

# Environmental scan and literature review of existing assessment tools and related initiatives for mental health apps

## Mental Health Commission of Canada — Request for Proposals

**Submission Deadline: 11:59 p.m. ET, Thursday, October 8, 2020**

### Background

In any given year, one in five people in Canada will experience a mental health problem or illness — including substance use. By age 40, half will either be living with or will have had experience with one or more mental health problems or illnesses. Since 2007, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) has worked to support the mental health and wellness of people in Canada by leading the development and dissemination of innovative programs and tools. Through its unique mandate from the Government of Canada, the MHCC helps federal and provincial/territorial (PT) governments and organizations incorporate best evidence into public policy through research and knowledge translation.

Our 2012 guiding document, the [Mental Health Strategy for Canada](#), called for the expansion of telehealth and e-mental health (E-MH) through better infrastructure, ongoing training and support, and greater funding flexibility. To foster such development, the MHCC is engaged in ongoing E-MH research, implementation, and evaluation projects.

We are also disseminating knowledge through tools and resources such as the [E-MH Implementation Toolkit](#), which includes a set of strategies to plan and initiate E-MH innovation and practice. In addition, the MHCC has created an [app evaluation framework](#), in partnership with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, that sets out guiding principles and assessment criteria to help people make more informed decisions on mental health apps. Whether it's organizations looking for mental health tools, health-care providers seeking to make good recommendations to their clients, or app developers working to improve their products, this framework has proven itself useful to many. The MHCC continues to explore its further development to complement any future standards on mental health apps and related app libraries.

Based on these and other E-MH activities, the MHCC has identified a need to manage the rapid expansion of apps to help people make better informed decisions when seeking to meet their mental health care needs. Privacy, security, quality, and the lack of a solid evidence base prior to entering the market are areas of concern when choosing mental health apps. Consequently, stakeholders have asked for more specificity and coordination around the apps designed for mental health care. For example, care providers are finding it challenging to recommend safe and effective apps, convey timely information (due to the volume of apps), and set aside the necessary time and skills to evaluate them.

## Project scope

In its efforts to inform sound mental health policy and practice, the MHCC is inviting proposals for the following four products:

1. An **environmental scan** to examine the Canadian and international mental health and addiction landscape (public and private) and identify existing assessment tools and related initiatives for mental health apps. At a minimum, the investigation will include the following:
  - a list of mental health app assessment tools and related initiatives
  - overall considerations and findings based on the list compiled
  - evidence and other details about mental health app assessment tools, standards, guidelines and/or accreditation. The evidence may include:
    - the intersection between populations, identities, and life stages
    - private mental health app assessment frameworks
    - app privacy assessment tools
    - ethical and policy considerations
2. Draft and final reports (literature review) that include qualitative data on key themes and findings and the areas of strength and needed improvement for mental health app assessment tools and related initiatives. At a minimum, the **literature review** will include the following:
  - a list and review of key documents related to mental health app assessment tools and related initiatives
  - an outline of how ethical and policy considerations are addressed in the literature, including distinct issues across the lifespan and for specific population groups
3. A **stakeholder map** (this activity is required first – see dates below) that includes those identified through key informant interviews (see below). Mapping should consider the following question:
  - Which organizations, individuals, and professions are involved with mental health app assessment tools, standards, guidelines and/or accreditation? This may include:
    - mental health and substance use professionals (psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, occupational therapists, addiction counsellors, etc.)
    - organizations and individuals who have contributed to existing app evaluation frameworks
    - organizations and individuals who provide the service of maintaining a library or list of apps
    - app developers, accreditors, and evaluators
    - people with lived experience of mental illness or substance use
4. An **executive summary** of findings highlighting short- and long-term opportunities and suggested next steps for the MHCC. The summary, at minimum, will include the following:
  - adequate information to guide the MHCC in shaping the future direction of its activities on the development of key evaluative and informative criteria for mental health apps
    - The overarching goal is to strengthen relationships, funding alignment, and engagement with stakeholders, including health-care providers, policy makers, and decision makers, in determining standards or accreditation for mental health apps.

