

# Resources to Help Select Behavioral Health and Wellness Mobile Applications

Prepared for the Michigan Health Endowment Fund  
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May 2022

## **Disclaimer**

The purpose of this document is to provide information about the use and availability of behavioral health and wellness mobile applications. The inclusion of any behavioral health and wellness apps in this report does not constitute an endorsement by either the authors, the NASMHPD Research Institute, or the Michigan Health Endowment Fund.

## Introduction

Nearly 53 million adults in the U.S. live with a mental illness, including more than 1.4 million adults in Michigan (1, 2). Unfortunately, not all those who are affected by a mental illness are able to access and receive appropriate mental health services. In 2019, only about 20% of adults in the U.S. and 46% of adults with any mental illness in Michigan received mental health services during the year (3, 4). This chasm, between those who are unable to access services, and those who receive services can be attributed to a variety of factors, including high healthcare costs, poor relationships with providers, distance to travel for in-person services, and the increasing behavioral health workforce shortage which limits the supply of available services (5, 6, 7). These barriers can be minimized through the use of technology, including the appropriate use of behavioral health and wellness mobile applications (“behavioral health and wellness apps”) for self-guided care.

Nearly 85% of Americans own a smartphone that allows convenient access to behavioral health and wellness apps, which provide behavioral health and wellness services without the direct involvement of a behavioral health care provider (8). Because so many of these apps are self-guided, individuals are empowered with the tools and resources necessary to improve their symptoms. An additional benefit of behavioral health apps is that they can help alleviate the pressure on the behavioral health workforce. Behavioral health apps may be useful tools to providers and organizations in Michigan who are focused on improving behavioral health outcomes for the unique individuals they serve.

This report is the result of a collaboration between the Michigan Health Endowment Fund and the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) Research Institute (NRI). The Michigan Health Endowment Fund contracted with NRI to conduct an environmental scan to understand which apps are commonly used to promote behavioral health and wellness, and identify resources that can help providers and organizations in Michigan determine which behavioral health and wellness apps available best meet the needs of the unique populations they serve, while taking into account privacy, security, and efficacy considerations. In addition, NRI conducted a small survey of Michigan Health Endowment Fund grantees to understand how they use, or do not use, behavioral health and wellness apps. The feedback and insight received from Michigan Health Endowment Fund grantees are incorporated throughout this report.

This report provides an overview of the value behavioral health and wellness apps can provide to both providers and individuals. It also discusses several considerations to consider when selecting an app, including associated costs and payment strategies, efficacy and safety, and privacy concerns. The report includes examples of commonly used behavioral health and wellness apps, as well as useful databases (e.g., MINDApp) and resources that sort and rank these apps based on a variety of criteria.

