

NHS Implementation Toolkit

ChatHealth

Mental Health

A safe, secure and confidential messaging service that puts young people and parents directly in touch with healthcare professionals.

What is the NHS Innovation Accelerator (NIA)?

- An award-winning national accelerator supporting committed individuals ('Fellows') to scale high-impact, evidence-based innovations across the NHS and wider healthcare system
- An NHS England initiative delivered in partnership with England's 15 Academic Health Science Networks (AHSNs) and hosted at UCLPartners
- Launched in 2015 to support the delivery of the Five Year Forward View, the NIA is highlighted in the NHS Long Term Plan, published in January 2019



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<https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/chathealth/>

What is it?

ChatHealth is a secure and confidential text messaging service. It allows patients to easily and anonymously get in touch with a healthcare professional for advice and support. Developed by Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, ChatHealth helps to safeguard vulnerable teenagers and parents. It uses technology that they are familiar with to enable them to securely contact a healthcare professional, supporting timely, confidential access to help. Messages are received in a central inbox, which can be accessed by the school nursing team. Nursing staff respond through a web-based application to send a message back to the individual's phone.

ChatHealth is co-designed by clinicians and service users. Its messaging helplines make holistic help universally accessible, simply by promoting a single centrally staffed service throughout an area. Service users do not need to wait for a clinician to visit and the service is completely anonymous, meaning it reaches out to often seldom heard groups. The computer-based risk management system ensures that no message received goes un-answered and the service is fully auditable and reportable, overcoming a previous implementation barrier to messenger-based platforms.

ChatHealth supports greater efficiencies by enabling individual nurses to provide support services to more people by using this digital solution.

What's the problem?

- Teenage suicide in England and Wales increased 67% between 2010 and 2017. [Office of National Statistics](#) figures show that in the last year alone 187 under 19s took their own lives, compared with 162 the year before.
- Traditional ways of accessing healthcare can be stigmatised and are inconsistently available across areas.
- 11% of clinical posts in mental healthcare are vacant meaning there aren't enough qualified staff to go around. As a result, many young people have poor experience of care and are unable to access timely and appropriate support.
- Evidence shows that young people sometimes feel more comfortable and confident relaying sensitive issues via mobile technology rather than by face-to-face discussion with a healthcare professional whilst busy parents especially value its convenience.
- A messaging service provides a timely, age appropriate and confidential solution for improving service access.
- The [British Youth Council](#) survey which underpins the road-map for school nursing, found that teens specifically requested more messaging helplines to be established.

What's the evidence?

NICE's MedTech [Innovation briefing](#) for ChatHealth found the following:

- ChatHealth has potential to have a positive impact as a communication platform in school nursing services compared with current standard care.
- Cost savings may arise from increased efficiency in the school nursing service and potential avoidance of health issues by improving access to the service. Economic information suggests cost and resource savings.
- ChatHealth users have reported easier and anonymous access to the school nursing service from a young person's perspective and more effective use of staff time from a service provider perspective.

Economic impact:

- Adopting teams usually move to a single point of access model, where one duty nurse can handle all messaging enquiries from an entire school population, requiring approximately 0.5 WTE capacity. One nurse using the service is able to support a population of 85,000 pupils.
- The combined cost of the service (0.5 WTE staff and product licencing) is £10,000 less than a WTE post. To deliver the same number of additional contacts using traditional face to face methods, would require four more staff costing £150,000 per annum in comparison to the savings that could be made with the combined total of £36,400 per annum for 0.5 WTE staff and ChatHealth.

Reducing inequalities:

- Nurses involved in piloting said they spoke with more new young people than before across a broader range of mental health issues. More contact is made with underserved adolescents – particularly boys, who're traditionally less likely to access help.
- A trial in 2014 of 65,000 11-19-year olds demonstrated more effective use of staff time, prevented problems escalating and removed the barriers of geography and transport. 97% of all enquiries received were effectively resolved via messaging nurses, with just 3% requiring more resource-intensive face-to-face input.

Compliance

- An independently accredited Information Security Analyst has been appointed to ensure compliance with information management standards and deliver continuous due diligence

on supply partners. ChatHealth is fully GDPR compliant and have implemented the information standard [SCCI0129](#). – This is now called DCC0129

- NHS Digital undertook rigorous testing before listing ChatHealth in the [NHS App Library](#) in 2017, examining particularly the robustness of the clinical approach, information security and legal compliance.

Recognition

- ChatHealth has been recognised with an NHS England Innovation Challenge Prize, a Patient Experience Network National Award and an East Midlands AHSN Innovation Award.

How can I adopt ChatHealth?

The ChatHealth support team provides training to staff before launch and an introductory workshop. Implementation plans are available for teams of any size. As an example, a team of up to ten nurses would cost around £6,000 per year.

Pricing is based upon annually recurrent costs per users, and costs reduce with each additional licence:

- A minimum cost of £2,700 per annum is set for four users.
- Average spend per organisation is £8,000 per annum.
- There is a one-off set-up cost of around £6,500.

ChatHealth is available through the [G-Cloud procurement framework](#).

Following expression of interest, a call or meeting will be organised to discuss the planned service model. Once confirmed, deployment can be completed within three months. Deployment will be supported by project management input from the ChatHealth team in liaison with a nominated change lead within the clinical team of the adopting site. Delivery of the messaging service will be supported on an ongoing basis under a contractual agreement between the ChatHealth team and the provider organisation.

Who else is using it?

ChatHealth is now available to nearly two million young people and used by around 40 organisations in 13 of the 15 AHSN regions. Publicity following the award-winning pilot and initial deployment in Leicestershire attracted the first three adopters in 2014/15; Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Northamptonshire.

In four years ChatHealth has grown to over 40% uptake in England's school nursing teams and 11% uptake by health visiting teams. In the last year, teams using ChatHealth have had 17,000 conversations with parents, carers and young people. So far, 1,530 healthcare professionals have been trained to use ChatHealth and some adopters are into their third year of annual licensing with 95% renewal rate.

Endorsements

"It allows us to express ourselves in ways we couldn't express to our friends – to know it's confidential makes me open-up" – **Young person using ChatHealth**

"Responded so quickly and answered all questions thoroughly. I felt anxious this morning but now I'm happy with the advice I've been given and know when to seek additional help. It has prevented an unnecessary appointment at the GP today. Very valuable service." – **Parent using ChatHealth**

"We reach a different cohort of young people by ChatHealth than the young people who a school nurse or other professional would refer to the service. I often think that they are the young people who on the surface appear to be coping but underneath it all are really struggling." – **Health professional using ChatHealth**



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