



Young People's Views on Digital Health Information and Support

About Healthwatch Cornwall

Healthwatch Cornwall is an Independent Community Interest Company funded by the Department of Health. As the statutory watchdog for health & social care our vision is to inspire positive change in the sector through effective public engagement and our mission is to ensure people's views are heard by local commissioners, health and social care providers, regulators and Healthwatch England (Healthwatch Cornwall, 2019). We do this by encouraging the public to feedback their health and social care experiences via a variety of engagement methods.

About the project

We listened to young people about their experiences and preferences for accessing health and social care information and support. The work was part of a project exploring the feasibility of developing or adapting a digital product to support the health and wellbeing of young people in Cornwall. The project was funded by EPIC, an eHealth Productivity and Innovation organisation in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

In 2019, a review of digital health products suitable for young people was undertaken as part of the feasibility study. The [review](#) identified two existing smart phone apps that have potential for young people in Cornwall: the student eHealth app, developed by Dr. Knut Schroeder in partnership with the University of Bristol's Students Health Services, and NHS Go, a confidential health advice and information service for young people in London.

This report describes results from 3 focus groups with 16 young people and a survey of 290 students at college freshers' fairs across Cornwall in September 2019. Young people were asked similar questions in both the focus groups and survey about their health priorities, their experiences of using online tools to access health and social care information and support, their preferences and their suggestions for online tools. Detailed results from the [focus groups](#) and [survey](#) are reported in the appendix.

16 young people took part in 3 focus groups:

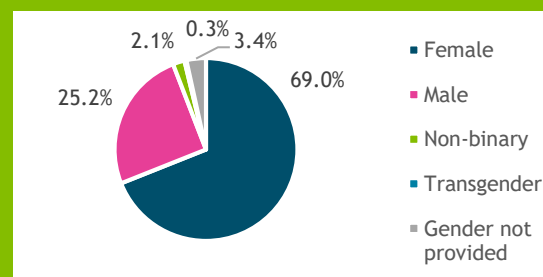
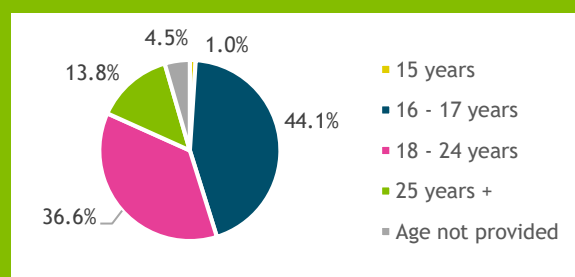
- Wild Young Parents in St Austell
- Intercom Trust (LGBTQ support group) in Truro
- Truro & Penwith College in Truro



[Click here for full survey sample characteristics](#)

290 young people completed a survey:

At college freshers' fairs in Camborne, St Austell, Saltash, Newquay and Truro



Key Findings

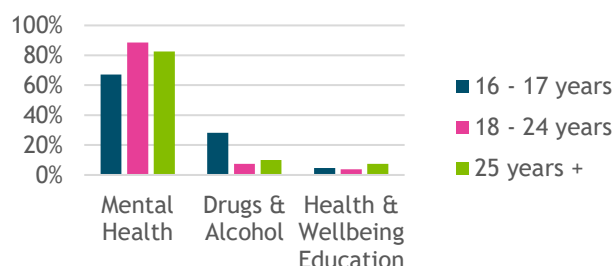
Health priorities

'Most issues relate to mental health'



Mental health was frequently raised as a priority for young people in the focus groups and this was confirmed in the survey results. It was selected as the most important health or social care concern facing young people by 77% of survey respondents, and 89% of 18 to 25 year olds. When asked about features to include in a new tool in the survey, mental health was raised six times more frequently than any other health and social care topic.

Drugs and alcohol were the most important concerns for 28% of 16 to 17 year olds. This is a much higher percentage compared to other age groups, suggesting a need to target drugs and alcohol information and support at this younger age group.



Sexual health was not raised as a concern in the focus groups and only 4% of young people in the survey felt health and wellbeing education (including sexual health education) was their most important concern. When compared with a freshers' survey completed in 2017^[1], the results suggest that sexual health may have become less of a concern to young people compared to mental health in recent years. In 2017, 13% of young people identified sexual health as the most important concern facing young people, often identified alongside drugs and alcohol, and 66% of young people said mental health was the most important concern facing young people. The lack of comments about sexual health by young people in the focus groups and survey may reflect improved sexual health services over recent years and/or mental health becoming more of a concern. Provision of sexual health services for under 25's in Cornwall has recently changed hands to Brook, so it will be important to monitor young people's experiences of these new services.

Current use of online tools

72%



Online tools are used to get help and advice about their health and wellbeing by 72% of young people in the survey. The NHS website and Google search engine are the most common online tools used. The two apps identified in the review were not being used by any young people we spoke to, but this is not surprising as NHS Go is London based and eHealth has been developed with university student services in Bristol, Oxford, London, St Andrews and York.

Some differences were seen between genders with only 55% of males using a website or app compared to 77% of females.

[Click here for analysis](#)

Online tools are a convenient way to access information and advice for young people. They are often used to inform and educate, and can help to make a decision about visiting a GP and/or provide reassurance.

'You can check whether really need to go to GP, especially with costs'

'It's embarrassing to have conversations face to face'

Ease of use, ease of access and reliability of information were common themes that came up in both the focus groups and the survey when young people were asked what they liked most about the online tools they use.



Common dislikes of online tools included poor presentation of information, unreliable information, their impersonal nature and 'imprecise', untailored advice.

[Click here for analysis](#)

When young people in the survey were asked to choose their preference, accessing health information via a website or phone app was the preferred option for 59% of young people, whereas 38% prefer a face to face visit with a health professional.



It was clear from young people in the focus groups that both online and face to face information and support have their place, and that preference for use of online tools depends on the situation. Our results echo research underpinning the student health app^[2], which showed young people still express a desire to talk to someone in some situations.

[Click here for analysis](#)

‘Reassuring and empathetic approach is needed, space and time to talk is important’

'Don't always want to talk to someone, depends on condition'

4



The inclusion of **local signposting** was frequently suggested by young people. Only 36% of those who used an online tool remembered finding any information on local services, suggesting that local signposting is an area for improvement.