## Overview of Behavioral Health and Wellness Apps

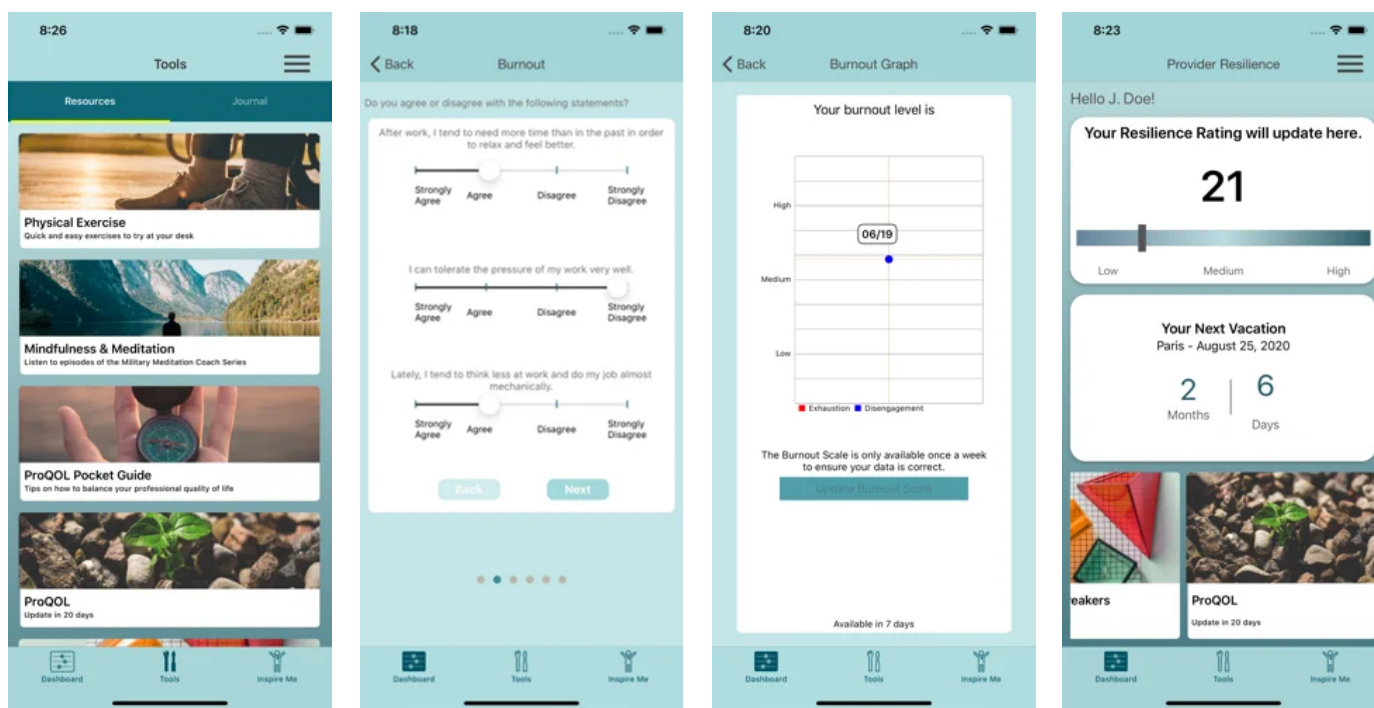
There is growing interest in the use of behavioral health and wellness apps in the United States. It is predicted that spending on mobile mental health apps will near \$500 million in 2022 (9). It is estimated that there are between 10,000 and 20,000 behavioral health and wellness apps available through the internet or for immediate download onto smart devices (10). These apps offer a variety of services with different approaches, such as self-care activities and components (e.g., meditation, breathing, informational material, etc.), and therapist-directed services (e.g., virtual support groups, coaching, telehealth services, etc.) (10).

Behavioral health and wellness apps can also be useful in supporting the diagnosis, treatment, and management of mental illness and symptoms. Behavioral health and wellness apps can also be useful in serving as an initial engagement with behavioral health services, or providing supplemental support between therapy sessions, encouraging individuals to practice skills learned in therapy, often for less than the cost of seeing a provider.

### Reducing Stress on the Behavioral Health Workforce

In addition to the value they can potentially provide individuals, behavioral health and wellness apps can also help alleviate pressures on the behavioral health workforce. In recent years, compassion fatigue (a combination of burnout and secondary traumatic stress) has led to high levels of exhaustion among providers, and turnover within organizations (11, 12). An example of how an app can help alleviate burnout among providers is the [Provider Resilience App](#). The Provider Resilience App is a Defense Health Agency (DHA)-connected mobile app designed to “provide information and support to service members, veterans, and their families dealing with behavioral health issues and traumatic brain injury” (13). It is also promoted by SAMHSA as way for health care professionals to access “tools to guard against burnout and compassion fatigue. The app allows users to take self-assessments, access support, and resources to help providers manage their mood and mental health (14). Screenshots from the app are included in the figures below (15).

Figure 1: Screenshots from the Provider Resilience App



## Cost of and Billing for Behavioral Health and Wellness Apps

Behavioral health and wellness apps may be free or require payment (one-time or subscription-based). Most often, users of the apps assume responsibility for payment of premium apps; however, it may be worthwhile to see if insurance companies can or will cover at least some of the cost associated with using an app. Providers may look into the possibility of using CPT Code (Current Procedural Terminology Code) 96127 for brief emotional/behavioral assessment. This CPT code is a commonly used code when billing private insurance and Medicaid for app-based assessments for patient testing where no active clinician is involved in the administration of the assessment.

