



mentalhealthonline

**Annual Report 2023**

# About MHO

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Mental Health Online is a digital mental health service (DMHS) delivered by the National eTherapy Centre at Swinburne University of Technology. Funded by the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care as part of its digital mental health strategy, Mental Health Online seeks to provide education, assessment, and treatment for common mental health problems in the Australian community.

Digital Mental Health Services, like Mental Health Online, are an important supplement to in-person services and provide an alternative source of mental health support [National Safety and Quality Digital Mental Health Standards, 2021].

We achieve this through three key activities:

1. Information: we provide high-quality information and resources to enable consumers and health care professionals to gain a comprehensive understanding of high prevalence mental health disorders generally, and of anxiety disorders in particular
2. Clinical assessment: an online psychological self-assessment enables consumers to obtain individualised mental health information that can inform a program selection and suggest referral options
3. Treatment programs: comprehensive and effective treatment programs, based on best evidenced therapeutic methods for the treatment of common mental health problems.

As well as providing evidence-based, self-paced and online mental health programs, Mental Health Online supports the development of the health care workforce through supporting postgraduate clinical psychology students through a placement program and contributes to the e-therapy evidence base through research and evaluation activities.

Our Model of Care emphasises a community focus, including integrated service delivery involving families, carers, GP and primary care services, private practitioners and organisations across the health care sector.



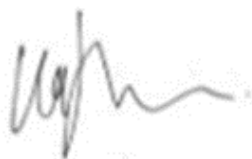
# Director's year in review

2023 has been an extraordinary year for MHO. With our operational team under the leadership of a new clinic director role, we have been pleased to implement a new web platform which will provide an improved user experience of our programs. Our new site was developed through a user-centred design process with users and therapists and will help to promote the accessibility of our evidence-based therapeutic programs.

Alongside this we have begun the process of accreditation of Mental Health Online in meeting the National Safety and Quality Digital Mental Health Standards. These recently introduced standards will ensure that digital mental health services funded by the Australian Government provide high quality services which are underpinned by strong quality assurance procedures, including clinical and data safety.

The past year was the first full year in which pandemic restrictions were no longer in effect. The 2020-22 era saw increasing demand for remotely delivered mental health services and helped the field of telehealth become a normal part of service delivery. We have continued to see sustained user demand for MHO through 2023. As we progress into 2024, an era in which digital mental health has been normalised, we will be addressing the important issue facing all services of improving equity of access across the diversity of our health populations. This will continue service user consultation through our consumer advisory group and considering ways to improve access for different populations.

Overall, we are pleased to report on the activities of our service in 2023 and look forward to continuing service improvements into 2024.



Neil Thomas  
Professor Neil Thomas FAIDH  
Director, National eTherapy Centre



# Operational Highlights

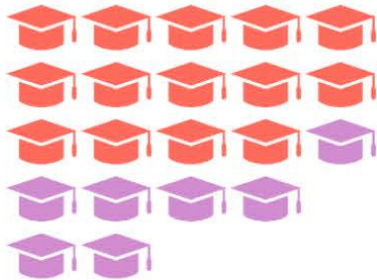
mentalhealthonline  
January – December 2023