'Local support links and crisis numbers'

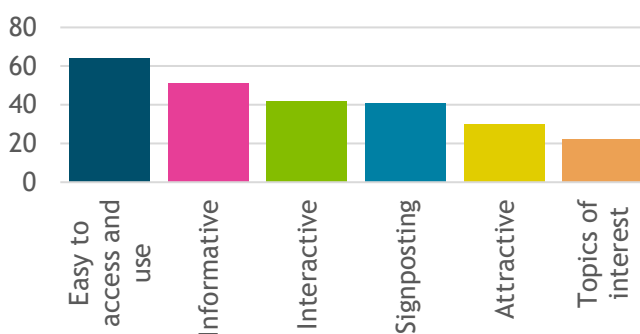
Easy to access and easy to use came up time and time again in different questions as important features of online tools. Ease of access and use will be essential to consider if adapting, developing or promoting an online tool.

Young people would like **opportunities for interactions with health professionals**, such as live chat, text message, facilities to ask questions and get fast answers and direct access to support via a hotline. Some young people also suggested having anonymous group forums for support.

'Easy message board, quick replies'

'Bright, colourful, easy to use'

If you were going to design a website or phone app about young peoples health & wellbeing, what benefits and features would you want it to have?



'Facts and statistics about all types of health issues'

Mental health information and support was the most common health topic suggested for inclusion in an online tool. Many of these suggestions referred to mental health in very general terms, and so it is difficult to know exactly the kinds of mental health information and support young people would like in an online tool. Several young people made more specific suggestions including signposting to crisis support, anonymous mental health chat forums, support with family problems and university stress and information on mindfulness.

'To be able to help with mental health and family problems'

[Click here for further analysis of design features](#)

Across the focus groups and survey, seven young people said they use online tools which have a specific focus on mental and emotional health. These included Kooth, Youper, Headspace, Calm, Papyrus and MIND.

Recommendations

- Young people are using digital platforms to get reliable health information and advice, such as from the NHS website, but there is a desire amongst young people for these sources to be more interactive and to offer local signposting information. As a result, Kernow Clinical Commissioning Group (KCCG) should consider developing the NHS GO app for Cornwall and/or promoting local signposting information alongside the NHS website.
- Mental health was the most important health concern for most young people. Cornwall Council / One Vision should continue to work collaboratively with KCCG, schools, colleges, universities and charities on improving mental health education and support in Cornwall. Part of this work could include further exploration and promotion of existing online tools for supporting young people's mental health, such as Kooth, as there is a desire amongst young people to access support online.

Appendix: Methods and Analysis of Focus groups and Survey

Focus groups

We ran 3 focus groups with 16 young people to ask about their views and experiences of digital health and wellbeing information and support. Three different groups were targeted to include young people with a range of experiences of health and wellbeing support:

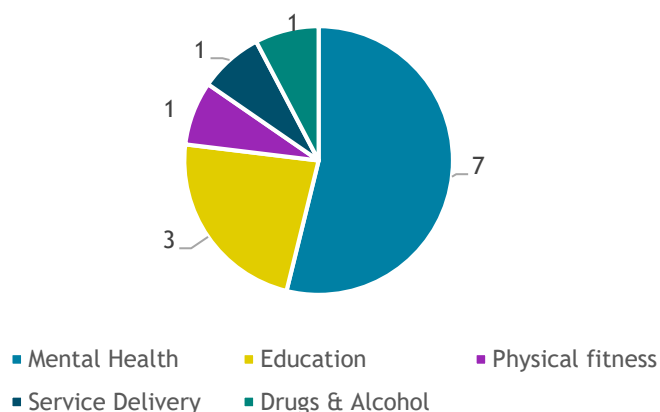
- Wild young parents support group in St Austell
- Intercom Trust support group in Truro for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans community
- Truro and Penwith College in Truro

In each group, young people were asked a series of questions about current ways they seek health and wellbeing advice, their experiences of using online websites and apps, and their design ideas for an online tool.

Focus group results by question

1. What do you feel is the most important health or social care concern facing young people today?

Thirteen young people commented on their most important health or social care concern. Mental health was the most commonly raised concern across all groups, followed by education amongst young parents.

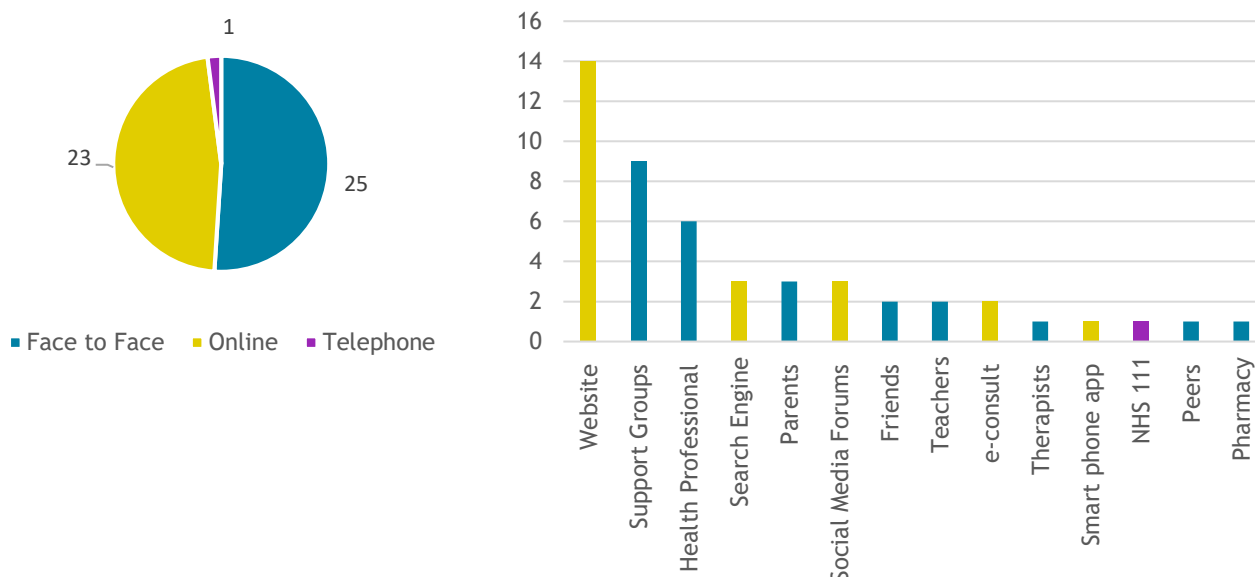


‘Social media can create insecurities and damage mental health’