Of the grantees responding to the survey, the majority use only free apps. One grantee relies on Innovation Funds to finance their use of apps, and another grantee indicated that their project partners already own the app," so it is not necessary to outlay any additional funds to support the app's use. By far, the biggest barrier to using apps by grantees is that apps are too costly, with nearly 67% of respondents identifying cost as a barrier.

## Safety, Privacy, and Ethical Considerations of Behavioral Health and Wellness Apps

Safety, privacy, and ethical concerns related to app uses have been highlighted as concerns by patients and organizations alike. Healthcare providers are bound by the privacy mandates within the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Currently, the HIPAA guidelines for mobile apps and health data are unclear, and apps that collect anonymous data that are unconnected to personally identifiable information do not need to be HIPAA compliant (16). Fortunately, a variety of additional resources are available to help providers and organizations navigate the challenges associated with selecting an app, including answering privacy, security, and efficacy questions.

## Selecting a Behavioral Health & Wellness Mobile App

With more than 10,000 apps to choose from, the process of selecting an app can be overwhelming; however, there are resources available to providers and individuals that can help make the process of selecting an appropriate app more straightforward, including the [American Psychiatric Association](#) and [MINDApp](#). Other resources, like [HealthLine](#) and [Verywell Mind](#) provide rankings and reviews of apps, going as far as making recommendations for the best behavioral health apps available to meet specific needs.

## American Psychiatric Association's App Evaluation Model

The American Psychiatric Association's (APA) [App Advisor](#) recognizes that behavioral health decisions made between a provider and a patient are "personal decision[s] based on many factors, for which there is rarely a binary 'yes' or 'no' answer" (17). Because of this approach, the goal of the APA's App Evaluation Model is to help provider, patients, and others "become familiar with important information that should be considered when picking an app, and how [the process] differs from choosing more traditional therapeutic interventions" (17).

The APA identifies eight fundamental questions that potential app users should ask before using or recommending an app (17):

1. On which platforms/operating systems (e.g., IOS, Android, Desktop) does the app work? Does it also work on a desktop computer?
2. Has the app been updated in the last 180 days?
3. Is there a transparent privacy policy that is clear and accessible before use?
4. Does the app collect, use, and/or transmit sensitive data? If yes, does it claim to do so securely?
5. Is there evidence of specific benefit from academic institutions, end-user feedback, or research studies?

6. Does the app have a clinical/recovery foundation relevant to your intended use?
7. Does the app seem easy to use?
8. Can data be easily shared and interpreted in a way that's consistent with the stated purpose of the app?

The APA's comprehensive model consists of five priority levels to consider when selecting an app, noting that once apps do not pass one level, they should not be considered to move up to the next. See Figure 2 (developed based on the Comprehensive App Evaluation Model from [www.psychiatry.org](http://www.psychiatry.org)), and the questions contained within each step below (18).

Figure 2: APA's App Evaluation Model



### Step 1: Access and Background

As much information as possible should be gathered before evaluating an app. This allows potential users to create context to understand the app, and to develop a framework for decision making. Questions to consider during this step include:

- Who owns the app? Is it a trusted source?
- Are there any funding sources identified that could create a conflict of interest?
- Does the app claim to be medical?
- Are there any additional or hidden costs that may surprise users?
- Which platforms or operating systems does the app use? Will it work offline?
- Does the app work with accessibility features? Is it accessible for those with impaired vision, hearing, or other disabilities?
- When was the app last updated? Has it been updated within the last 180 days?

