

Atlantic Futures Research Stream 4 - HPRC Annual report 2024-2025



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Project Title: *Digital Mental Health Support for Young People*

(more information available at <https://www.atlanfutures.com/themes-and-research/researchstream-4>)

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Funder: This research study is a collaboration between researchers from Ulster University (Northern Ireland) and the University of Galway (Ireland) and is part of a broader four-year cross-border research project Atlantic Futures, which seeks to guide transformation in Ireland's Northwest Atlantic corridor. The project is funded by The North-South Research Programme, a collaborative scheme funded through the Government's Shared Island Fund. It is administered by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

Background: This study is being undertaken because young people across the island of Ireland are experiencing higher rates of mental health difficulties than ever before. Although there are evidence-based approaches available to support young people's mental health, their implementation in practice is fragmented. Since 2020, there has been a drastic increase in demand for mental health supports, yet, according to a recent report, youth mental health systems in Ireland and Northern Ireland remain over-stretched and under-resourced, lacking appropriate and timely mental health care. Recent consultations conducted with young people on their mental health highlight that there is a need for a better understanding of how to respond to young people's mental health needs in new ways, including evidence-based digital mental health supports, and to explore how supports are best implemented on the ground. This is especially important for those young people considered most marginalised.

To address these gaps, the project initially conducted scoping reviews on digital mental health interventions and the co-production of supports with marginalised youth. In late 2024 and early 2025, an online survey and creative workshops identified key challenges and resources, informing the co-design of a Google Site featuring digital mental health apps during the summer of 2025. An acceptability and implementation study is currently on the way with young people evaluating the Google site to inform future service and policy development.

Aim and objectives: This research study seeks to explore innovative, accessible digital supports and blended services to promote youth mental health in partnership with young people across the island of Ireland, especially with those who are marginalised.

The study aims to engage young people and the staff who support them in health, youth, and community services in order to:

- Identify digital mental health challenges facing young people across the island of Ireland
- Identify appropriate digital mental health apps and interventions
- Validate, in partnership with young people, what digital mental health interventions work

- Use findings to inform policy and practice to be adopted by health providers across the island of Ireland.

Design and methods: Sequential mixed methods; co-design.

Findings/Results:

The following project activities have been conducted to date:

- Scoping reviews on 1) digital mental health interventions for young people, and 2) production of digital mental health supports with marginalised young people.
- Established an Advisory Group and Reference Group with young people from both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, to help guide the development of the project.
- Initial stakeholder engagement workshops undertaken with young people and service providers in both jurisdictions.
- Online survey to assess young people's mental health needs, attitudes, knowledge, and use of digital technologies across both jurisdictions.
- Creative workshops with young people across both jurisdictions during Q2/2025 to assess mental health and wellbeing challenges and needs as well as resources currently used by young people.
- Co-design of Google Site with Reference group of young people during Q3/2025, containing digital mental health apps and websites. Resource creation was informed by findings from survey and creative workshops.
- Currently (Q4/2025) recruiting for acceptability and implementation study where young people trial co-designed Google Site to inform service providers and policy makers.
- Planning policy dialogue with key stakeholders for Q1-2/2026.

Dissemination:

Conference presentations to date:

Kealy, C., Potts, C., Madrid-Cagigal, A., Mulvenna, M., Donohoe, G., O'Neill, S., & Barry, M. (2025, 30 September). Co-producing digital mental health resources with marginalised youth in Ireland. *International Digital Mental Health & Wellbeing Conference*. Granada, Spain.

Potts, C., Kealy, C., McNulty, J., Madrid-Cagigal, A., Mulvenna, M., O'Neill, S., ... & Barry, M. (2025, 30 September). Exploring the digital landscape: Mental health tools for young people (16–25). *International Digital Mental Health & Wellbeing Conference*. Granada, Spain.