‘Need more info on baby and infant vaccinations’

2. How *do you* currently get advice/ access information for your health & wellbeing?

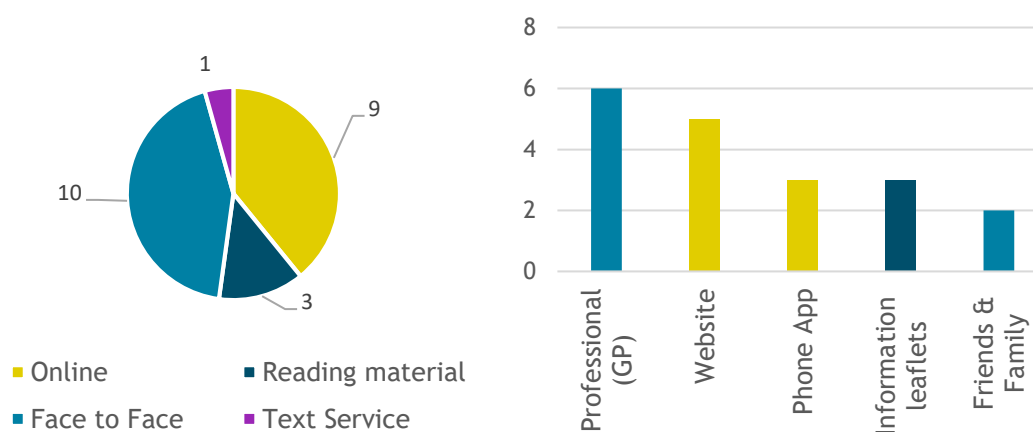
There were 49 comments on current access of advice and information, with some young people accessing advice and information in more than one way. An even split is seen between use of online sources and face to face sources, such as support groups, GPs and nurses.



There was a notable difference between the groups in terms of current use of online support verses face to face support, with 71% of comments within the Truro and Penwith College group referring to online sources, rather than face to face sources, compared to 47% of Wild young parents' comments and 33% of Intercom Trust. These group differences likely reflect varying current health and care needs and current use of support groups and health services.

3. How *do you want* to get advice/ access information for your health & wellbeing?

Young people's preferences varied, with just under half of young people preferring face to face support with a health professional or friends and family, and 9 of the 23 young people preferring support through a website or phone app.



Young people preferring face to face advice emphasised the importance of emotional support received through speaking with a health professional.

'reassuring and empathetic approach is needed, space and time to talk is important'

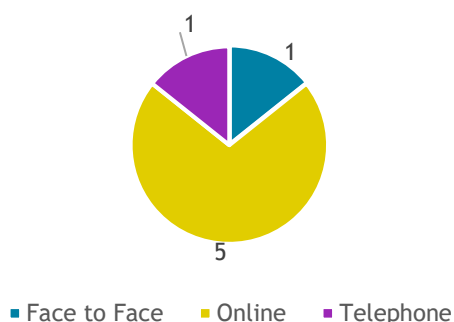
There was also acknowledgement that young people's preferences vary depending on the situation, and that accessing online information may inform a decision to see a GP.

'Don't always want to talk to someone, depends on condition'

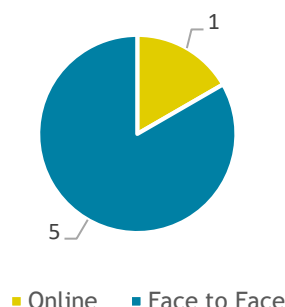
'Online as a first port of call as don't want to contact doctors unnecessarily'

Preferences for getting advice and support within the Truro and Penwith College group were at odds with the ways they currently access advice and support. Young people within this group currently access advice and support through websites, but would prefer to see a GP in person. This pattern was not seen in the other groups where young people are already engaging with health and support services. Within the other groups, there was a mix of preferences and a higher number of young people preferring to get advice and support online. These differences support some young people's suggestion that it would depend on the situation as to whether they would prefer face to face or online advice and information.

Truro and Penwith College group: current methods for accessing advice and information



Truro and Penwith College group: preferred methods for accessing advice and information



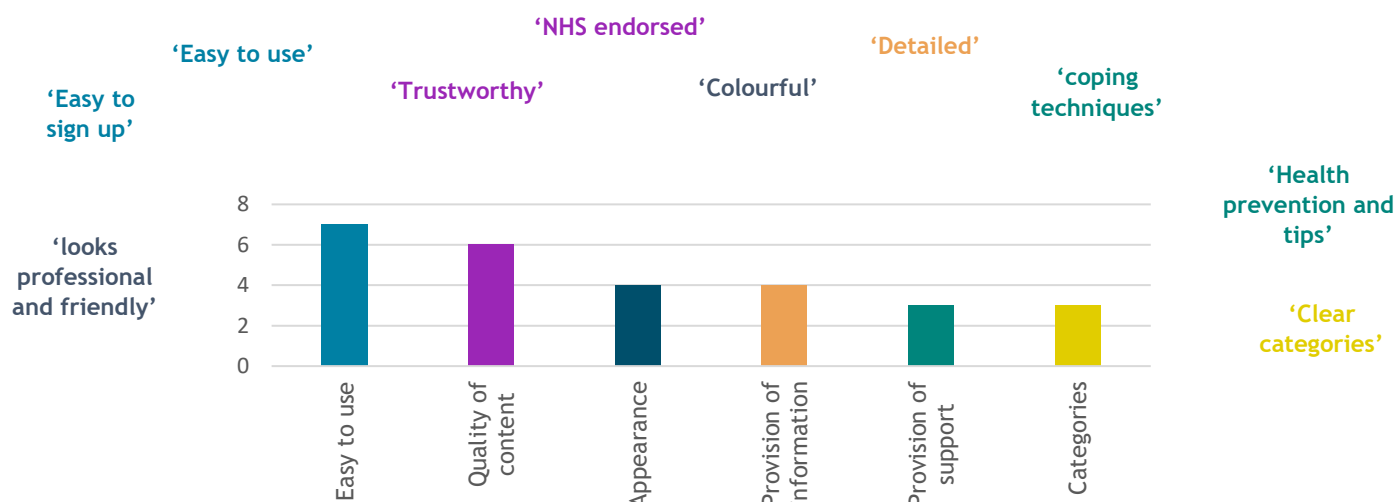
4 & 5) How many of you use online tools/ smart phone apps to get help or advice about your health & wellbeing? Can you tell me what you have used?

