

Virtual Solutions for Depression and Anxiety

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Background on PHTI's Report on Virtual Solutions for Depression and Anxiety

Depression and anxiety are two of the most common mental health problems in the United States. In any two-week period, one in five adults experience depression symptoms and one in six have anxiety symptoms.¹ Depression and anxiety make it hard to do everyday tasks, perform well at work, and maintain healthy relationships. If not treated, depression and anxiety can get worse over time.

Many people with depression and anxiety do not discuss their condition with their doctors. It can also be hard for people to find a therapist who is taking new patients and is covered by their insurance. Some people may be reluctant to ask for help and to seek care for their mental health needs.

Virtual mental health companies use smartphone apps to allow people to access digital content or virtual therapy. These apps can include self-guided programs or one-on-one therapy with a licensed mental health professional.

The Peterson Health Technology Institute (PHTI)—an independent nonprofit organization that conducts rigorous, evidence-based assessments of digital health tools—evaluated 15 of these virtual solutions for depression and anxiety to

understand how well they work. For this assessment, PHTI looked at the research and spoke with doctors, patients, and the companies that make these solutions. Past PHTI assessments have examined solutions for hypertension, musculoskeletal conditions, and type 2 diabetes.

What PHTI Found

PHTI identified three types of virtual solutions for depression and anxiety: self-guided apps that provide fully digital depression and anxiety content with coaching, FDA-cleared digital apps that can be prescribed by a provider while patients are receiving other treatment, and blended-care apps that combine digital content with one-on-one telehealth therapy.

- 1 Self-guided apps with personalized digital content can effectively reduce depression and anxiety symptoms, especially among patients who are not getting other treatment.
- 2 FDA-cleared apps also can help reduce depression and anxiety symptoms when used as part of a treatment plan with a doctor.
- 3 Blended-care apps are the most effective at reducing symptoms and may be more appropriate for patients with moderate to severe symptoms, offering both digital and one-on-one telehealth treatments.

¹ Terlizzi, Emily P., and Benjamin Zablotzky, "Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression Among Adults: United States, 2019 and 2022," *National Health Statistics Reports* 213 (2024): CS353885. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr213.pdf>

What It Means for You

Depression and anxiety often involve a mix of symptoms. For patients, finding the right type of care can be challenging and overwhelming. Virtual mental health apps can offer flexible, on-demand programs that support you at any stage of your mental health journey. Depending on your needs, they can offer symptom tracking, self-guided resources, and connection to care teams.

Self-guided solutions may be especially helpful if you are not currently in therapy. For those currently in treatment, you should first discuss with your provider whether starting a prescription program may be beneficial for you. If you need more support or are looking for one-on-one teletherapy, blended-care apps that also offer access to licensed mental health professionals may be a good option.

You can also share [PHTI's research](#) with your doctor to help them understand which solution may be the best option for you.

Costs

If your provider recommends or prescribes a digital depression or anxiety program, you may be able to access it through your insurance. You also may be able to access through your employer at low or no cost.

Accessing PHTI's Full Report

You can access the full report [here](#).