### Step 2: Privacy and Security

The use of behavioral health and wellness apps presents unique risks that may be easy to overlook. For instance, they can quickly use data on a cellular plan that can unexpectedly increase costs to users, apps can allow developers access to a user leading to social profiling, and user data may not be adequately secured to protect user privacy. Questions to consider during this step include:

- Does a transparent privacy policy exist? Is it clear and accessible?
- How does the app use user data? Are collected data deidentified or anonymous?
- Is it possible to opt out of data collection or delete user data?
- Where are data maintained? Locally (on the device) or elsewhere (cloud-based storage)?
- What, if any, security systems are used to protect user data?
- What other entities does the app share user data with?
- Is the app equipped to respond to potential harms or safety concerns?

### **Step 3: Clinical Foundation**

In their descriptions, many apps make grandiose claims about their effectiveness; however, there is often little information available to support these claims, and little regulation to ensure their accuracy. Once it is determined that an app is sufficiently secure (Step 2), then it is important to consider the following questions:

- Does the app appear to do what it claims to do?
- Is the app content well-written and relevant?
- What sources and references are available that support the app?
- Is their evidence of the app's effectiveness published by academic institutions, or through research studies? What does the end-user feedback say?
- Has the app been validated as useful and feasible?
- Does the app have a clinical/recovery foundation relevant to its intended use?

### **Step 4: Usability**

Once it has been determined that an app is sufficiently secure (Step 2), and has a solid clinical foundation (Step 3), it is important to assess usability. According to the APA, "an app is only as useful as determined by [the provider] and [their] patients" (17). To determine usability, the following questions should be considered:

- How does the app engage users?
- Does the app meet your needs and align with your priorities?
- Can the app be customizable to meet unique needs?
- Is the app easy to use?
- Does the app clearly define its functional scope?

### **Step 5: Data Integration Towards a Therapeutic Goal**

The final consideration is the ability of the app to interact with other systems to help achieve a therapeutic goal while maintaining privacy and security (Step 2), having enough clinical evidence to support its use (Step 3), and is useful and engaging (Step 4). This step is helpful in finding apps that allow data to be integrated with other health systems to make the information meaningful to both patients and providers to ensure streamlined, non-fragmented care. The majority of behavioral health and wellness apps will not achieve this goal. However, to determine if an app allows data integration to help achieve a therapeutic goal, the following questions should be considered:

- Does the user own the data?
- Can the data in the app be easily shared and interpreted in a way that is consistent with the stated purpose of the app?
- Can the app share data with electronic medical records and other health-data tools, such as smartwatches and fitness trackers?
- Is the app for individual (patient) use, or is it to be used in collaboration with a provider? If it is intended to be used in collaboration with a provider, how does the app share data with the provider?
- Does the app lead to any positive behavior changes and/or skill acquisition?
- Does the app improve therapeutic relationships and goals between the patient and provider?

## MINDApps

MINDApps is an interactive, online database that helps individuals and providers find the best behavioral health and wellness apps appropriate for their needs.

Developed by the [Division of Digital Psychiatry at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center](#), MindApps relies on the APA's App Evaluation Model to classify apps, and allows users to search for individual apps by name, or narrow down potential apps through 88 different search filters, grouped into nine categories, including (18):

- **Cost** – Allows MindApps users to search for apps based on their cost (i.e., free to download, free to use, premium with payments up front, those that offer in-app purchases, or a subscription).
- **Developer Type** – Filters available apps by which type of organization created the app. May include government organizations, academic institutions, public or private organizations, and healthcare or non-healthcare organizations.
- **Supported Conditions** – Allows users to select specific behavioral health diagnoses or conditions, such as mood disorders, schizophrenia, self-harm, substance use, physical pain, and others.
- **Functionalities** – This category allows users to sort apps based on language preference, accessibility, and offline capabilities (which can facilitate use in areas without broadband or cellular data access).
- **Uses** – Filters app by their use, such as self-help, reference/informational apps, or a hybrid of the two.
- **Engagement** – Allows users to select apps based on how they interact with the user. It may include artificial intelligence (AI), peer support, gamification, chat/messaging capabilities, and real-time response.
- **Evidence and Clinical Foundation** – This filter allows users to identify only those apps that have supporting or cautionary studies demonstrating their safety and effectiveness.
- **Privacy** – Allows users to see which apps have privacy policies, data storage and handling protections (e.g., where data are served, declaration of data use and purpose for use, protection of personal health information), and which apps meet HIPAA requirements.
- **Other App Features** – Filters for apps that provide tracking services (e.g., mood tracking, medication reminders, sleep patterns, etc.), therapies provided (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy, dialectical behavioral therapy, coaching, therapist connections, etc.), and self-help features (e.g., psychoeducation, journaling, mindfulness, breathing, etc.).

