



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Student name: Mame Diarra. Student ID number:2335169

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Lecturer: G1: Dr Laila Surani

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MindLink: A Digital Mental Health Support Platform for Young Adults (18–25)

Innovation Overview

- MindLink is a free NHS linked digital mental health platform designed specifically for young adults.
- It supports individuals experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, and low mood.
- The platform provides early intervention and self management tools, including mood tracking, coping exercises, and guided well being resources.
- Mind links offers rapid signposting to NHS approved mental health services, including referral pathways to IAPT, now known as NHS talking therapies.
- The innovation encourages preventative care to reduce escalation of mental health crises and the strain on NHS resources.
- Evidence based strategies and digital support are integrated to improve accessibility and engagement and user experience.

The Issue / Gap in Health & Social Care

- Mental health problems are rising sharply among young adults aged 18–25 in the UK.
- Long waiting times for NHS services prevent timely support, leaving many individuals without help for weeks or months.
- Many young adults do not meet referral thresholds for formal therapy but still require early support.
- Delayed intervention can worsen outcomes, increase the risk of self harm, and reduce educational or work productivity.
- Stigma and lack of awareness prevent some young adults from seeking support in person.
- Digital mental health solutions can bridge gaps by providing confidential, accessible, and low threshold support.

Target Audience & Impact

Target Group:

- Young adults aged 18–25.
- University students, apprentices, and early career workers.

- Individuals at risk of anxiety, depression, or low resilience due to academic, work, or social pressures.

Impact on Health & Wellbeing:

- Provides immediate access to mental health resources and support.
- Encourages help seeking behaviour and reduces stigma around mental health.
- Reduces crisis escalation and unnecessary visits to emergency services.
- Builds mental resilience through guided self-management and education.
- Supports the wider community by easing NHS workload and reducing societal costs associated with mental health crises.
- Promotes long term wellbeing, coping strategies, and life skills development.

Implementation

- Setting: Universities, GP practices, community health services, and online platforms accessible nationwide.
- Led by: NHS, local authorities, and accredited digital health providers.

Delivery

- Self referral through a secure mobile app or web portal.
- NHS approved mental health resources, self assessment tools, and mood tracking.
- Referral pathways to NHS Talking Therapies (IAPT) when higher level support is needed.
- Provides optional reminders, push notifications, and motivational support to increase adherence.
- Collaboration with mental health charities ensures additional peer and community support.

Timeline:

- 0–3 months: Development, stakeholder consultation, and testing of app usability.

- 3–6 months: Pilot programme in universities, GP practices, and community health centres.

- 6–12 months: National rollout across England with continuous monitoring and feedback loops.

- Evaluation includes user satisfaction, engagement metrics, and mental health outcomes.

- Ongoing updates to resources and app features based on feedback and emerging evidence.

Development & Regulations

- Fully complies with GDPR and UK Data Protection Act 2018.

- Adheres to NICE mental health guidelines for digital interventions.

- Meets NHS Digital security and safeguarding standards.

- Ensures ethical and confidential handling of personal and mental health data.

- Regular audits and risk assessments maintain high quality service standards.

- Continuous staff and volunteer training supports ethical and professional delivery.

Technology Integration

- Secure mobile and web application accessible on multiple devices.

- Mood tracking, self assessment quizzes, and guided coping exercises.

- AI supported signposting for personalised support recommendations (nondiagnostic).

- Encrypted data storage ensures user safety and confidentiality.

- Push notifications encourage engagement without overwhelming users.

- Integration with NHS digital records allows streamlined referral to professional services.

Conclusion

MindLink provides a digital, accessible, and preventative solution for mental health support among young adults. By encouraging early intervention, promoting self management, and linking users to professional services when needed, it improves mental wellbeing, reduces crises, and supports the wider community. The innovation

aligns with NHS priorities and UK regulations while harnessing technology to make mental health support more inclusive, confidential, and effective.

Rationale and Need for the Innovation

Young adults aged 18–25 represent a critical transitional stage in life, often facing increased vulnerability to mental health difficulties due to academic pressures, employment instability, financial stress, and changing social relationships. Evidence from UK mental health services shows a sustained rise in anxiety, depression, and low mood among this age group, alongside increasing demand for professional support. However, existing NHS mental health services are struggling to meet this demand in a timely manner, resulting in long waiting lists and delayed access to appropriate care (NHS Digital, 2023). A significant gap exists for individuals who experience ongoing mental distress but do not meet the clinical thresholds required for immediate referral to specialist services such as NHS Talking Therapies. As a result, many young adults are left without structured support during the early stages of mental health difficulty, increasing the risk of deterioration, crisis escalation, and negative impacts on education, employment, and social functioning. This lack of early intervention contributes to preventable mental health crises and places further strain on emergency and specialist services (NHS England, 2023).

Stigma surrounding mental health remains another major barrier to help seeking among young adults. Many individuals are reluctant to access face-to-face services due to fear of judgement, lack of awareness, or concerns about confidentiality. Digital mental health platforms offer an effective solution to this challenge by providing discreet, flexible, and accessible support that aligns with the digital habits of younger populations. Research and national policy increasingly recognise the role of digital interventions in improving engagement, promoting self management, and supporting preventative mental health care within the community. MindLink directly addresses these identified gaps by offering an NHS linked digital platform that supports early intervention, self management, and rapid signposting to appropriate services. By providing low threshold access to evidence based resources and guidance, MindLink aims to prevent the escalation of mental health difficulties while complementing existing NHS pathways. This approach supports both individual wellbeing and wider system sustainability, aligning with national priorities for early intervention, digital innovation, and improved mental health outcomes.

