



Healthcare
Improvement
Scotland

SHTG
Advice on health
technologies

Plain Language Summary

SHTG Assessment

Togetherall | July 2022

What is Togetherall and who is it for?

Togetherall is a web-based subscription service that provides mental health and well-being support to people over the age of 16 years. It is made up of different online components such as a space to talk to other people going through a similar experience, tools to self assess mental health concerns, self help articles, training courses and tools for artistic expression. The service is available 24 hours a day and is continually monitored and moderated by trained mental health professionals. Togetherall is not meant for people in crises, but has procedures in place to respond when someone is in extreme distress.

SHTG was asked by the Digital Mental Health team at Scottish Government to consider if making Togetherall available in Scotland would be helpful for people needing mental health support.

Why is this important?

Mental ill health is one of the major public health challenges in Scotland. Around one in four adults are estimated to be affected by mental health issues in any one year. At any point in time approximately one in six adults will be experiencing a mental health problem. The number of people affected has grown over the last decade and services are struggling to cope. Many people who may benefit from help are not receiving it and the COVID-19 pandemic has made the situation worse.

Online services such as Togetherall could supplement the care already provided by our mental health services by providing access at any time, support for people on waiting lists, and by reaching people who may not otherwise contact mental health services. It also offers an alternative to people who might find face-to-face services challenging.

There are safety and equality issues to consider before using the internet to provide therapy. These include protecting users' data protection, making sure the service is accessible to all, that is safe to use and that it doesn't increase inequalities.

What we did

We reviewed published trials, studies and evaluations that assessed how effective Togetherall was at improving mental health and well-being, for example in reducing levels of anxiety or depression. We also reviewed studies that examined the views of people who have used the service already or might use it in the future. We looked at barriers and facilitators to implementing the service. Lastly, we looked at whether or not Togetherall would offer value for money to NHSScotland.

We also talked to patient and public interest groups, clinical experts and the developers of Togetherall. This gave us information about whether or not Togetherall is easy to use, how it complies with data protection guidance, how secure it is and whether or not it is able to link with other clinical systems.

What we found

We found two randomised controlled trials (RCTs). One looked at the use of Togetherall for patients in Canada who, following referral to specialised mental health services, had been offered either immediate or delayed access to Togetherall. The trial found that while the people who had immediate access to Togetherall showed some improvements they were not clinically important. A high number of people dropped out of the trial, which means we can't be certain of the results. The second trial took place in Nottinghamshire. It compared access to Togetherall with access to a web-based information service that only provided information. The people taking part were recruited via a public health campaign. Not enough people took part in the study to be able to make any conclusions about the effectiveness of Togetherall.

What is our conclusion?

Togetherall is made up of different components that can help people to improve their mental health. It is difficult to determine its overall effectiveness as it provides a broad range of support across a population to individuals with a wide spectrum of needs. The small amount of published evidence on the effectiveness of Togetherall in addition to standard practice, does not demonstrate a significant clinical improvement for people who have used it. The studies show other benefits for participants such as being able to access mental health support out of hours. The overall rates of use reported in the studies were low, but there were some people

who used the service to a much greater degree than others. The extent to which people use the service might depend on factors such as how aware of the service they are, or their well-being when offered access. We didn't find any studies that looked at the value to the NHS. Some cost data were available to show where cost reductions through use of Togetherall could be achieved.

Neither the studies identified or the consultations with stakeholders identified any major safety or technical concerns from the use of Togetherall.

Digital services like this have the potential to both reduce and increase the existing inequalities experienced by service users. Careful monitoring and promotion of the service with any additional support needed by particular groups would be essential to minimise this.

Research into the effectiveness of Togetherall is ongoing. It is important to continue to collect evidence about the impact of Togetherall on clinical outcomes and patient benefits, and to establish the acceptability of Togetherall with users.

What next?

This report will be shared with Scottish Government to assist in their considerations of digital mental health service provision for the population of Scotland.

This plain language summary has been produced based on SHTG Assessment, July 2022