In total, 15 of 16 young people currently use 14 different online tools for health and wellbeing advice, 3 apps and 11 websites. The tools used target both general health and specific aspects of health and wellbeing, such as emotional and mental health and pregnancy and parenting. All websites and apps used are listed in the table below.

	Websites	Apps
General health	NHS WebMD Youtube e-consult	Babylon
Emotional and mental health	Kooth Calm	Youper
Pregnancy and parenting	Baby Centre Baby Check Real baby milk	Baby Buddy
Children and young people	Barnardos Childline	

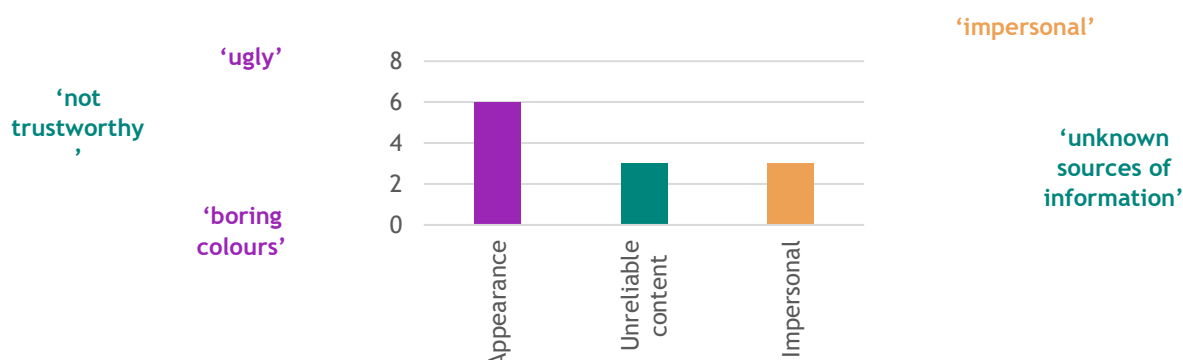
5a. Can you tell me what you like about most it?

Of the 15 young people who had used a tool, the most common features they liked about it were around its ease of use and quality of content, particularly the reliability of content. Other common likeable features were the tool's appearance, it's function in terms of provision of information and support, and the way information is categorised.



5b. Can you tell me what you liked least about it?

There were less comments about features of the tools that were disliked. The most common dislikes were around the tool's appearance, the reliability of information and the impersonal nature of the tool.



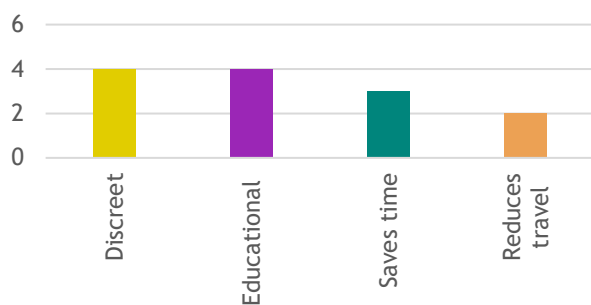
6) For those of you who don't use online tools, can you tell me why you choose not to?

a. What would encourage you to use an online tool?

Only 2 people spoke about why they choose not to use online tools. One preferred face to face contact and both were concerned about the reliability of information on websites and apps.

7) For those of you who do use online tools, can you tell me why you chose an online tool?

Common reasons given for using online tools were for convenience in terms of saving time and reducing travel, discretion and education. Some young people spoke about feeling embarrassed visiting a doctor and so an online tool provides a discreet alternative. Others use them as an educational tool to assist in their decision as to whether to visit a GP, and to help to reassure themselves.



'It's embarrassing to have conversations face to

'You can check whether really need to go to GP, especially with costs of NHS'

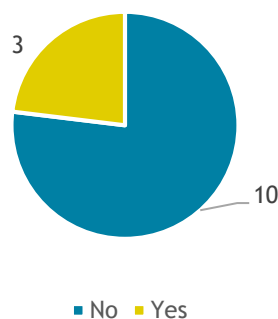
'Can provide reassuring information'

'Quick & convenient'

'Transport can be an issue, so ease of access'

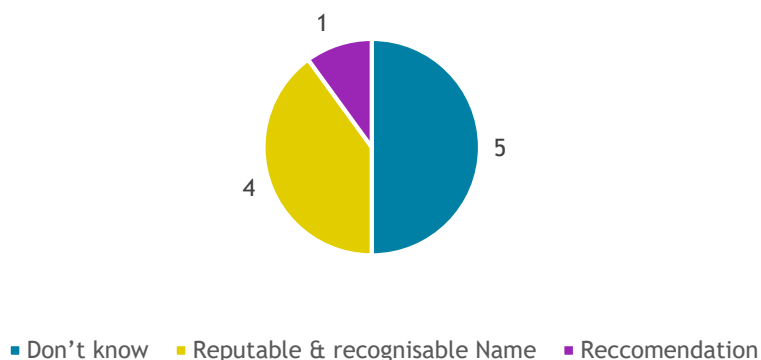
8) Thinking about the online tools used, did you find any signposting information on where you can seek help locally?

The majority of young people did not find any signposting information for local advice and support on the tools they had used.



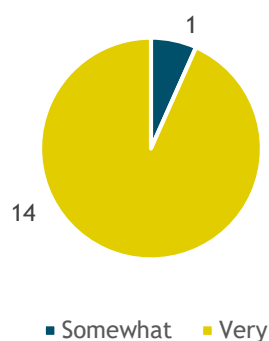
9) Thinking about the online tools used, how do you know the advice you're getting is reliable?

Young people look for a reputable name on the site, such as NHS or a government logo or recommendation. Some said they did not know if advice was reliable or not.



