

Media note: EMBARGOED until midnight October 9th 2013

New app to improve Indigenous mental health featured on World Mental Health Day

Thursday, 10 October 2013

An innovative iPad app based on tools developed by Indigenous people for Indigenous people is hoping to address one of the nation's fastest growing health problems.

National health surveys show that Indigenous adults are more than twice as likely to experience emotional distress than non-Indigenous adults.

Similarly, mental health disorders are the second largest contributor to the total disease burden of Indigenous Australians accounting for 15 per cent of the total disease burden.

Developed by the Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies), in partnership with the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), the AIMhi Stay Strong iPad App has been designed to promote wellbeing by looking at strengths, worries and the goals or changes people would like to achieve in their lives.

Menzies Associate Professor Tricia Nagel said the AIMhi Stay Strong App will assist services to deliver cost-effective, evidence-based substance misuse and mental health interventions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

"With World Mental Health Day on 10 October it's important to remember that mental health is more than just treating mental illnesses; it is about our overall emotional wellbeing which is so important for positive health and life outcomes."

"The app centers around the client's strengths and worries and sets goals for change," Assoc Prof Nagel said.

Clients are first asked to identify the people in their life that help keep them strong, their relationships and the role they play in the person's life.

They are then asked to identify their strengths in four areas of their life and this is represented visually as leaves on a tree. As they input more strengths, the leaves grow stronger and healthier.

Similarly, clients are asked to identify things in their life that take away their strength in same four areas. As they input more worries, the leaves on the tree wilt and change colour.

"Clients are then left with a visual representation of the areas in their life where they are strong and the areas in their life where they are not as strong," Assoc Prof Nagel said.

"The process is assisted and supported by the health provider and provides help text and audio instructions to reduce the impact of low computer or English literacy.

"A summary of the Stay Strong Plan can then be emailed and printed to keep a record of the session for clients and health providers."

Menzies and QUT are in the process of trialing the Stay Strong iPad App with selected health service providers and a limited preview is available at www.menzies.edu.au/aimhiapp.

Training in the app will be delivered without charge to primary care providers in the Northern Territory from October 2013. It's anticipated the app will be publically available through iTunes by 2014.

Since its launch in 2003 AIMhi has given Indigenous service providers and communities a range of tools to recognise and overcome the problems causing mental illness, such as social issues, work and family stress. These can be accessed at www.menzies.edu.au/mentalhealthresources.

Media contact: Richmond Hodgson

communications@menzies.edu.au; 08 8922 8598; 0408 128 099

Menzies Background

Menzies School of Health Research are Australia's only Medical Research Institute dedicated to improving Indigenous health and wellbeing. We have a 27-year history of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies work at the frontline and collaborate broadly, partnering with over 60 Indigenous communities across Northern Australia to create resources, grow local skills, and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.