



Mental health care is not a one-size-fits-all solution:

The importance of in-person as well as digital modalities in mental health care.

A study from TELUS Health (Formerly LifeWorks) found that nearly one in five (19%) Australian workers report having a mental health condition or issue. The need is strong, but not everyone seeks care. Digital interventions have been developed over the past two decades and have the potential to address several barriers to mental health care, such as stigma, time, and accessibility in remote locations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also accelerated the development and adoption of such tools, however during the pandemic, in spite of an increase in need, one out of four people delayed getting the care they needed; and many of them did so because they were waiting for the in-person option to return. Digital modalities are critical to increasing the ease of access to care, but in-person modalities continue to be essential and must remain available in mental health care offering.

Why offering in-person support.

One of the main reasons to keep offering in-person care is simply personal preference. Individuals value greatly in-person modality option when reaching out for mental health support.

- More than half (54%) of Australian workers indicate they prefer some level of in-person modality when accessing mental health support with more than one-third (41%) indicating in-person support with a counsellor as their preference. (Mental Health Index by TELUS Health, 2023).
- Additional studies targeting different populations also reported that face-to-face counselling or in-person psychotherapy was the preferred modality of accessing care (Wong et al., *Frontiers in Psychology* 2018; Renn et al., *npj Digital Medicine* 2019).

Meeting in person can help establish trust and a deeper therapeutic relationship, which can be important for successful treatment.

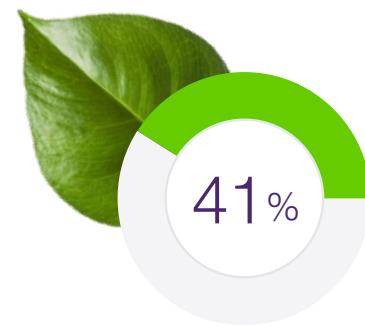
While there is strong evidence that digital interventions are as efficient as in-person interventions for mood and anxiety disorders of mild to moderate severity, in-person support has better outcomes for certain complex mental health problems (Gareti et al., *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2021) and is recommended by the medical community in specific cases.

- Face-to-face interventions is recommended for moderate to severe depression as well as for specific anxiety disorder (PTSD, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder) (*The Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) Manual*, NHS 2021).
- Face-to-face interventions are recommended for people with persistent sub-threshold depressive symptoms or mild to moderate depression who have not benefited from self-guided interventions (*IAPT Manual*, NHS 2021).
- In-person interventions can be particularly beneficial for specific demographics, such as children and family interventions. (Grist et al., *Clinical child and family psychology review*, 2019).

In-person interventions may also yield stronger outcomes in situations where there is comorbidity/co-occurrence of disorders.



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41% indicate they prefer in-person support with a counsellor.



In-person sessions can help establish trust and a deeper therapeutic relationship.

The importance of a human touch.

Even in digital settings, the importance of a human touch must not be disregarded. Guidance from counsellors or therapists within iCBT interventions, both asynchronous and synchronous, is a key driver of clinical improvements. Human guidance may also increase user engagement. (Lattie et al., *Nature Reviews Psychology*, 2022). While one could argue that video counselling provides a human touch, in some cases, where the issue itself involves challenges in human connection, in-person may be advisable.

- While unguided interventions have demonstrated efficacy relative to control conditions, e.g. wait-list, for common mental health problems such as depression and generalised anxiety disorder, the effects are smaller than for those that are guided by a counsellor.

Overall, while digital platforms have made mental health services more accessible, it is important to keep the option of in-person sessions available so that individuals can choose the modality that works best for them, to not exclude certain groups who may not be able to communicate well virtually, and to ensure the proper care modality is used for mental health conditions where it matters.



What can leaders and organisations do about it.

Organisations play a key role in supporting employee's mental health. Employees who feel their mental health is supported by their employer have better mental health than those who do not feel supported. What employers do matters. With 77% of employees having a high or moderate mental health risk (Mental Health Index by TELUS Health, 2023), it is more important than ever for employers to provide the support their employees need to be well. [TELUS Health Employee Assistance Programme](#) offers personalised care that is accessible by phone, virtually, or in-person. With immediate access to specialised professionals in counselling, social work, human services and psychology, employees can focus on what matters, their journey toward improving their wellbeing.