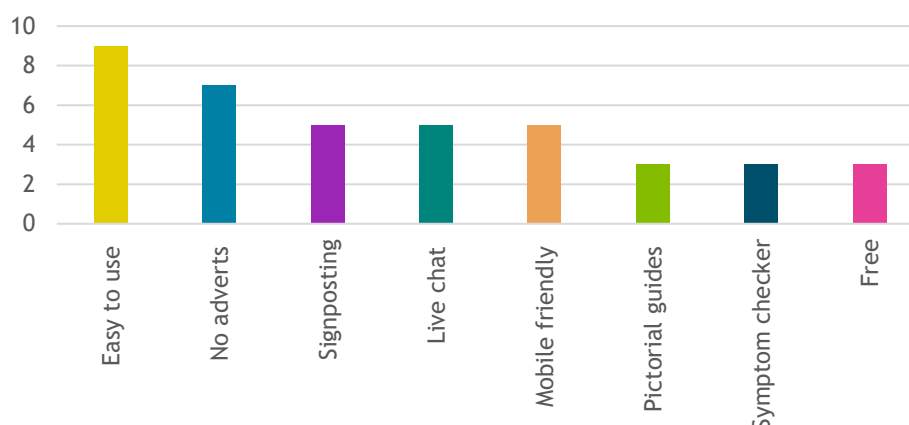
9a). On a scale of 1-10, how important is reliable and trustworthy information to you?

Reliable and trustworthy information was very important to all but one person in the groups.



10) If you were going to design an app what benefits and features would you want it to have?

Over fifty suggestions were given by young people across the three groups. The most common suggestions were for it to be easy to use, advert free and include signposting information and a live chat facility.



Survey

A survey was distributed to college students during freshers' fairs in Camborne, St Austell, Newquay, Saltash and Truro to explore the views and experiences of a larger number of young people. The survey questions were similar to those asked in the focus groups and were informed by responses within the focus groups. A prize draw was included to encourage participation.

Of 290 students who completed the survey, 234 were between 16 and 24 years, 40 were 25 years old or above, 3 were 15 years old and 13 did not provide their age. Over two thirds of respondents were female, and 5.5% of respondents identifying as disabled. Over half of respondents did not provide their ethnicity. For the remaining 42% who did, the majority were White British (37%) or White Cornish (2%). Full details of respondent characteristics can be found on the following page.

Charts broken down by age and gender are only included in the report where differences are statistically significant.

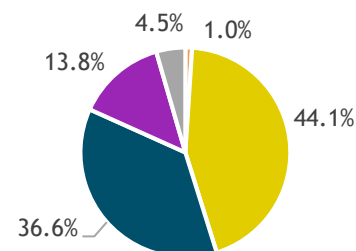
Survey respondent characteristics

TOTAL RESPONDENTS 290

Age

15 years	3	1.0%
16 to 17 years	128	44.1%
18 to 24 years	106	36.6%
25 years +	40	13.8%
Not provided	13	4.5%

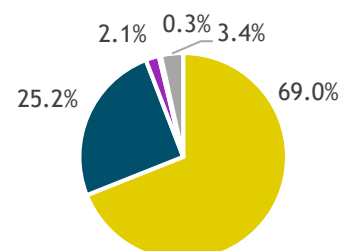
- 15 years
- 16 - 17 years
- 18 - 24 years
- 25 years +
- Age not provided



Gender

Female	200	69.0%
Male	73	25.2%
Non-binary	6	2.1%
Transgender	1	0.3%
Not provided	10	3.4%

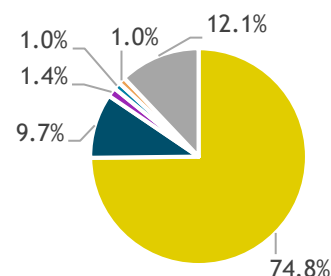
- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Transgender
- Gender not provided



Sexual Orientation

Heterosexual	217	74.8%
Bisexual	28	9.7%
Gay	4	1.4%
Lesbian	3	1.0%
Prefer to self-describe	3	1.0%
Not provided	35	12.1%

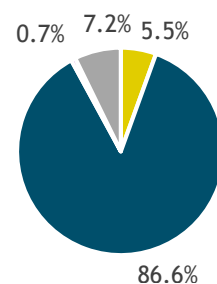
- Heterosexual
- Bisexual
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Prefer to self-describe



Disabled

Yes	16	5.5%
No	251	86.6%
Prefer not to say	2	0.7%
Not provided	21	7.2%

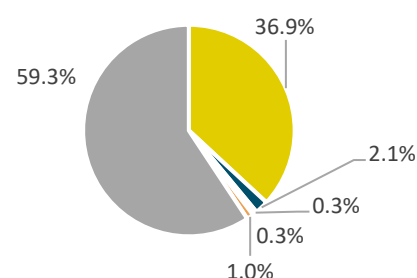
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say
- Not provided



Ethnicity

White British	107	36.9%
White Cornish	6	2.1%
Black British	1	0.3%
Mixed ethnic background	1	0.3%
Other	3	1.0%
Not provided	172	59.3%

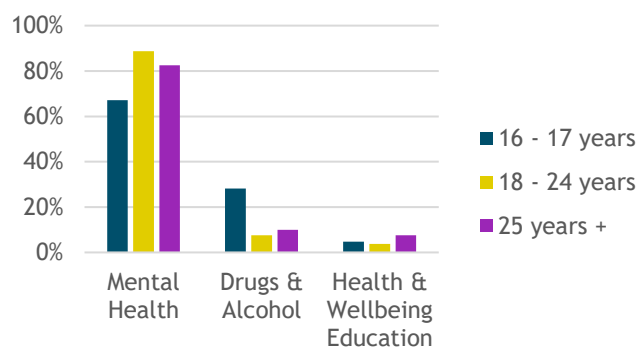
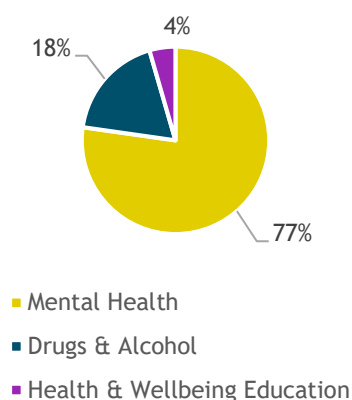
- White British
- White Cornish
- Black British
- Mixed ethnic background
- Other



Survey results by question

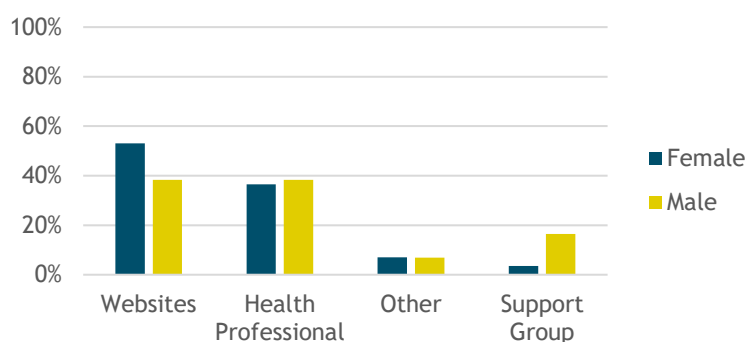
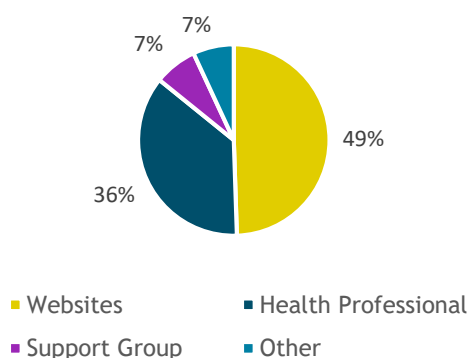
1. Which do you feel is the most important health or social care concern facing young people today?

