

New digital tool supports mental health assessment of people with intellectual disability

August 14 2020, by Isabelle Dubach



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UNSW Sydney's Department of Developmental Disability Neuropsychiatry (3DN) has launched a tool to support the mental health

assessment of people with intellectual disability and communication difficulties.

The [web application](#), called MySigns—which is funded by NSW Health—is one of very few e-[health](#) tools for people with intellectual disability. Despite the fact that they are more likely to experience [mental health issues](#) than people without intellectual disability, mental health service access for this group is poor.

3DN's Professor Julian Trollor, UNSW's Chair of Intellectual Disability Mental Health, says there are many e-mental health tools available for the general population.

"It is crucial that we also consider the mental health needs of people with intellectual disability and begin to incorporate these into digital health initiatives," he says.

MySigns is designed to be used collaboratively by people with intellectual disability, their carers and mental health clinicians to improve mental health assessment, monitoring and treatment.

"The tool allows carers to upload photos and videos of the person's unique behaviors, gestures and expressions when they are experiencing certain moods," says Dr. Jenna Zhao, Project Officer at 3DN. "These can then be shared with the person's mental health team to facilitate mental health assessment."

A mental health assessment can be difficult for people with [intellectual disability](#) who experience communication barriers because information about their mental health is usually displayed through behaviors, gestures and expressions.

Carers and others who support the person are best placed to detect

changes in the person's mental health and are often most familiar with the person's behaviors, gestures and expressions.

Jann Hayman, who calls herself an involved "secondary" carer for her son who lives in a group home, says she is looking forward to this app being available.

"My son is non-verbal but does communicate with facial expressions, gestures and behaviors. These can be confusing or meaningless to people who are not in daily contact with him—such as health professionals. This app can be used to capture and share those specific signs. It is a very person-centered product."

MySigns builds a visual library of the person's moods and can be used to help new support staff to learn about how the person conveys information about their mental health.

"My son will always require people in his life who know him well," Ms Hayman says. "This app is a tool to provide a continuity of vital information. Support staff come and go... I think the app may have wider usage as a [tool](#) for new support workers to become familiar with the meaning of my son's specific facial expressions, rather than presuming."

More information: MySigns is free to use. For more information and to access MySigns, please visit [here](#).

An Easy Read Guide to MySigns is available [here](#).

Provided by University of New South Wales

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