## Students

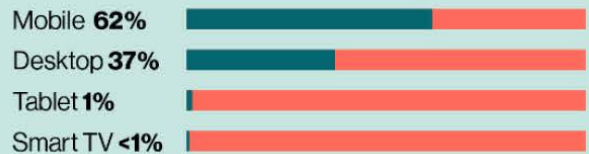
Students total - 21

Jan - June 2023 - 14

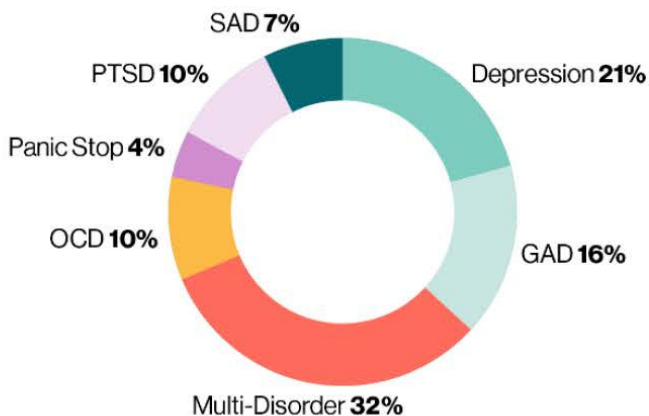
Jul - Dec 2023 - 7



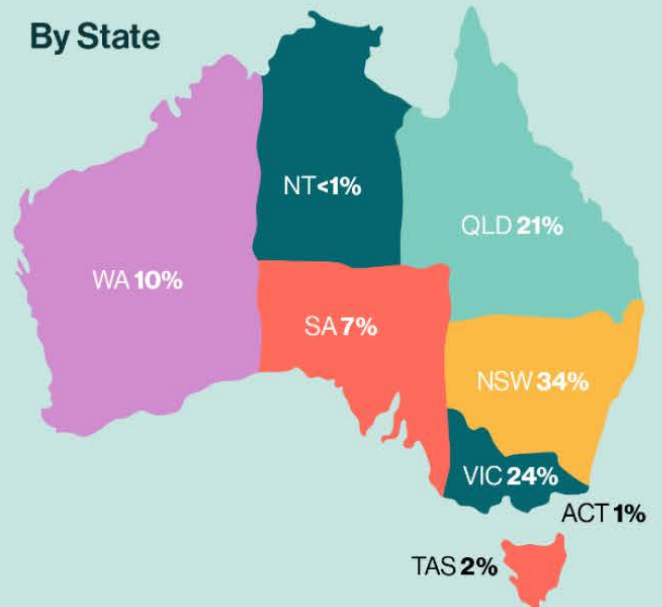
## By Device



## Program Registration 2023



## By State



## Visitors



72,359

## Users



10,140

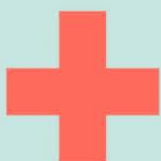


3,877 Programs

258

Therapist Assist Clients

## Health Professionals



236

3,788



Completions

# Who are MHO Service Users?

Demographics	All users	ePASS users	Program users	Therapist Assist clients
	%	%	%	%
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	78	78	78	77
Male	19	19	19	19
Prefer Not to Say	1	1	1	1
Prefer to self-describe	2	2	2	3
<b>Age</b>				
18-24	26	25	18	8
25-34	35	35	35	26
35-44	23	24	26	35
45-59	13	13	16	24
60+	3	3	5	7
<b>Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Status</b>				
Aboriginal	8	7	6	3
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1	1	1	0
Torres Strait Islander	<1	<1	<1	0
Neither Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	90	92	93	97
<b>Sexuality</b>				
Bisexual	15	14	12	4
Lesbian	2	3	3	6
Gay	1	2	1	1
Queer	3	3	3	1
Pansexual	<1	<1	0	0
Other: Please Specify	3	3	3	1
I do not wish to disclose	6	6	6	6
Heterosexual	69	70	72	79

Note. Missing data has been omitted, and proportion of missing data varies by user type

# Delivering safe, high-quality care

In 2023, Mental Health Online surpassed all safety and quality benchmarks:

## Partnering with consumers

- Feedback resolved  $\geq 80\%$
- Complaints resolved within 20 business days\*  $\geq 80\%$
- Initial contact with complainants made within 3 business days  $\geq 80\%$
- Effectively collaborating with clients in decision-making relating to care  $\geq 80\%$
- Therapist considered clients' individual priorities and needs  $\geq 80\%$

## Program effectiveness

- Program modules easy to understand  $\geq 80\%$
- Positive change to mental health  $\geq 80\%$