Mental health was the most important health or social care concern facing young people for 77% of 290 young people, followed by drugs and alcohol (18%) and health and wellbeing education (4%). Over a quarter (28%) of 16 to 17 year olds felt drugs and alcohol was the most important concern for them. This was a lesser concern for the majority of respondents 18 years and over.



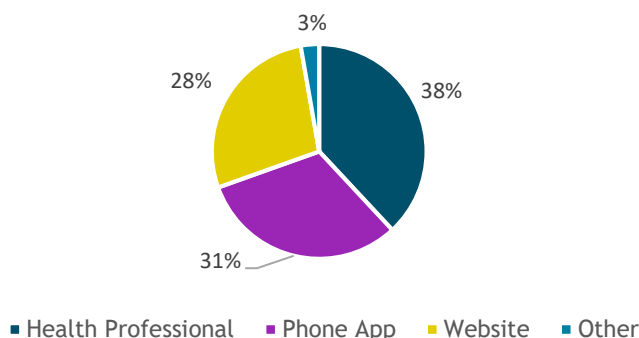
2. How do you most commonly get advice for your health & wellbeing? Tick one option only

Websites was the most common source of advice for 49% of young people, followed closely by face to face advice from a health professional. Females reported using websites more frequently than males, whereas more males reported getting advice from support groups. 'Friends and family' was a frequent response under the 'other' response option.



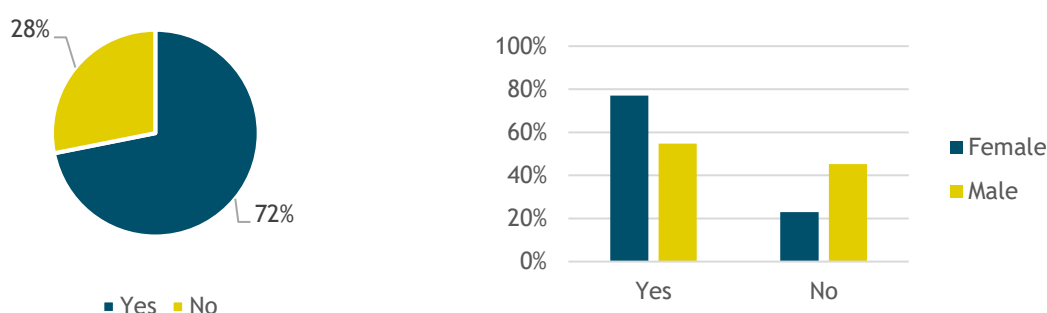
3. What would be your number 1 preferred way of accessing information for your health & wellbeing? Please tick one option only.

Online tools (websites or phone apps) are preferred by 59% of young people, where as 38% prefer to see a health professional face to face. 'Other' responses included friends and family, support groups and books. There were no statistically significant differences in responses between age groups or gender.



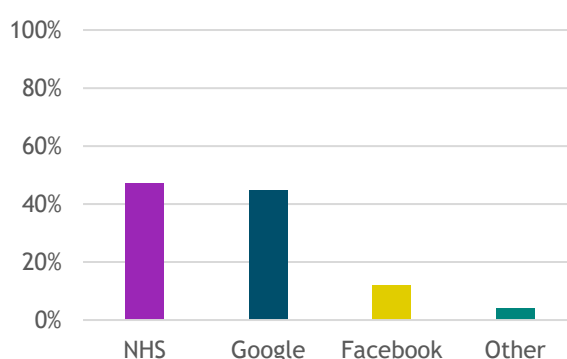
4. Do you use websites or phone apps to get help and advice about your health & wellbeing?

207 students said they use websites or phone apps. A higher proportion of females are using websites or phone apps compared to males. There were no statistically significant differences in responses between age groups.



5. If you have used websites or phone apps for health & wellbeing advice, can you tell us what you have used? Tick any that apply.

NHS and Google are the most frequently used tools, with many people using more than one website or app. The charts below show the percentage of all respondents (n=290) who use each site.



Other websites and phone apps used included social media; Papyrus; Sexual Health Clinic; Eve app; Headspace; MIND; Outlook SW; Childline chat app; Web MD.

Very few online tools other than Google, the NHS and Facebook were mentioned by young people who completed the survey. This differed to the young people within the Wild Young Parent focus groups who were using a number of other apps and websites for parenting support and the Intercom Trust focus group, who listed a number of different websites and apps they used for emotional and mental health support, such as 'Kooth' and 'Youper'. It is likely that topic specific online tools are promoted and used amongst groups of young people with specific health and social needs.

6. What do you like most about your preferred website or phone app? (e.g. user friendly, reliable information, easy to find info)

Comments were received from 156 students. The most common themes included being user friendly; information is from a reliable source, such as the NHS; it is easy to find and access; it includes a range of information; it is appealing and 'friendly'; and it is safe and private.



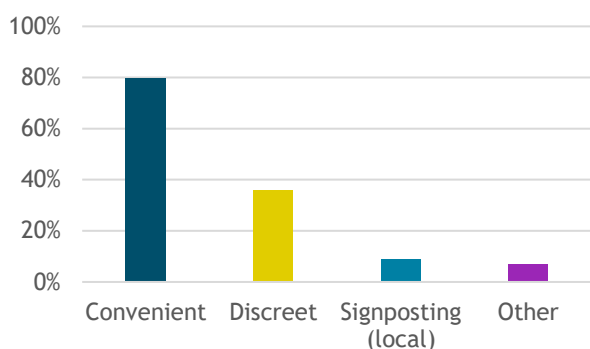
7. What do you like least about your preferred website or phone app? (e.g. difficult to navigate, can't find info I need/easily, impersonal, repetitive)

Comments were received from 148 students. Common themes included poor information presentation, such as it being hard to find, repetitive or unclear information; poor information quality, such as unreliable or imprecise information; the impersonal nature of websites or phone apps; and the potential for unnecessary worry due to exposure to worst case scenarios.



