

Introduction

Previous research demonstrates a strong link between mental health and substance use, prompting the World Health Organisation to call for integrated approaches to care (WHO, 2024). SUMIT is a project supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). The project investigates how digital interventions can support people experiencing substance use and mental health challenges in community harm reduction settings. This work is delivered through a partnership between Queens University Belfast, Trinity College Dublin, the University of St Andrews, Scotland's Digital Health and Care Innovation Centre (DHI), and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO). This summary presents findings from DHI's initial participatory research.

Method

DHI first held professional workshops to co create service user personas (Fig. 1) and digital product cards (Fig. 2) intended to stimulate discussion about needs and potential solutions.

(Figures omitted from summary)

These were used during participatory workshops with professionals and service users across four sites in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. Participants mapped service journeys in each area using the personas and explored how digital tools could support recovery and mental health needs. Service users also discussed their experience using digital devices for support and shared their views on where digital help would be most valuable.

Results & Discussion

Participants generated nine concepts including: self directed resource libraries, personalised recovery support, tools to build confidence when approaching services, online peer communities, mental health rescue plans, and cross generational support. Professionals focused on enhancing existing service delivery, while service users emphasised broader life challenges, hope for the future, and breaking cycles of transgenerational trauma. They also expressed caution about digital replacing personal connection, although they recognised the value of digital support when anonymity or out of hours help is needed.

Conclusion

We are continuing design led workshops which will inform the procurement of three innovative digital products our demonstrator areas. These products will be evaluated for their impact on services, staff, and service users.

Reference

WHO. (2024). Integrated Operational Framework For Mental Health, Brain Health and Substance Use.