack and Common Ground, both established via the Prime Minister's Youth Mental Health Package, and BRAVE Online, an evidence-based anxiety program for children and teens with a component for families.

Micro-interventions

'Micro-intervention' is a relatively new term referring to brief activities that are likely to support mental wellbeing but are not full etherapies or interventions on their own. Various Aotearoa New Zealand digital tools include micro-interventions that are likely to have positive impact. These include:

- A Te Ao Māori breathing exercise 'Hikitia Te Ha' offered on the All Right? website. allright.org.nz/tools/hikitia-te-ha
- Meditation and mindfulness exercises. Many websites and apps include guided meditations, e.g. calm.auckland.ac.nz includes free meditations and the Mana Moana programme (created by Dr Karlo Mila) includes Pacific focused meditations.
- Psychoeducation, an important component of effective interventions. Many Aotearoa digital tools included psychoeducation, e.g. The Lowdown, Depression.org, Mental Wealth and more.
- Mental health literacy focused minigames, such as those offered within Quest | Te Whitianga and SPARX.
- Problem solving interventions, such as Le Va's Aunty Dee.
- Gratitude diaries and mood monitors, such as those offered within the Melon app, Mentemia, the Quest | Te Whitianga and others.

International

In addition to these local resources, there are many international websites, apps and etherapies accessible to people in Aotearoa New Zealand. The App Store and Google Play offer apps organised by topic, user ratings and reviews, but not usually by country or clinical rating.

There are international ratings of app content and safety available. Public facing, independent and reputable sites reviewing publicly available online self-help mental health and wellbeing tools include HeadtoHealth and PsyberGuide.

In Australia, government funded site *headtohealth.govt.au* provides an overview of Australian e-mental health sites, forums, apps and online programs. Many of these have university and government partnerships and are informed by robust research.

One Mind PsyberGuide is a US based collaboration that rates mental health apps on credibility, user experience and transparency (*onemindpsyberguide.org/apps*). As of February 2021, free or freemium apps with credibility ratings over 4.5/5 and an acceptable or better transparency include Headspace, Happify, Calm, Cognifit, Moodmission, PTSD Coach, Superbetter and Woebot. A further six user-pays apps have credibility ratings over 4.5/5 and acceptable or better transparency. These include Beating the Blues and This Way Up.

Examples

ALL RIGHT?

All Right?

allright.org.nz

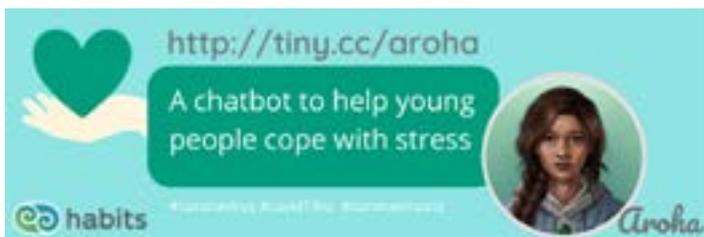
Website & mobile app, free to the public.



Who	What	How
<p>Targets Cantabrians going through tough times post-earthquakes, but available to anyone.</p> <p>By Canterbury DHB and the Mental Health Foundation.</p>	<p>Prevention and early intervention.</p>	<p>Website and app: Users select a change goal for a wellbeing boost and receive a regular 'mini mission' each day.</p> <p>The app rewards users with positive feedback and beads for completed missions.</p>

Additional Features

-  Includes content in te reo Māori.
-  Research background: Based on 5 ways to wellbeing allright.org.nz/research
-  Micro-intervention features: Psychoeducation, goal setting, breathing guidance (Hikitia Te Ha).



Aroha ChatBot

healthnavigator.org.nz/apps/a/aroha-chatbot

Web & mobile chatbot app (Facebook Messenger), free.



Who	What	How
<p>Targets young people aged 13–24.</p> <p>By Youth Resilience/HABITS team, The University of Auckland</p>	<p>To reduce stress during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing positive ways of coping.</p>	<p>Requires: Facebook Messenger (iOS, Android or Computer).</p> <p><i>Still in development.</i></p> <p>Aroha guides the user through practical ideas to maintain social connections, stay calm, active and well.</p> <p>Aroha chatbot requires Facebook to work and is completely text/image based (no videos). However, strong Māori focus and appealing colours.</p>

Additional Features



Includes content in te reo Māori.



Research background: Research-based with ongoing study by the HABITS research group.



Aunty Dee

auntydee.co.nz

Website & mobile app, free to the public.



Who	What	How
Targets Pacific and Māori youth. By Le Va.	Health promotion, prevention or early intervention.	Interactive website and app that guides users through a structured problem solving approach. Users can enter their problems and receive a list of potential solutions.

