Calm Health

FOR EMPLOYERS

Healthy Minds:

5 Pillars for Improving Mental Health at Scale with Digital Apps

Unmet mental health needs

Expanded provider networks. New teletherapy options. A modernized employee assistance program (EAP) that offers an extensive array of services. If you're like most HR leaders, you've taken a lot of steps to help employees and their families get the mental health care they need when they need it.

But access remains a huge challenge, and too many people are left untreated. **Sixty percent of youth** with major depression in 2023 didn't receive any mental health treatment, for example.

Of course, the access challenge isn't just about the severe shortage of mental health providers. Stigma and cost play a significant role, along with social determinants of health and the lack of available culturally responsive care. What's more, in our fragmented system of care, employees often don't know where to turn for mental health support or don't stay engaged once they find it.

>35%	of the US population lives in a mental health professional shortage area

46%	of Black adults report difficulty finding a provider who can understand their background and experience

~5%	of employees use their EAP

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Why digital mental health apps are key

Although digital mental health apps can't replace the deep, empathetic human connection that great therapists provide, they can play a pivotal role in driving access and engagement, which are pivotal to positive cost and health outcomes. Digital apps can do this by:

Reaching people in need at scale

Reaching people before they have a serious mental health condition is the sweet spot of digital mental health solutions, said Dr. Chris Mosunic, chief clinical officer of Calm. "It might feel like everyone is dealing with an anxiety disorder, but the majority of the population— about 75%—actually falls in the subclinical space. This is where digital mental health is at its best."

In this space, digital mental health apps can support people with stress, mild depressive symptoms, anxiousness, insomnia, or other challenges before they escalate into more serious mental health challenges.

By offering accessible support that's convenient and confidential, digital mental health apps can reach:

- ✓ People before they're in crisis,
- ✓ Teens where they are (on their phones),
- ✓ Underserved populations at scale.

Digital solutions also can be a safe, stigma-free on-ramp to mental health care that people can access immediately.

94% of employees say focusing on preventive health care is somewhat or very important

76% of teens and young adults with mild depressive symptoms say the mobile health apps they've used are very or somewhat helpful

Simplifying navigation

Over half of employees (**51%**) feel overwhelmed when they try to figure out how to navigate the healthcare system, and fewer than **20%** use their mental health benefits.

It's not surprising that implementing care navigation services is the highest strategic priority for HR leaders—or that **more than half of employers** plan to implement an engagement platform in the next three years to help employees navigate their health benefits.

An alternative strategy is adopting digital mental health solutions that can guide employees to the resources available to them.

By meeting people where they are and centralizing access to mental health resources, digital apps can:

- ✓ Simplify care navigation for employees and their family members

- ✓ Facilitate employee engagement with the right level of support

- ✓ Improve utilization of mental health resources

44% of insured adults who didn't receive needed mental health care say they couldn't find a provider they trust

36% say they didn't know how to find care

Bridging the gap between mental and physical health care

The concept of whole-person health has gained wide acceptance, but solutions that connect physical and mental health care have been lagging. For example, adoption of **collaborative care** models has been low despite the proven effectiveness of integrating behavioral health and primary care using a team-based approach.

In the absence of collaborative care at scale, digital apps can take on important elements of these models, including:

- ✔ Offering 24x7 access to screening tools to help people identify potential mental health challenges early and take action

- ✔ Screening people for depression and anxiety using questions from the **Patient Health Questionnaire 9 (PHQ-9)** (depression symptoms) and **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7)** (anxiety symptoms)

- ✔ Triaging users to the right level of mental health support

95% of all mental health providers are practicing in siloed settings

~80% of people with mental health challenges seek care in primary care settings

> "
> *We've found that early identification and treatment leads to better outcomes. Early treatment may also lessen long-term disability and prevent years of suffering. Health care screenings are common in this country, and mental health screenings should be no exception."[1]*

National Alliance on Mental Illness

1. National Alliance on Mental Illness. (2024). Mental Health Screening. https://www.nami.org/Advocacy/Policy-Priorities/Improving-Health/Mental-Health-Screening

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# Improving Mental Health Access, Engagement, and Outcomes

With <u>tens of thousands</u> of mobile apps available to support mental health, it's hard to know which solutions can reach people in need at scale, simplify care navigation, and bridge mental and physical health care—and ultimately move the needle on engagement, access, and outcomes.