## Supporting activity

- **Five key informant interviews** with health leaders/stakeholders. The contractor has the option to use focus groups or a survey as an alternative to interviews. (A rationale should be provided for the method selected.)
  - This activity should support the establishment of the scope for the four products (environmental scan, literature review, stakeholder map, and executive summary).

**Note:** The MHCC will retain the intellectual property rights of the content developed. Co-branding and shared knowledge translation opportunities may be available.

## Preliminary considerations

The selected contractor will be expected to address key considerations, dimensions, and limitations in the available evidence and information. This will include the following:

- (a) Provide responses to key questions:
  - What are the challenges associated with implementing app assessment, and what have others done to overcome those challenges?
  - What mental health app assessment tools are currently being used, and how have they been implemented successfully?
  - Are the mental health app assessment tools and related initiatives culturally sensitive?
  - What are the limitations of mental health app assessment tools and related initiatives?
    - Is the tool user-friendly?
    - Is it co-designed by health-care providers and people with lived and living experience?
- (b) Define common terminology:
  - mental health apps
  - app evaluation tools, guidelines, standards, and accreditation
  - high-quality mental health apps
- (c) Determine how mental health app assessment tools and related initiatives intersect across life stages and populations:
  - life stages —
    - youth
    - emerging adults
    - adults
    - seniors
  - populations —
    - Immigrant, refugee, ethnocultural, and racialized
    - First Nations
    - Inuit
    - Métis
    - LGBTQ2+
    - gender differences
    - minority languages

## Deliverables and budget

1. Finalized project plan and budget (due no later than Wednesday, November 4, 2020)
  - \$50,000 is available for completing the four deliverables (environmental scan, literature review, stakeholder map, executive summary) and the key informant interviews (supporting activity).
    - Please submit a detailed budget for how the money will be allocated.
    - Please include any in-kind contributions to this work.
2. Stakeholder map (due no later than Monday, November 16, 2020)
3. Proposed scope for the scan and search parameters for the literature review (due no later than Friday, December 11, 2020)
4. Draft environmental scan and literature review (due no later than Monday, February 1, 2021)
5. Research validation through key informant interviews (with notes and/or transcripts provided to the MHCC) (February 4-15, 2021)
6. Final environmental scan, literature review, stakeholder map, and executive summary (due no later than Friday, February 26, 2021)

## Key dates

- Deadline on requests for additional information:<sup>1</sup> Tuesday, October 6, 2020
- **Deadline to submit proposals: Thursday, October 8, 2020**
- Confirmation of the selected contractor: Monday, October 19, 2020
- Expected contract start date: Monday, October 26, 2020
- Kick off call/meeting: week of October 26, 2020
- Completed stakeholder map: Monday, November 16, 2020
- First draft of environmental scan and literature review: Monday, February 1, 2021
- Final draft of deliverables: Friday, February 26, 2021

## Requirements for the proposal and budget

- A project plan that focuses on objectives, methodology, activity timelines, and budget (including GST/HST/PST), no more than four pages
- The names, roles, and biographies or CVs of the project team member(s)
- Two examples of prior research projects or similar initiatives
- Two references (optional)
- A list of other individuals or organizations you plan to draw on or engage with to complete the work

## Evaluation criteria

1. A demonstrated history of writing and publishing on mental health and substance use
2. A demonstrated familiarity with key concepts in mental health app evaluation, frameworks, and guidelines

---

<sup>1</sup> Every effort will be made to respond within 48 hours.

3. An adequate human resource capacity to meet the identified timelines
4. An ability to complete the project within the available budget

## How to send your proposal

Please send your proposal to Sapna Wadhawan, MHCC Program Manager, Access to Quality Mental Health Services at [swadhawan@mentalhealthcommission.ca](mailto:swadhawan@mentalhealthcommission.ca) by Thursday, October 8, using the subject line: Proposal for scan of mental health app assessment tools and related initiatives.