8. Can you tell us why you chose a website or phone app to get advice about your health & wellbeing rather than a health professional? Tick any that apply:

The most popular reason for accessing advice online was convenience, given by 80% of the 203 young people answering the question.



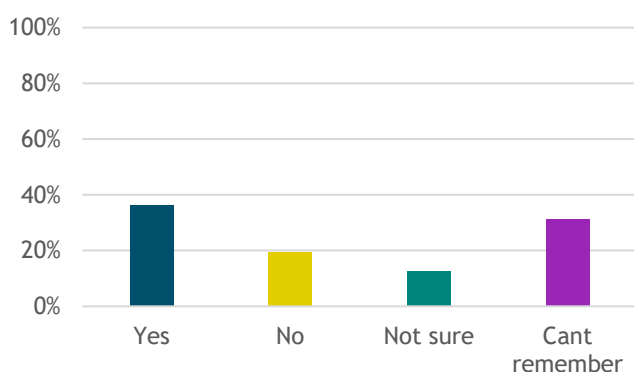
'Other' reasons included finding it difficult to access a health professional, saving time and not wanting to waste a GPs time.

'Can't get a Dr's appointment'

'Don't want to waste the GP's time'

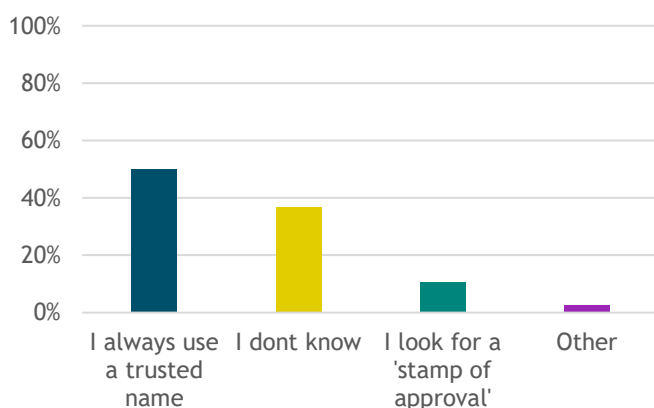
9. Thinking about websites or phone apps you've used, did you find any signposting information on where you can seek help locally?

Of 204 young people who answered the question, only 36% remembered finding any information on local services.



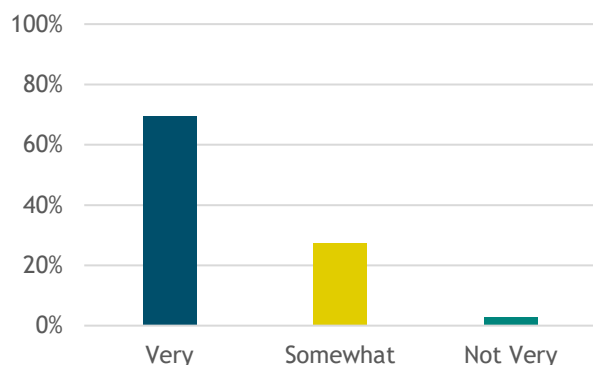
10. Thinking about websites or phone apps you've used, how do you know the advice you're getting is reliable? Tick one only!

Of 204 young people who answered the question, 50% use a trusted name and 37% do not know whether the advice they get is reliable.



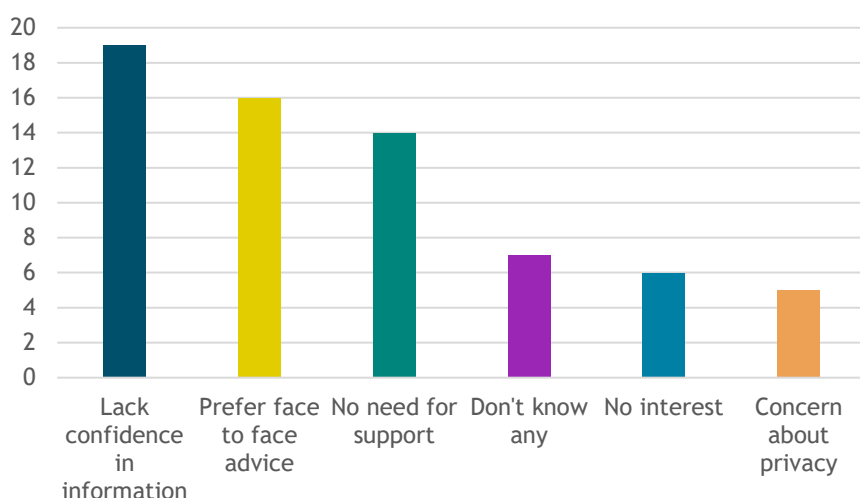
11. How important is reliable and trustworthy information about your health & wellbeing to you?

The majority of the 204 students who answered this question felt it is very important to have reliable information.



12. If you don't use online tools, can you tell us why you choose not to?

Of the 76 young people who answered this open question, the most frequent reasons given were a lack of confidence in the information and preferring face to face advice. Other common reasons included not having a reason or need to seek advice; not knowing about online tools that are available; and concerns about privacy. Six people expressed a lack of interest or inclination through responses such as 'just don't'.