To make a positive impact on mental health, digital mental health apps need to meet specific criteria. Here are five key attributes to look for as you evaluate solutions.
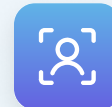
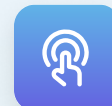## **5 Pillars** of Impactful Digital Apps
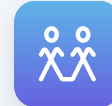
Tailored for the underserved
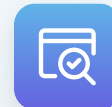
Evidence based

Personalized

Integrated

Compelling

Tailored for the underserved

Communities facing discrimination

A person's mental health doesn't exist in a vacuum; it's inextricably tied to their life experience and their physical health. For example, Black people experience higher levels of daily and chronic stressors—such as exclusion, microaggressions, or bullying—which puts them at higher risk of stress, anxiety, depression, and substance-use disorders. Prolonged stress, in turn, makes them more susceptible to stress-related illnesses, such as cardiovascular disease and hypertension.

Similarly, amid growing hostility in the political and social landscape, LGBTQ+ people are at higher risk of mental distress, depression, suicide, and cardiovascular disease.

Unfortunately, these and other marginalized communities commonly face a wide range of barriers to care, including bias, stigma, and a lack of culturally relevant support.

To support these underserved populations, look for digital mental health apps that feature:

- ✓ Support from psychologists who specialize in culturally relevant care
- ✓ Content that speaks directly to the health experiences of Black, LGBTQ+, and other communities facing chronic stressors
- ✓ Broad native-language support
- ✓ Diverse content developers and narrators

Hypertension & Health for Your Black Wellness is a Calm Health stress-management program designed to foster well-being among Black people and help with hypertension through evidence-based, culturally relevant exercises.

Only 14% of mental health apps have Spanish-language operability, but the Hispanic and Latino community represents the largest non-White community in the US

People with occupational stress and trauma

When it comes to mental health support, marginalized communities aren't the only underserved populations. Military personnel, first responders, healthcare workers, and veterinarians are among the professionals who are exposed to long or irregular work hours, high-stress environments, and traumatic events but often don't receive the care they need. Shame, stigma, time constraints, lack of available resources, and fear of disciplinary action are some of the reasons.

- Members of the military often fear seeking mental health support due to potential impacts on their active-duty status.

- Many states don't allow physicians to practice if they have a mental health diagnosis or they're in treatment.

Broaden your thinking about who represents an underserved population. Caregivers and parents, for example, are also underserved.

67% of nurses report feeling stressed, and 25% feel symptoms of depression

>50% of firefighter deaths are due to stress and exhaustion

Look for digital mental health resources that:

- ✓ Are developed by licensed clinical psychologists with expertise addressing the unique challenges of underserved populations

- ✓ Don't require a diagnosis or prescription to use

- ✓ Provide essential information to people about the challenges of their roles

> " It's hard to reach the military population because they often fear seeking mental health help due to potential impacts on their active-duty status. Our model allows them to access programming without getting a diagnosis or treatment, which can address their unique issues."

Dr. Chris Mosunic
Chief Clinical Officer at Calm

People with chronic conditions

More than half (52%) of employee respondents to a **One Medical survey** are struggling with at least one chronic condition. Unfortunately, most people with chronic conditions are not receiving the mental health support they need. People with diabetes are three times more likely to struggle with depression, but only **25% to 50%** are diagnosed and treated for it, for example.

Worse, some people receive poor-quality mental health care for their condition. Cancer patients, for instance, often don't receive a referral to a mental health provider specializing in cancer. "If the provider is a generally trained therapist, they could say something toxically positive or worse to a patient," said Dr. Mosunic. "The good news is there are psychologists with specialized expertise in cancer and other conditions, and digital solutions can bring their messaging to the masses."

Look for digital mental health programs that:

✓ Are developed by licensed clinical psychologists with deep subject-matter expertise in specific conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, hypertension, and chronic pain

✓ Connect with listeners about the mental and emotional side of their condition with empathy and authenticity (not AI)

74% of employees want to manage their chronic conditions with lifestyle changes, rather than medications alone

> "
> *I trialed the Calm Health app, and I was quite shocked at how authentic and honest it felt. It felt like someone else going through cancer treatment beside me, saying 'Hey we've been there. We've experienced the toxic positivity. We've experienced the scanxiety. We know what you're feeling and you're not alone.'"*

Sara Machnik
Executive Director, Bloom Club

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Evidence based

When you have an ear infection, you can expect to receive a prescription for antibiotics. When it comes to mental health care, however, people don't know what to expect in terms of quality care. It's important to establish evidence-based mental health care as the quality standard.

"The answer is having the consumer understand what the best experience looks like and start to have that standard play out through their experience," said Dr. Mosunic. "A patient should be able to expect that filling out a questionnaire screening for their provider is a good thing for them, the provider, and the payer—that the whole system is working better together."

Adopting digital solutions that apply evidence based practice can help employers deliver effective mental health support to employees at scale.

