Addressing Mental Health Stigma in Regional Australia

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Of the 9 million people living with a mental health issue in Australia in 2014, 54% did not receive mental health care.
The previous Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) group who worked with VCPS earlier this year focused on ways to reduce mental health stigma in Melbourne.

The goal of this project was to improve knowledge of, and access to, mental health care in regional Australia, by making evidence based recommendations for VCPS’ telecommunication service, Chinwag.
Telehealth is the use of telecommunication services to provide telemedicine, medical education, and health education over a distance.


VCPS’ platform *Chinwag* aims to improve access to mental health care for people living in regional areas of Australia.
Monash regions are determined by the modified Monash model, a geographical classification system based on population data.
Objectives

1. Analyze differences in attitudes towards mental health services between regional and metropolitan Australians

1. Solicit and compile content for the *Chinwag* website

1. Evaluate social networks that would be appropriate for increasing publicity and engagement of *Chinwag*
There is a lack of mental health practitioners in regional areas.

Colac

Warrnambool


Differences between regional and metropolitan Australians’ perceptions of mental health were demonstrated through a mental health survey.
Interviews were conducted with two regional Australians to gain insight on their perceptions of mental health.

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us. We work in Melbourne that offers counselling to people living in your area. We want to find out the best way to offer counselling services to people in your community through your home computer. We want to understand how people in Colac and Warrnambool access mental health care. Would you be happy to read this consent form? Do you have any questions?

How do you define mental health?

Do you think that people are generally caring and sympathetic toward people with mental health illness such as depression or anxiety? What about illnesses like dementia?

What effects do you think this attitude has on those living with mental illness and their loved ones?

What effects do you think it has on their tendency to seek help?

Would you be comfortable talking about your own experiences with mental illness?

Would you be comfortable talking about a person that lived with or is currently living with mental illnesses?

How do you stay mentally healthy?
Interviews with GPs/practice managers gave the team insight regarding what content to include on the *Chinwag* website.

Marg White, Director of Community Services

Dr. Archie, General Practitioner of Southwest Medical Center

Deb, Practice Nurse from Cambourne Clinic

Miffy Shelton, Practice Manager from Corangamite Clinic

Alistair Ross Practice Manager from Warrnambool Medical Center
Usability testing of the Chinwag website helped find minor and major concerns.

These are a list of tasks that participants were asked to talk through their experience as they are accomplishing these tasks, please take the time to explore the site as much as you want.
Social media surveys, site observations, and content analysis enabled the team to learn about regional Australians’ social media use.
The mental health survey suggests that regional Australians are more willing to utilize mental health services than metropolitan Australians.

How likely are you to go visit a psychologist or counselor?

- **Very Unlikely**
  - Regional: 5%
  - Metropolitan: 15%

- **Somewhat Unlikely**
  - Regional: 20%
  - Metropolitan: 30%

- **Neither Likely Nor Unlikely**
  - Regional: 25%
  - Metropolitan: 20%

- **Somewhat Likely**
  - Regional: 10%
  - Metropolitan: 10%

- **Very Likely**
  - Regional: 25%
  - Metropolitan: 15%

(Gathered by last group of WPI students)
There are opposing perceptions of mental health among regional Australians, according to interviews conducted in Colac.

“I think **10 sessions should be enough** to either work out, whether a psychologist... can actually help the person [or if] they need more help from a different sort of expert, but I don’t believe it should be allowed to be an ongoing thing for 20 or so years...”

-Interviewee 1

“I think [people] realize it’s a condition... it’s not this thing- this demon, and some people live with it for the rest of their lives and some people can get through it and some people don’t, it’s as simple as that... I think it’s a **chronic condition** for a lot of people.”

-Interviewee 2
Interview Feedback

GPs/practice managers had positive feedback and a few concerns regarding *Chinwag*:

**Pros**
- Increase access to mental health care available to regional Australians
- Anonymity
- Timeliness of scheduling appointments

**Cons**
- Local psychologists losing business
- Willingness and ability for older population to use telepsychology
- Communication between telehealth psychologist and GP/ local psychologist
A list of major concerns were given to VCPS to be fixed in the future, while other minor issues were fixed by the team.

I’m wanting assistance with...
Client age
Facebook and Instagram are used by more than half the people who took the social media survey, so the team focused on these two social networks to advertise *Chinwag.*
A report summarizing the differences between regional and metropolitan Australians’ perceptions of mental health was created for VCPS.