'Untrustworthy and can mess with heads'

'I prefer to talk to someone'

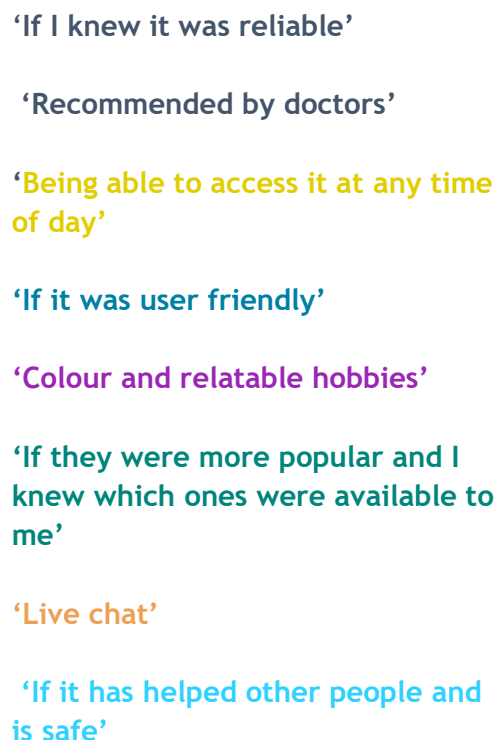
'I don't really have use for it'

'Don't really know what is available'

'Other people knowing my information'

13. What would encourage you to use an online tool?

Reliable information was the most frequent theme to arise from 98 young people responding to the question. This included recommendations from health professionals, friends and family and others for the information to be from a trustworthy source. Easy to access, easy to use and appealing were also common themes and included suggestions for a tool to be accessible from home, fun and include games and rewards. The importance of raising awareness through advertisements and promotion was raised by 8 young people. Twelve young people showed no interest in using an online tool by responding 'nothing' or similar and five said they would use an online tool if and when they needed to.



202 young people provided their ideas and suggestions. These were categorised into themes and displayed in the chart below. Subthemes are displayed in the word cloud.



- Live chat with a health professional
- Support from a health professional via text message
- Facility to ask questions and get fast answers
- Direct access to support, such as via a hotline
- Anonymous group forums for support

‘Anonymous conversations with doctors or text to talk about embarrassing things’

‘Access to a professional 24/7 helpline’

‘Easy message board, quick replies’

‘A space for people to share their feelings’

Suggestions around the provision of **information** included that it should be:

- Reliable
- Include a broad range of useful information
- Provide advice on a variety of topics, such as mental health. Mental health was the most common **topic of interest** suggested by 13 young people. Other topics suggested by one or two people included addiction support, healthy eating, physical activity, physical health, safe sex and sleep support.

‘Accurate info, easy access to health professional’

‘Good tips, helpful advice, mental health and sex safety’

‘Facts and statistics about all types of health issues’

Signposting to local health services, crisis help lines and support groups and activities was also suggested by a large number of young people.

‘Access info and numbers of mental health crisis advice and health issues’

There were also many suggestions for increasing the **attractiveness** of a tool, such as making it colourful and promoting its reliability through logos and endorsements. Five young people also suggested that the tool should encourage positivity, such as with daily messages and tips.

‘Bright, colourful, easy to use’

‘A logo so you know it’s reliable’

‘Better advertising to young males’

‘Daily ideas, random generator for keeping active, healthy & happy. Positive and encouraging messages/ quotes, recipe ideas’

Security in terms of privacy and safety was also frequently mentioned by young people as an important feature of an online tool.

Table 1: Desk based review of digital tools conducted in 2019 as part of the feasibility study.

Digital Solution	Aim	National or Regional	Does it meet the needs of the target audience and how is this evidenced?	Is the digital solution engaging and intuitive?	Does the digital solution offer local signposting information?	Does the digital solution offer a trusted and nationally recognised accreditation?
Student Health App  Website Landing Page: www.expertselfcare.com/health-apps/student-health-app/ Contact Details: knut.schroeder@expertselfcare.com	Easy access to reliable health information specifically for young people all in one place. The content has been created for university students by NHS doctors.	National.	• YES • Built upon research and evidence from independent stakeholder engagement (focus groups). • Qualitative data questionnaires & benchmarking. • In-app feedback survey. • Service governed by terms of use detailed on expertselfcare.com. • Regular partnership working with University of Bristol Students Health Services.	YES Students were involved in the design of the app.	SOMEWHAT Signposting is offered in terms of NICE Guidelines and support from websites. Local information on where to seek help is not provided.	YES Has health & care information accreditation. Certified by NHS England. Has been developed with NHS. Partners include university of Bristol Student Health Service and First Response. Refers to NICE Guidelines.
NHS Go App:  Website page: https://nhs.uk/ contact details: www.sohostrategy.com/assets/cases/SOHO_NHS_2018-01-10.pdf landing	NHS Go is a Free, confidential health advice and information service for 16-25-year olds. Instant access to find local services. Notification on relevant topics. Information about rights under the NHS.	REGIONAL - London.	YES • Built upon research and evidence from independent stakeholder engagement (focus groups) and NHS Clinicians. • Detailed analytical reports are produced on an ongoing basis, pulling in data from Google Analytics, the Google Play Developer Console amongst many others. Marketing and ongoing development of site is contracted through the SOHO Strategy (see SOHO Strategy Case Study). • As of Jan 2018 65,000 + installs and 600,000 screen views.	YES The app is easy to navigate, but arguably not engaging as only has basic colours. The developers created wireframes with young people and is aligned with the current NHS brand, but more youth friendly.	SOMEWHAT National Signposting information is provided. Unable to evidence localised signposting information.	YES Content linked to NHS choices/ NHS Website, Healthy London and Lewisham CCG.

NHS Website  www.nhs.uk	Information website. Allows service users to leave a review of their experience/s. As part of a programme of work by NHS Digital to improve its services, the NHS Choices website is now the NHS website going forward.	NATIONAL with a breakdown to regional NHS Service providers.	YES • Users can leave reviews by answering questions about their experience. • Can leave open comments as well as access contact details for each service. • You can read reviews and view comments left by users.	SOMEWHAT There is a search feature but relies on you knowing what to search for.	YES	YES NHS
Dadpad App:  Website Landing Page: www.thedadpad.co.uk Contact details: Julian@inspirecornwallcic.org.uk 07403 274757	Innovative, online guide for new dads. Developed by Inspire Cornwall CIC.	Regional to South West, growing to reach further regions such as Manchester.	• YES • Built upon research and evidence from independent stakeholder engagement (Focus Groups). • Based on google analytics, dashboard created detailing downloads etc. approx. 5,500 births in Cornwall per year and currently 1000 downloads in last 3 months. • Qualitative data questionnaires & benchmarking. • In-app feedback survey. Using pilot social value engine & return by investment.	YES Dads were involved in the design of the app.	YES Growing smart Phone app. Gives localised signposting information on maternity services, health visiting, early help hub, perinatal mental health, crisis, mental health and charities.	SOMEWHAT The app has been developed with the NHS and local CCG. Has been developed with national initiatives such as NHS 10-year plan & NHS choices. Does not have Health & Care information standard.

References

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