Additional Features

- ✓ Specifically targets Pacific and Māori youth aged 14–25.
- ✓ Research background: Based on an evidence-based psychotherapeutic approach.
- ✓ Micro-intervention features: Quick, interactive problem solving.



CALM: Computer Assisted Learning of the Mind

calm.auckland.ac.nz

Website, free to the public.



Who	What	How
<p>Developed for medical and other UOA students, but open to all.</p> <p>By Tony Fernando and David Birrell (medical practitioners) in association with The University of Auckland.</p>	<p>Health promotion, prevention and early intervention.</p>	<p>Website: Provides information and links on mental resilience, managing stress, anxiety and depression, healthy relationships, finding meaning in life. Includes guided meditations.</p>

Additional Features



Micro-intervention features: Guided meditation and psychoeducation.



depression.org.nz

depression.org.nz

Website, free to the public.



Who	What	How
Targets adults (18+) with depression and anxiety. By Te Hiringa Hauora/ Health Promotion Agency.	Health promotion, prevention, early intervention and direction to support services.	Website including mood quiz, stories, self-management tools, “small steps” and access to the depression helpline.

Additional Features



Includes content in te reo Māori.



Micro-intervention features: Psychoeducation, self-testing, small steps.



E Tū Whānau

etuwhanau.org.nz

Website & movement for positive change.



Who	What	How
<p>Targets Māori adults and whānau.</p> <p>By E Tū Whānau.</p>	<p>‘E Tū Whānau is a movement for positive change developed by Māori for Māori. It’s about taking responsibility and action in your community and supporting whānau to thrive.’</p>	<p>Information, activities and links to support whānau to connect with their whakapapa, Māori values and tikanga, and build individual and community connectedness and mana. Includes activities for whānau, videos, shareable posters and booklets, opportunities to become part of a community movement.</p>

Additional Features

- 

Includes content in te reo Māori.
- 

Includes individual and group focused resources and opportunities to get involved.
- 

Includes content for refugees and migrants.



Mana Restore

mentalwealth.nz/manarestore

Website, free to the public.



Who	What	How
Targets Pacific youth and gamers. By Le Va.	Health promotion, prevention and early intervention.	Website with a game-like look and brief, clear information about mental health and wellbeing topics including sleep and gaming.

Additional Features



Includes some Pacific focused content.



Mental Wealth

mentalwealth.nz

Website, free to the public.



Who	What	How
Targets Pacific youth, adults, and families. By Le Va.	Health promotion, early intervention, including mental health literacy skills.	Positively framed resources and information 'to make yourself rich in mental wealth, so you can support yourself and others'. Topics include sleep, mindfulness, eating well, alcohol, stigma, depression and anxiety.

Additional Features



Le Va's primary website (leva.co.nz) also provides fact sheets for building wellbeing and resilience specific to diverse Pacific groups.



Includes information and resources for parents, e.g. how to monitor screen time, links to other tools and 1737 live web chat.



Quest | Te Whitianga

Mobile app via app store. No public user-facing website at time of writing. Free to the public.



Who	What	How
Targets young people. By Youth Resilience/ HABITS team at the University of Auckland.	Early intervention.	Mobile app (iOS and Android): A smartphone game that helps young people cope with strong emotions and provides advice about life skills, based on CBT. It is a mobile app sequel to SPARX.

Additional Features



Research background: Developed by research team, testing is in progress and there are publications describing the evidence-based theory and development.



Micro-intervention features: Includes gratitude diary and mental health games.



Te Au

teaumaori.com

Website, free to the public.



Who	What	How
<p>Targets Māori communities and groups.</p> <p>By The National Māori Suicide Prevention Centre of Aotearoa.</p>	<p>Māori suicide prevention initiatives and crisis prevention.</p>	<p>Showcases initiatives supported by Te Au and the Māori Suicide Prevention Fund to support Māori individuals, whānau, iwi, hapū and communities to unleash their full potential, have the best possible health and wellbeing outcomes and prevent suicide. Includes videos, resources and links to support services and programmes.</p>

Additional Features



Includes content in te reo Māori.



The Lowdown

thelowdown.co.nz

Website, free to the public.



Who	What	How
<p>Targets young people aged 12–19 with anxiety and depression.</p> <p>By Te Hiringa Hauora/ Health Promotion Agency.</p>	<p>Health promotion, early intervention. Promotes mental health literacy, helpseeking and steps for wellbeing.</p>	<p>Website: Includes mood quiz, links for urgent help and activities, information and links for wellbeing and dealing with depression, anxiety or other problems.</p>

Additional Features



Micro-intervention features: Includes psychoeducation and activities.



Whaiora Online

whaioraonline.org.nz

Online community & website, free to the public.



Who	What	How
Targets Māori adults. By Whaiora Whanui (community-based health service).	Recovery.	Online community and website to support recovery for whaiora (people wanting improve their health and wellbeing).

Additional Features



Consumer representation and advocacy.