## Compliance

- Risk responded to within 1 business day  $\geq 80\%$
- Records compliant with Health Records Policy  $\geq 80\%$

## Access

- Access programs and/or communicate with your therapist using enabling technologies?  
\*\*  $\geq 80\%$

## Support for therapists on placement

- Adequacy of supervision  $\geq 80\%$
- Would recommend a placement at MHO to a colleague  $\geq 80\%$

## Additional safety and quality highlights

- In December 2023, Mental Health Online underwent the first stage of accreditation towards the National Safety and Quality Digital Mental Health Standards. This will be completed in 2024.
- As MHO launched the website on a new platform in November 2023, we also undertook security testing, accessibility auditing, and privacy impact assessment

\* No complaints were received in 2023

\*\* No respondents of the MHO Exit Survey endorsed using enabling technologies



# Performance and effectiveness

In 2023, MHO met all key performance indicators set by the Department of Health:

1. Create and deliver evidence-based online mental health content aligned to improving mental health outcomes.
2. Deliver free online mental health assessment and referral information.
3. Deliver free immediate access to evidence-based and expert reviewed treatment programs for high prevalence mental health disorders.
4. Deliver free to health professionals and mental health service delivery organisations progressive, accessible, and best practice assessment and treatment resources for adaptation and use within their existing models of service/care.
5. Deliver free health care practitioner portal access to evidence based treatment programs enabling them to integrate e-mental health into their professional practice.
6. Deliver free online therapy training programs for post-graduate students and their supervisors.
7. Promote service delivery growth through community engagement and social marketing.
8. Increase brand awareness and brand strength.

Additional effectiveness highlights:

- Therapist Assist clients rated their mental health improvement overall as significantly, positively improved

## Research

MHO Therapist Assist clients completed optional measures and surveys about their mental health to evaluate the effectiveness of our Therapist Assisted programs. **Clients reported significant, large improvements in psychological distress after completing their program**

The ACTION research project continued throughout 2023. **ACTION involves a brief, behavioural activation for depression with email support from a therapist.** An additional 15 participants enrolled in and completed the program in 2023, providing feedback on the program which will shape its continued development.

Four research students (1 PhD and 3 Masters students) **were based with MHO in 2023.**

NeTC Director Neil Thomas began participant enrollments for a nationwide National Health and Medical Research Council funded trial examining the **use of avatars to support therapeutic role-plays during remotely delivered therapy**

# Research (continued)

Our team received a **collaborative grant from the Australia-Germany Joint Research Cooperation Scheme** to examine the potential **integration of smartphone-based ecological momentary assessment** within service delivery over 2024-25.

Our work on using virtual reality to support learning mindfulness skills was **featured in publications in Frontiers in Virtual Reality, and Journal of Medical Internet Research.**

Members of the team have been involved in **collaborative research** including:

- **Publication of resources** to develop local frameworks for addressing mental health literacy needs
- Establishing an **understanding of potential adverse effects of digital interventions and associated monitoring procedures**
- Developing the **use of virtual worlds for service delivery**
- Examining **global health priorities for the use of digital technology in healthcare.**
- Use of **virtual reality exposure therapy** in the treatment of severe mental illness

# Projects

**In November 2023, Mental Health Online launched our website** on a new platform to offer more personalised, easier to navigate, and more intuitive experience.

This re-launch involved the development of a **new treatment program, the Depression-Anxiety program.**

Throughout 2023, Mental Health Online undertook a project to establish **a new consumer advisory group.** The first meeting of the group is planned for early 2024

# Governance

In 2023, MHO undertook a revision of governance structures in line with organisational changes within Swinburne University, as outlined within the MHO Governance Framework. This included establishing a new Governance Committee.





# The Mental Health Online Team thanks you for your support

For any comments, questions or feedback about the content of this report, please email [contactmho@swin.edu.au](mailto:contactmho@swin.edu.au)

