VA Technology for Veterans with PTSD

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Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Those with PTSD suffer from challenging psychological symptoms, including:

- Hyperarousal
- Difficulty sleeping
- Intrusive symptoms s/a memories
- Avoidance of triggering stimuli
- Negative mood
- Impacts functioning in social situations
Veterans with PTSD report that:

- eHealth tools can help them to cope with their symptoms.
- eHealth tools allow them to report symptoms more accurately.
- Mobile phones can provide a sense of security that helps them function more effectively. (e.g., Erbes et al., 2014; Houston et al., 2013; Whealin et al., 2015; Whealin et al. 2016)
Mobile Phone Apps for PTSD:

- Treatment Companion Apps
- PTSD Coach
- Family Coach
- Mindfulness Coach
- VetChange
- CBTi Coach
- Annie Text Messaging protocols
PTSD Coach supports PTSD-related self-care, and offers:

- Self-assessment
- PTSD-related education
- Information about professional care
- Tools to help manage their stressors
- Symptom monitoring
- Suicide prevention safety plan feature
The Mindfulness Coach helps Veterans learn how to practice mindfulness. And offers:

- Education about mindfulness
- Self-guided training in mindfulness meditation
- Tips to adopt a mindfulness practice
- Meditation goal-setting and tracking
- 12 audio-guided mindfulness exercises and additional exercises available for free download
The Annie Texting App

- Sends automated text messages to promote self-care for Veterans enrolled in VA health care.
- SMS messages for those who would like additional support and structure to remember things or to engage in a behavior.
- Text message protocols can improve efficiency and effectiveness of care delivery, as well as improve health outcomes.
- Clinics report major financial savings after implementing an automated, SMS-reminder system.
The Annie Texting App

Annie sends three types of messages:

- Reminder messages prompt Veterans to follow their treatment plans (e.g., take medications, prep for a medical procedure, follow after-care plans)
- Motivational/educational messages inspire Veterans to better care for themselves
- Interactive texts allow Veterans to track, monitor and provide data to their health care team.
Over 50 message protocols are available:

- Stress Management
- Coping During COVID
- Sleep
- Tobacco cessation
- Reminders, for example:
  - Medication reminders
  - Blood glucose monitoring
  - Home telehealth use reminders
The Stress Management Protocol helps Veterans learn more about stress and how it may affect them.

Messages provide tools:
- Simple strategies to manage stress
- Breathing exercises
- Strategies to help take a break
- Information on setting boundaries
- Mindfulness techniques

Veterans receive encouragement about how they are coping.
• Annie “Coping During COVID” sends self-care messages related to coping during the pandemic.

• Messages guided by cognitive-behavioral theoretical principles (e.g., Beck & Beck, 2011; Clark & Beck, 2010).

• Prompts encourage veterans to monitor stress and to request a coping tip “now or whenever you want one”.

• Of 651 Veterans, 90% of respondents paid more attention to their mental well-being because of the messages.

• 33% were “less likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors, such as drinking too much” (Whealin, Saleem, Vetter, Roth & Herout, accepted pending revisions).
Individuals with PTSD suffer from challenging psychological symptoms.

Technology—using Veterans who have PTSD embrace tools to help them cope.

Mobile apps have supported thousands of Veterans, but many still do not know about them.

Because Veterans commonly have, VA phone apps and text messaging protocols can deliver immediate support to Veterans when and where they need.
• **Office of Connected Care**

• The link to download the prescription pad and clinician's guide: [https://connectedcare.va.gov/outreach-toolkit](https://connectedcare.va.gov/outreach-toolkit)

• Staff can enroll Veterans via the Annie website: [https://staff.mobile.va.gov/annie-provider/](https://staff.mobile.va.gov/annie-provider/)

• **VA Mobile Apps**
  – [Annie Text Messaging protocols](https://connectedcare.va.gov/outreach-toolkit)
  – [CBTi Coach](https://connectedcare.va.gov/outreach-toolkit)
  – [Family Coach](https://connectedcare.va.gov/outreach-toolkit)
  – [Mindfulness Coach](https://connectedcare.va.gov/outreach-toolkit)
  – [PTSD Coach](https://connectedcare.va.gov/outreach-toolkit)
  – [VetChange](https://connectedcare.va.gov/outreach-toolkit)
References

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