Each app in the MindApps library "is informed by 105 objective questions based on the APA's App Evaluation Model," which provides a framework for evaluating apps based on accessibility, privacy and security, clinical foundation, engagement style, and interoperability (19). MindApps reviews each app in its library at least once every six months and allows users to report issues with apps in the library, as well as make suggestions for apps to be included in the library.

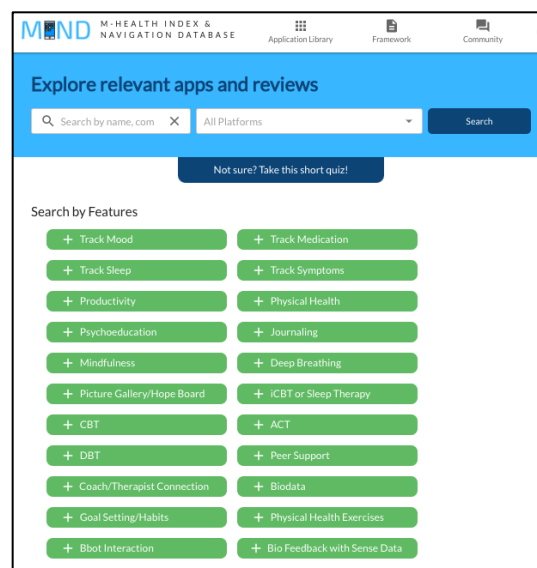


Figure 3: MindAppsApp Library Search Page



## Ratings of Individual Behavioral Health and Wellness Apps by Health Publications

Other resources, like [HealthLine](#) and [Verywell Mind](#), provide annual rankings and reviews of apps, going as far as making recommendations for the best behavioral health apps available to meet specific needs. Their assessments of individual apps are provided below. HealthLine identifies MoodKit as the best overall app, while Verywell Mind recommends [Moodfit](#) as the best overall app. Both HealthLine and Verywell Mind recommend [Talkspace](#) as the best app for therapy; and both recommend [Happify](#) for its ability to boost moods. Each of the apps recommended by these two resources are described in greater detail below.

### HealthLine

[HealthLine](#) is an online resource that “covers all facets of physical and mental health,” to help users “cut through the confusion with straightforward, expert-reviewed, first-person experiences” to make the best health decisions for themselves and those they love. Each year, HealthLine publishes a review of mental health apps that evaluates the features, scientific backing, cost, and customer satisfaction. HealthLine claims that the apps they recommend are “designed using evidence-based psychotherapy techniques” (20).

### Verywell Mind

[Verywell Mind](#) is an online resource that provides information about mental health and wellness. Its stated mission is to help its readers prioritize “mental health and find balance” (21). Its review board consists of psychiatrists, psychotherapists, social workers, counselors, mindfulness coaches and others to deliver high-quality, inclusive content that “reflects the latest in evidence-based research and health information” (20). Similar to HealthLine, Verywell Mind also releases an annual list of recommended behavioral health and wellness apps.

## Highly Ranked Apps by Condition



### [MoodKit](#)

*Mental Health and Wellbeing*

HealthLine's 2022 review, [10 Great Mental Health Apps to Use in 2022](#), recognizes MoodKit as the best overall app for mental health and wellbeing. Developed by clinical psychologists, MoodKit is rooted in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) principles and techniques, and offers more than 200 activities to help users improve their mood and change negative thinking. MoodKit also includes a journal that encourages users to track their moods, thought patterns, and manage stress. HealthLine's researchers found MoodKit to be evidence-based, offer a large variety of activities, and appreciate the journal feature that easily allowed users to monitor their progress. The only drawback HealthLine identified with MoodKit is that some users reported technical issues when using the app (20). In addition to best overall app, HealthLine identified the best apps for therapy, meditation, suicide awareness, stress, anxiety, addiction, mood, eating disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.