Look for digital mental health solutions that offer resources:

- ✅ Based on principles of proven, **evidence based** therapy models, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)

- ✅ Developed by licensed clinicians to ensure a high standard of safety and efficacy

> "
> *There is a clear, urgent need for the rapid deployment of digital mental health interventions (DMHIs) to address the mental health needs of various populations. Technology companies . . . who aim to implement DMHIs must do so with an evidence-based approach and equity framework."*[2]
>
> **Susanna Park, Chloe Sigmon, Debra Boeldt**
> National Mental Health Innovation Center, University of Colorado

2. Park SY, Nicksic Sigmon C, Boeldt D. A Framework for the Implementation of Digital Mental Health Interventions: The Importance of Feasibility and Acceptability Research. Cureus. 2022 Sep 19;14(9):e29329. doi: 10.7759/cureus.29329. PMID: 36277565; PMCID: PMC9580609.

Pillar Three

Personalized

In the wake of the pandemic, when online engagement soared, consumers have come to **expect personalization in all digital interactions,** says consulting firm McKinsey & Company. "From web to mobile and in-person interactions, consumers now view **personalization as the default standard** for engagement."

Personalization is perhaps nowhere more important than in the realm of digital mental health support—not just to meet consumer expectations and drive engagement but to deliver positive health outcomes.

Indeed, tailored digital interventions have been shown to **significantly reduce depression and anxiety in employees** with higher levels of psychological distress. And they have promising results in terms of improving sleep and reducing stress levels, presenteeism, and physical symptoms related to somatization.

Look for mental health apps that:

- ✓ Use an assessment tool to determine a user's level of acuity and recommend content

- ✓ Prompt the user to retake the assessment regularly to ensure that personalized recommendations stay appropriate

- ✓ Incorporate a user's self-reported goals into a personalized mental health plan

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Integrated

No single digital solution can address all mental health needs, so it's vital they work together. By integrating with other solutions, digital apps can simplify navigation and more efficiently get people to the right care.

A thriving holistic health ecosystem is anchored by a digital solution that engages people even when they're not actively seeking support, assesses the frequency of their depression or anxiety symptoms, and quickly guides them to mental health resources based on their level of acuity.

For example, if an employee's assessment shows they have symptoms of moderate anxiety or depression, they could be guided to their EAP for counseling. If an employee indicates they're struggling with a specific condition such as cancer or ADHD, they could be directed to specialized clinical programs or partner apps for those conditions.

Look for digital mental health apps that:

✔ Centralize and integrate with a wide spectrum of mental health resources

✔ Assess mental health acuity and perform triage

✔ Guide employees to appropriate, trusted mental health resources

91% of employees said access to experts to help them navigate health care is a top priority

87% of employees said access to mental health solutions is a top priority
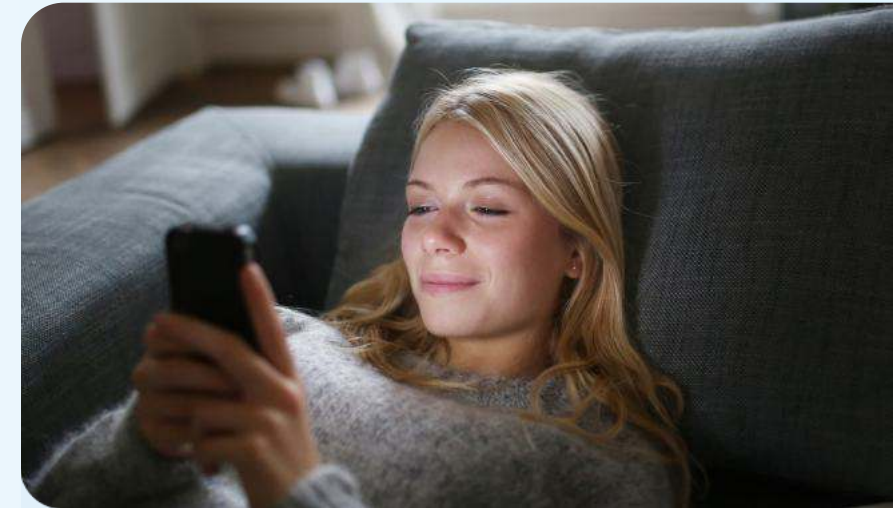
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Compelling

And finally, digital mental health apps must be compelling—to the employees who use them and to the compliance officers and administrators who stand behind them.

As evidenced by the explosion of digital apps, the barrier to entry is low. The real challenge is to make sure users keep coming back and that the app has staying power. "It needs to be longitudinal to solve the access issue," said Mosunic.

