



U.S. Department
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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



PTSD and Mobile Technology

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)



VA Support for PTSD and Comorbidities

Mobile Phone Apps for PTSD:

- ✓ Treatment Companion Apps
- ✓ PTSD Coach
- ✓ Family Coach
- ✓ Mindfulness Coach
- ✓ VetChange
- ✓ CBTi Coach
- ✓ Annie Text Messaging protocols





PTSD Coach

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



Mindfulness Coach 2.0

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 promotes 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.



Annie Health Reminder Tools

Over 50 message protocols are available:

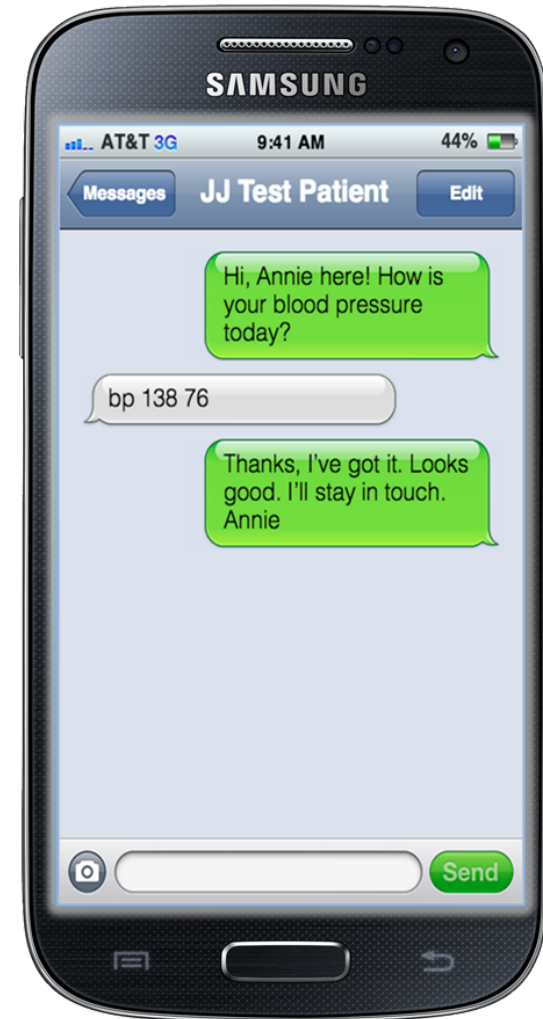
- ✓ Stress Management
- ✓ Coping During COVID
- ✓ Sleep
- ✓ Tobacco cessation
- ✓ Reminders, for example:
 - Medication reminders
 - Blood glucose monitoring
 - Home telehealth use reminders





Stress Management Annie App Protocol

- 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.





Coping During COVID Annie App Protocol

- 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*).



Summary/Recommendations

- ✓ 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.



Resources

- [Office of Connected Care](#)
- The link to download the prescription pad and clinician's guide:
<https://connectedcare.va.gov/outreach-toolkit>
- Staff can enroll Veterans via the Annie website:
<https://staff.mobile.va.gov/annie-provider/>
- VA Mobile Apps
 - [Annie Text Messaging protocols](#)
 - [CBTi Coach](#)
 - [Family Coach](#)
 - [Mindfulness Coach](#)
 - [PTSD Coach](#)
 - [VetChange](#)



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