### [Moodfit](#)

*Behavioral Health and Wellness*

For 2022, Verywell Mind recommends [Moodfit](#) as the best overall behavioral health and wellness app. Moodfit is a free app (with optional in-app purchases) that enables users to track their moods and provides exercises for users to address negative thinking using CBT principles. Moodfit is customizable for each individual user, and can be adapted to individual goals. The app provides daily reminders to keep users on track. Verywell Mind identifies several drawbacks to Moodfit, including the lack of access to professional help, the increased likelihood the app will be used for self-diagnoses, and that a lack of progress can lead to frustration among users.



## Talkspace *Therapy*

For 2022, HealthLine identifies [Talkspace](#) as the best app for therapy. Talkspace is pricy in that it requires a monthly subscription plan starting at \$65 per week (20). While it is the most expensive app reviewed by HealthLine, it does provide online therapy and gives users direct access to a mental health professional 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Users can interact with therapists via chat or scheduled live video sessions. Users can also change therapists until they find the person that best meets their needs. The only drawbacks to Talkspace identified by HealthLine, in addition to the high cost, are that the therapy techniques may be limited based on a user's need, and it may take time to find a good therapist match, which could discourage users from continuing to use the service.

In alignment with HealthLine, Verywell Mind also recommends the Talkspace app for therapy. Going beyond the cost of the app, Verywell Mind notes that the benefits of Talkspace are that conversations between users and therapists in the app are private and secure, and that therapists can provide diagnoses and treatment for a variety of mental health conditions. Verywell Mind does note that while Talkspace is more expensive than other therapy apps, there is a good range of available price options for users, making it more accessible. However, Verywell Mind does note that Talkspace is not appropriate as a standalone service for individuals with a serious mental illness, and that the therapist evaluation surveys the app requests can be an annoyance.



## MindShift CBT *Anxiety*

For anxiety, HealthLine recommends [MindShift CBT](#). MindShift CBT is a free behavioral health and wellness app that alleviates anxiety through CBT techniques that help users adjust thinking and behaviors. The app is designed to help users address worry, panic, perfectionism, social anxiety, and phobias. The app provides a series of short meditations, thought journals, and activities to address fears, change beliefs, and create healthy habits. The drawbacks to MindShift CBT are that users are limited to a specific number of entries each day, and some users have experienced technical issues when accessing the app.



## MoodMission *Coping Skills*

For developing coping skills, Verywell Mind recommends [MoodMission](#), an app that is designed to help individuals dealing with stress, anxiety, and depression. The app has users respond to a series of surveys to help the app determine the most effective "missions" to overcome negative thoughts and feelings. These missions contain objectives and explanations of how the mission can help a mood. Users are asked to describe how they feel after the mission so it can tailor its program to be more effective. MoodMission was developed by mental health professionals and its efficacy is supported by randomized-controlled trials. The app uses evidence-based CBT activities to help users address depression and anxiety, and uses in-app rewards to increase motivation. However, Verywell Mind finds that the initial questionnaires can be overwhelming, turning some users away from the app. The app does not include direct access to a mental health professional, and requires regular use of increased personalization.



## Sanvello *Anxiety and Depression*

Verywell Mind recommends [Sanvello](#) to help treat mild to moderate anxiety and depression. Sanvello provides tools that are based in CBT principles to help users overcome mild to moderate anxiety and depression. Sanvello allows users to track moods, provides strategies to label moods and identify patterns in mood shifts. Sanvello

also offers guided journeys in the app that are designed to help people feel more in control of their lives. Through a randomized study of 500 adults experiencing mild to moderate anxiety and depression, Sanvello was found to decrease symptoms, even after users ceased using the app. The drawbacks to the app identified by Verywell Mind include the monthly subscription required for advanced features, the limited availability of therapy (only available in some states), and the lack of clarity on what credentials Sanvello coaches actually have. Additionally, the app may not be appropriate for individuals with severe mental illnesses.