Aims and Objectives

Aim

The overall aim of MindLink is to improve early access to mental health support for young adults aged 18–25 by providing a digital, NHS linked platform that promotes early intervention, self management, and timely referral to appropriate mental health services.

Objectives

The objectives of MindLink are to:

- Provide young adults with immediate, low threshold access to mental health support through a secure digital platform.
- Support early intervention for individuals experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, or low mood before symptoms escalate.
- Promote self management and mental wellbeing through evidence based tools such as mood tracking and guided coping exercises.
- Reduce barriers to accessing mental health services, including stigma, long waiting times, and lack of awareness.
- Encourage appropriate help seeking behaviour and facilitate timely referral to NHS Talking Therapies (IAPT) when higher level support is required.
- Contribute to the reduction of mental health crises and unnecessary use of emergency services.

Expected Benefits and Outcomes

MindLink is expected to deliver significant benefits for young adults, health and social care services, and the wider community. For young adults aged 18–25, the platform will provide immediate and accessible mental health support, reducing delays in care and enabling individuals to seek help at an earlier stage. This early access is anticipated to improve emotional wellbeing, increase mental health literacy, and strengthen coping skills through guided self management tools.

By offering low threshold digital support, MindLink is expected to reduce stigma associated with help seeking and encourage users to engage with mental health services in a confidential and supportive way. Improved signposting and referral pathways to NHS Talking Therapies (IAPT) will support timely escalation to professional care when required, improving continuity of care and outcomes.

For the NHS and wider health and social care system, MindLink is expected to reduce pressure on GP services, emergency departments, and crisis services by preventing the escalation of mild to moderate mental health difficulties. Long term outcomes include reduced mental health crises, improved service efficiency, and cost savings associated with preventative care. Overall, MindLink contributes to improved population mental wellbeing and supports a more sustainable, preventative approach to mental health care.

Implementation & Delivery

MindLink will be implemented across universities, GP practices, community health services, and online platforms to ensure nationwide accessibility for young adults aged 18–25. The platform will be led collaboratively by the NHS, local authorities, and accredited digital health providers, ensuring that services are safe, effective, and

aligned with national guidelines. Regular consultations with stakeholders, including students, mental health professionals, and university wellbeing teams, will inform the platform's design and ongoing updates.

Users will be able to self refer through a secure mobile app or web portal. MindLink will provide evidence based resources, self assessment tools, mood tracking, and guided coping exercises to encourage self management and proactive engagement. For users requiring higher level support, the platform will facilitate timely referrals to NHS Talking Therapies (IAPT), providing a clear pathway from digital support to professional care. Optional push notifications and reminders will enhance engagement while respecting user preferences, allowing users to control their level of interaction with the platform.

Partnerships with mental health charities and peer support networks will allow integration of community based resources, creating a holistic support system. Continuous monitoring of engagement metrics, user satisfaction, and mental health outcomes will inform iterative updates to the platform, ensuring ongoing relevance, accessibility, and effectiveness. Staff and volunteers will receive comprehensive training in digital safeguarding, confidentiality, and ethical delivery, maintaining compliance with NHS Digital standards, NICE guidelines, and GDPR regulations.

The rollout of MindLink will follow a phased approach. A 3–6 month pilot will be conducted in selected universities and GP practices to test usability, user engagement, and overall effectiveness. Feedback will be gathered continuously through surveys, focus groups, and in app evaluation tools to refine the platform's features. Following the pilot, a national launch will occur within 12 months, with ongoing monitoring to adapt the service to emerging needs. This structured and phased implementation ensures that MindLink remains accessible, safe, impactful, and capable of supporting preventative mental health care for young adults across England.

Conclusion

MindLink offers a comprehensive, accessible, and preventative approach to mental health support for young adults aged 18–25. By integrating early intervention, evidence based self management tools, and clear referral pathways to NHS Talking Therapies (IAPT), the platform addresses key gaps in current mental health services, reduces barriers to care, and encourages proactive engagement with mental wellbeing. Young adults can access confidential, low threshold support at any time, which is crucial given the rising prevalence of mental health challenges in this age group and the long waiting times for traditional services.

The innovation is designed to be scalable, safe, and fully aligned with NHS guidelines, GDPR regulations, and NICE recommendations for digital mental health interventions. Implementation across universities, GP practices, community health services, and online platforms ensures that support is available wherever it is needed. Integration with peer support networks,

mental health charities, and user feedback loops creates a holistic and adaptive support system. This approach enhances accessibility, promotes inclusion, and allows the service to respond dynamically to the evolving needs of young adults.

MindLink benefits individuals by enhancing mental resilience, reducing stress, anxiety, and low mood, and preventing the escalation of mental health crises. Simultaneously, it supports the wider community by alleviating pressure on NHS services, promoting preventative care, and contributing to a sustainable, long term approach to mental health. By continuously monitoring engagement, satisfaction, and outcomes, the platform can iteratively improve, ensuring its relevance and effectiveness over time.

By combining technology, evidence based strategies, and collaborative partnerships with health professionals and community organisations, MindLink demonstrates the potential to make a meaningful and lasting impact on the mental wellbeing of young adults in the UK. Ultimately, it fosters healthier, more resilient communities while addressing one of the most pressing challenges facing contemporary health and social care: accessible, preventative, and effective mental health support.

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