In addition to being tailored for the underserved, personalized, evidence based, and integrated, a compelling digital mental health solution should have:

- A trusted brand behind it
- Clinical programs written by psychologists with deep subject-matter expertise
- Familiar, respected voices who can captivate an audience with insight, empathy, and compassion
- An appealing user interface
- High-quality production
- Data analytics that provide insight into population mental health trends and utilization
- Proven high engagement that's sustained over time

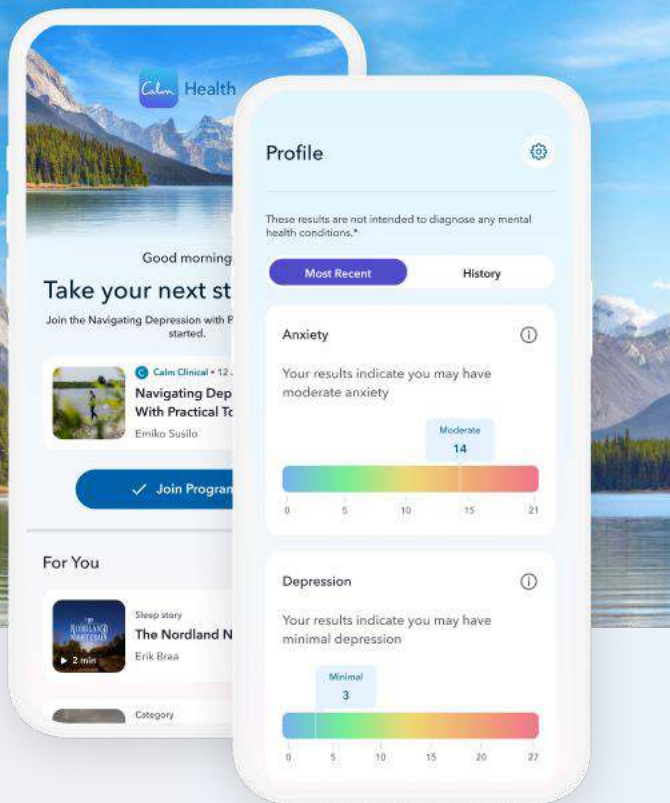**53%** of people registered for Calm Health engaged in a clinical program

> " Our best estimate is that 96% of people who download a mental health app will have entirely stopped using it just 15 days later. The field of digital mental health has been trying to tackle this profound engagement problem for years."[3]
>
> **Dr. Benjamin Kaveladze**
> Center for Behavioral Intervention Technologies, Northwestern University

3. Kaveladze, B. (2024, December 9). Mental Health Apps Are Stuck in the 90s. STAT. https://www.statnews.com/2024/12/09/digital-mental-health-interventions-apps-design

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About Calm Health

Calm Health is a digital mental health solution that offers evidence-based programs and resources designed to foster the connection between mental and physical health conditions.

Rich population health data and analytics make it easy to identify mental health trends, evaluate program performance, and gain insight into member health.

93% of registered individuals completed a mental health screening

97% of registered individuals entered a goal or topic

By leveraging mental health screening (GAD and PHQ) results and self-reported conditions, goals, and topics of interest, Calm Health creates a personalized plan of recommendations spanning:

- ✅ Evidence-based programs developed by psychologists with specialized expertise in chronic conditions and other health experiences, life experiences, and occupations
- ✅ Mindfulness content from familiar, trusted voices
- ✅ The user's mental health benefits
- ✅ Links to appropriate, trusted external resources to simplify the employee experience

A trusted brand, compelling content, and a guided, personalized experience engage employees in their mental health and keep them engaged. By driving accessibility and engagement, more employees are getting the right mental health support at the right time.

> "
> *This is a great app. I listen to the sessions during my commute, and it's honestly so informative and helpful if you let it. You can tailor it to your needs. I'm so happy that my health insurance company offers this. Great day to day strategies. LOVE!"*

5★ **Leahx83**
Oct 17, 2024

What to Look for in a Digital Mental Health App

The world of digital mental health apps is growing exponentially, but not all solutions will engage employees and keep them coming back. To make a significant positive impact on engagement and access, digital solutions need to meet a set of foundational criteria. Here's our list.

Tailored for the Underserved

Support from psychologists who:

- ✔ Specialize in culturally relevant care
- ✔ Have deep expertise in the unique challenges of underserved populations, including those with:
- ✔ Specific conditions (e.g., cancer, diabetes, hypertension)
- ✔ Potentially traumatic roles and occupations (e.g., military, caregiving, health care)

Programs and content that:

- ✔ Speak directly to the health experiences of Black, LGBTQ+, and other communities facing chronic stressors
- ✔ Provide essential information to people about the challenges of their roles
- ✔ Connect with listeners about the mental and emotional side of their condition with empathy and authenticity (not AI)
- ✔ Support a wide range of native languages
- ✔ Feature diverse voices
- ✔ Don't require a diagnosis or prescription to use

Evidence based

Programs that are:

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