### [Depression CBT Self-Help Guide](#)

*Depression*

For depression, Verywell Mind recommends the [Depression CBT Self-Help Guide](#). This app “provides education on depression and the best strategies for managing symptoms” while encouraging users to engage in self-care activities that can improve their mood. The Depression CBT Self-Help Guide is free, but, at the time of writing, is only available to Android users.



### [Quit That!](#)

*Habits and Addiction*

HealthLine recommends [Quit That!](#) for users looking to overcome specific habits and addiction. Quit That! allows users to monitor habits to quit smoking, drinking alcohol, using drugs, and even caffeine. HealthLine notes that is important for users who are trying to tackle severe addictions to use the app in tandem with a behavioral health and/or medical professional and other therapeutic techniques. Another drawback to the app is that some users have experienced technical difficulties with the app crashing.



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### [NOCD](#)

*Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)*

For obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), HealthLine recommends [NOCD](#). NOCD combines mindfulness and exposure-response techniques to help users address OCD. The app requires potential users to call a centralized phone number to determine which program and payment plan is most appropriate. The app accepts more than 30 types of insurance, so it is possible there is little to no cost to users depending on insurance status. The app allows users to schedule live video therapy sessions with an OCD therapist and receive support between sessions, and also develop a personalized OCD therapy plan. The app is beneficial in that it is convenient for sudden OCD episodes, and also has a strong user community that can provide support. The drawbacks to the app identified by HealthLine are that it can be expensive if not covered by insurance, and some of the guidance may be too general.

## eMoods [eMoods](#)

### *Bipolar disorder*

For individuals with bipolar disorder, Verywell Mind recommends the [eMoods](#) app. This app creates mood and medication charts to track progress that can be shared with a user's doctor, either through printable or emailed reports. This feature makes it easier for users to keep track of symptoms between appointments without relying solely on memory. The only drawback identified by Verywell Mind is that the premium version can be expensive, and in-app purchases can add up.

## todoist [Todoist](#)

### *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*

For Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Verywell Mind recommends the [todoist](#) app. A basic version of the app is free to use, and an enhanced version is only \$3 per month. This app helps users centralize their tasks, organize them by priority, and set reminders for deadlines. The app also allows users to share tasks with others, including family, friends, and co-workers, and is helpful for users to focus, rather than get overwhelmed by tasks as they pile up.



## [PTSD Coach](#)

### *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*

For PTSD, Verywell Mind recommends the [PTSD Coach](#) app. PTSD Coach was designed by the Department of Veterans Affairs to help service members and others living with PTSD. The app provides educational materials, connections to additional resources, self-care assessments, and symptom-management tools. Verywell Mind notes that the app may be too general, and its specificity to service members and veterans may limit the accessibility of the app to other populations.



## [Better Stop Suicide](#)

### *Suicide Awareness*

HealthLine recommends the app [Better Stop Suicide](#) to promote suicide awareness. This app provides "psychological techniques to help people who are having suicidal thoughts by encouraging their minds to slow, calm down, and think [more] rationally" (20). The app allows users to listen to calming audio files developed by mental health professionals, record messages, listen to audio that helps promote sleep, and save important contacts who can help users in a hurry. The app also provides gratitude and mood exercises to change negative thoughts into positive affirmations. There is no cost to use the app; however, there are a limited number of activities available in the app, which may be a drawback to some users.



## [Bearable](#)

### *Symptom Tracking*

For symptom tracking, Verywell Mind recommends the [Bearable](#) app. The Bearable app helps users explain symptoms, and allows them to share data with their medical team, aligning with Step 5 of the APA's App Adviser. Bearable provides users a journal, symptom tracker, and medication reminders. It also allows users to monitor sleep, medication, exercise, and food intake. The app is available either free, or additional features can be purchased through a subscription for \$4.49 per month, or \$27.99 per year. The only drawbacks to the app identified by Verywell Mind are that there can sometimes be technical difficulties with the app crashing or reminders not working.