Case Study

In addition to the mental health survey, the team conducted interviews with two regional Australians while visiting regional areas. The first interviewee was an older male resident of Collie (ID 15069). He was retired and lived in public housing. At first he was asked to take the mental health and social media surveys, then upon speaking with him further, he agreed to answer a few questions. He gave consent for the interview to be recorded. His responses made his opinions on mental health clear. In summary, he wasn’t entirely sure what mental health meant, or how someone is diagnosed with a mental health problem. He seemed to feel betrayed by the Australian government for “letting people use the system” for mental health services, yet not allowing him a Disability Support Pension for his physical condition (suffered five heart attacks). He went on to say that mental health cases go unaddressed even when the person is not a “medication goes to an expert, they are “fixed” if he is treated over a period of 20 years. In summary, the survey suggests that regional Australians appeared to be more willing to utilize mental health services than the survey takers from metropolitan Australia.
The Chinwag website will motivate practitioners to refer clients.

**Accessible - Medicare Rebatable - Effective**

Chinwag is a video conferencing service that matches a client in a remote area to an available psychologist. This type of counselling is known to be very effective with both the client and the psychologist able to communicate clearly. Chinwag serves rural Australians who would otherwise not be able to access a psychologist. This service is bulk billed (rebated) via Medicare.

**How will this be achieved?**

Using our remote platform, you can make a patient to a psychologist who is available via video conferencing, from 9am to 10pm, seven days a week. The process: patients use to connect for a consultation is easy and expeditious. Appointments are often available on the same day of your referral. It is worth noting that the Chinwag service is dedicated to ongoing counselling and psychology, and not generally for critical incidents or crisis care as provided by services such as Lifeline.

Chinwag is a service established by Victorian Counselling and Psychological Services (VCP), a practice of more than 50 psychologists, psychiatrists and general practitioners. Our clinical team is further supported by our national network of over 150 psychologists who provide services to rural, regional and remote areas around Australia.

**It’s easy to connect**

Simply give your patient our phone number, or call us whilst you are with your patient and discuss the referral with our intake team. Our intake and support team will match your patient to the most suitable practitioner delivering private, confidential counselling and psychology services. Our team will assist your patient with a video conference call using the patient’s mobile phone or home computer so they are prepared for their appointment. The service is secure and utilises the latest technology making it easy, reliable, secure and confidential.

**Your patient: Shared care.**

You will be able to advise your patient that you are working closely with the Chinwag psychologist in relation to their care and that you will be retaining the

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**Dr. Aude Plontz**

Consultant Psychologist

MPsych, PhD, MAPS.

I provide support to individual clients, couples, and families finding their way through a broad range of issues; from clients curious about how to bring more vibrancy or awareness into their lives, to clients struggling with entrenched feelings of depression or anxiety.

In my work, I uphold values of evidence-based and person-centred practice. I invite my clients to work with me in a collaborative manner from a humanistic perspective, exploring their personal choices and inner experiences with respect and sincerity and striving to adapt my approach to my clients’ preferences. I view psychological counselling as a process aimed at facilitating change in not only observable behaviours and habits of thinking, but also more fundamentally in what could subjectively be experienced as deep emotional or existential shifts. The main counselling methods I utilise are Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT; including exposure, relaxation, & mindfulness – based strategies, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy - ACT, and Schema Therapy) and Emotion-Focused Therapy. I also use interventions from Feedback-Infused Therapy, Narrative Therapy, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, Solution-Focused Therapy, or Hypnotherapy.

My areas of special interest include:

- Chronic, entrenched, or pervasive feelings of depression or anxiety
- Obsessive and compulsive symptoms
- Trauma and abuse (including emotional abuse and other forms of relational trauma)
- Life transitions (including grief & loss, pregnancy and birth)
- Interpersonal difficulties (including work with couples)
- Clients with a culturally and linguistically diverse background (including clients with a refugee background or French or German-speaking clients)

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**Fees**

- 50 minute consultation: $200.00

For more information on:

- Medicare rebates
- Reduced fees/bulk billing
- Assessments and reports
- Non attended session fees

Please call Chinwag on 1300 244 692

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**Book an appointment**

Use this form below to request an appointment with this practitioner

- **Name (required)**
- **Email (required)**
- **Phone (required)**
- **Practitioner (required)**
- **Dr. Aude Plontz**

**Message**

- I'm not a robot

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**Questions with Dr. Aude Plontz**
A short informational video will demonstrate *Chinwag’s* client journey.
Social media posts were created for publication throughout the rest of 2017 and the beginning of 2018.

Of the 9 million people living with a mental health issue in Australia in 2014, only about 46% sought mental health treatment.

![Chart showing 54% sought treatment and 46% didn't seek treatment.]

*Chinwag* providing psychologists to rural Australia

*When you love what you have, you have everything you need.*
Field testing of the Chinwag website with regional Australians will provide feedback to improve the website.
Additional content for the *Chinwag* website will improve the experience for users.


Additional content for the Chinwag website will improve the experience for users.
Collecting and using real stories from citizens needs to fit within APS and WPI IRB guidelines.
More time should be dedicated to collecting survey data in order to allow for a larger sample size and more accurate / significant results.

Sample

Population

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Questions?