Potts, C., O'Neill, S., Mulvenna, M., Kealy, C., Donohoe, G., & Barry, M. (2024, September 9-11). Addressing youth mental health: can we leverage digital technologies for support? [Conference Presentation]. *European Conference on Mental Health*, Krakow, Poland.

Kealy, C., Potts, C., Mulvenna, M., Donohoe, G., McNulty, J., Madrid-Cagigal, A., O'Neill, S. & Barry, M. (2024, June 13-14). Preliminary findings from a scoping review on co-producing accessible digital mental health tools in partnership with marginalized young people. [Conference Presentation]. *UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, University of Galway, 11th Biennial International Conference: Promoting Equality through Family Support*. University of Galway, Galway, Ireland.

Kealy, C., Potts, C., Mulvenna, M., O'Neill, S., Donohoe, G., McNulty, J., Madrid-Cagigal, A. & Barry, M. (2024, June 13). Preliminary findings from a scoping review on co-production of accessible digital

mental health tools in collaboration with young people from marginalised backgrounds. [Conference Presentation]. *Annual Health Promotion Conference*. University of Galway, Galway, Ireland.

Kealy, C., Potts, C., Mulvenna, M., O'Neill, S., Donohoe, G., McNulty, J., Madrid-Cagigal, A. & Barry, M. (2024, June 2-5). Exploring co-production of accessible digital mental health tools in collaboration with young people from marginalised backgrounds: A Scoping Review. [Conference Presentation] *International Society for Research on Internet Interventions*. University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland.

Potts, C., Kealy, C., Mulvenna, M., O'Neill, S., Donohoe, G., McNulty, J., Madrid-Cagigal, A. & Barry, M. (2024, April 18-20). Landscape of Digital Mental Health Interventions for Youth Aged 12-25. [Conference Presentation]. *Society for Research on Adolescence Annual Meeting*. Chicago, Illinois, United States of America.

Publications to date:

Kealy, C., Potts, C., Madrid-Cagigal, A., Mulvenna, M., Donohoe, G., O'Neill, S., & Barry, M. (2025). Mental health needs, attitudes, knowledge, and use of digital technologies among young people across Ireland: An overview report. School of Psychology Ulster University. <https://doi.org/10.21251/4c41f572-7e39-4f15-a035-9404a9d66c28>

Kealy, C., Potts, C., Cagigal, A.M., Mulvenna, M.D., Donohoe, G., O'Neill, S., Barry, M.M. (2025). Co-producing digital mental health supports with marginalised young people: exploring needs through creative workshops in Ireland [OSF Preprint]. doi:10.31234/osf.io/qxjza_v1

Potts, C., Kealy, C., McNulty, J. M., Madrid-Cagigal, A., Wilson, T., Mulvenna, M. D., ... & Barry, M. M. (2025). Digital Mental Health Interventions for Young People Aged 16-25 Years: Scoping Review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 27, e72892.

Kealy, C., Potts, C., Madrid-Cagigal, A., Mulvenna, M. D., Donohoe, G., O'Neill, S., & Barry, M. M. (2025). Co-production of accessible digital mental health supports with marginalised young people: a scoping review. *Journal of Mental Health*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2025.2512317>

Kealy, C., Potts, C., Mulvenna, M. D., Donohoe, G., O'Neill, S., & Barry, M. M. (2024). Protocol: Production of accessible digital mental health supports in partnership with young people from marginalised backgrounds: a scoping review protocol. *BMJ Open*, 14(5). doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2023-082247.

Public and Patient Involvement (PPI): Engaging young people and the organisations that support them plays a critical role, not only in shaping the focus of this overall research study, but also in selecting appropriate methods to explore the benefits and barriers relating to the effective use of digital technologies for young people's mental health.

The project has established an Advisory Group and a Reference Group of young people to guide the research study.

Knowledge Translation: A Knowledge Translation plan is being developed in collaboration with the Advisory Board, Reference Group, and other key stakeholders.