### [Headspace](#)

*Meditation*

For meditation, HealthLine recommends [Headspace](#). Headspace offers users a variety of meditation programming ranging from three to 20 minutes that are designed for both beginners and experienced users, with the goal of users being more mindful in their everyday lives. Headspace also educates on the basics of mindfulness, how to deal with cravings, address distractions, and how to get better sleep. While not free, HealthLine finds Headspace to be affordable with a monthly subscription price of \$12.99 (or \$69.00 for the year). HealthLine also notes that Headspace has high user satisfaction ratings, but notes that the exercises may become repetitive. Survey results indicated that this is the most used app among Michigan Health Endowment Fund grantees.



### [iBreathe](#)

*Stress*

For handling stress, HealthLine recommends the free app, [iBreathe](#). This easy-to-use app helps users handle stress and anxiety through simple breathing exercises. The app focuses solely on breathing exercises, and allows users to schedule a time each day to focus on breathing. Users can also access the breathing exercises in the app any time they need help dealing with a stressful situation. The only drawback identified by HealthLine is that the app only offers one feature, meaning that users may need to access additional apps for a more holistic approach to stress management.



### [Happify](#)

*Mood Management*

For boosting moods, HealthLine recommends [Happify](#). Happify has a variety of versions available with a variety of pricing models. The free version of Happify provides users access to some games and information, with premium versions providing additional content. Subscriptions can be purchased monthly (\$14.99) or annually (\$139.99), and lifetime access is available for \$449.99. Happify uses games that were developed with positive technology techniques and CBT principles to boost users' moods. Games are available to help users cope with stress, advance their careers, achieve mindfulness, overcome negative thoughts, and build self-confidence. HealthLine finds the app is easy to use and sets achievable goals for its users; although some users have indicated that the deadlines provided by the app contribute to higher levels of stress.

Similar to HealthLine, Verywell Mind also recommends the [Happify](#) app. While HealthLine recommends Happify for boosting moods, Verywell Mind recommends Happify as the "best fun app" (21). Verywell Mind recommends Happify "because of its science-backed games that help [users] reduce stress, build resilience, and overcome negative thoughts" (21). The only drawbacks identified by Verywell Mind for Happify are the limitations in the free version, and that the deadlines in the app can contribute to increased stress – a similar concern recognized by HealthLine.



### [Calm](#)

*Meditation*

According to Verywell Mind, [Calm](#) is the best app for meditation. Calm claims to improve sleep quality, reduce stress and anxiety, improve focus, and help users with self-improvement. Calm offers audio classes and programming to help users achieve better sleep; and provides breathing exercises for relaxation and mindful movements. Calm is suitable for both those new to meditation, as well as those who are experienced. Verywell Mind likes Calm "because it offers flexible programs and exercises that help manage anxiety" (21). Calm memberships are approximately \$70 per year, or \$400 for a lifetime membership.



## Shine

### *Anxiety and Stress*

With equity in mind, Verywell Mind recommends [Shine](#) as the best app for people of color, especially women. Verywell Mind notes that Shine helps empower people of color "by offering community support and tools that address" issues that are specific to people of color. A Shine subscription is \$65 per year, and allows users access to a peer community for support, provides empowering tools and activities for self-improvement and crisis management, and provides resources specific to BIPOC mental health. The app also contains activities that were designed based on empirical research. The drawbacks to Shine identified by Verywell Mind include a lack of access to professional support, the cost of the app, and the potential for the challenge activities to increase stress. They also note that the app is not designed for individuals with serious mental illnesses, although it may be useful in collaboration with clinical care.

## Summary

With more than 10,000 behavioral health and wellness apps available to individuals and behavioral health organizations, the research and recommendation process can be daunting. Resources like the APA App Advisor and MINDApps help to streamline the process; and independent reviews of apps, such as those provided by HealthLine and Verywell Mind can give individuals, providers, and behavioral health-focused organizations a place to start to understand what types of apps are available, how they can be integrated into clinical care, and additional benefits they can provide to individuals and providers alike.

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