RSP e-therapy Clinic: Client Information

Thank-you for your interest in the RSP e-therapy clinic.

1) What is the RSP e-therapy clinic?

The e-therapy clinic provides services to people living in regional and rural areas near Canberra. Therapists work from the Research School of Psychology at the Australian National University in Canberra. Sessions are mainly via video-conferencing (this is like using Skype). You can join sessions from home or another private place that you choose.

Who are the e-therapy clinic therapists? Therapists are training in the ANU’s Clinical Psychology program which provides advanced clinical training for people who already have one or more psychology degrees. Therapists will have Provisional or General Registration as Psychologists with the Psychology Board of Australia. People who complete this program usually go on to be registered as Clinical Psychologists.

Therapists will work in the e-therapy clinic for up to 3 days per week over about 5 months. They will be supervised by experienced Clinical Psychologists at ANU. We hope that the students who work in the e-clinic will go on to provide services in regional, rural and remote areas when they have graduated.

What kind of issues can the e-Clinic best help with? This service is designed for people aged 18 years and over who have concerns about their mental health, including anxiety and depression. This service may not be suitable if you are experiencing severe symptoms and/or are in a situation where you or someone else is at risk of harm.

How is telepsychology used in other regional, rural and remote areas? Telepsychology is used across Australia to people see psychologists outside their local area. This provides more choice and saves travel time and costs. Sessions are offered through mental health organisations and by private practitioners.

2) What are the alternatives to the ANU e-therapy clinic?

When thinking about whether telepsychology is right for you, you might like to consider other options:

- Therapy delivered in face-to-face and/or telephone meetings, email and/or chat
- Seeking face-to-face or online support from people who have had similar experiences
- Making lifestyle changes such as exercise or meditation
- Using self-help books, self-help or therapist-supported internet programs

You can find out about other services by talking to your GP, other health practitioner or community support organisations and your local RAMHP Co-ordinator can help link you to mental health as well as other rural/ regional services including financial support.

Information is also available from the following online resources:

- Your local Primary Health Care Network has a list of mental health services in your local area – for example in Cooma and in Young
- Crisis support services such as Lifeline, MensLine - others are listed on HeadtoHealth
• Information websites and support providers e.g., SANE, beyondblue, Black Dog Institute
• Information about self help and therapist-supported online services and programs is available from the Head to Health website and the Beacon website

3) How does the e-therapy clinic work?

When you contact the e-clinic, we will make some times to talk with you by phone about the service and whether it suits your requirements.

We will then make an appointment for your first video-conferencing session. In that session we will complete a more detailed assessment. From this point, therapists will meet you by video-conference. You can log in from home or another private place that you choose. Sessions will usually run for 50 minutes.

What do I need in order to use the service? You will need an internet connection, a safe and private place and a device such as a computer, laptop or tablet. A small fee will be charged for sessions, but the amount can be adjusted if needed and fees will be waived while COVID-19 restrictions are in place.

Will we use Skype? The clinic uses the VideoCall service. It works like Skype, but you won’t need to make an account or download any software. You can just click on a button on our website and connect straight to the e-therapy clinic.

The technology in VideoCall was developed by the CSIRO for Australian health services to be as secure and reliable as possible. VideoCall is supported by State and Commonwealth governments. It is used by many health providers and has been approved for use with Drought Mental Health Services provided under Medicare.

4) How is it different from face to face sessions?

Does it work as well as in-person therapy?

Research so far shows that telepsychology results and client satisfaction can be similar to in-person therapy. However, more research is needed, especially for people living outside cities. You might like to consider the following points as you decide if telepsychology is right for you.

Suitability: Like other services, telepsychology is not suitable for everyone or for every situation.

Together, we will carefully consider the potential risks and benefits in your situation. If we identify any significant risks, we may decide that it is not appropriate for you at this time or we may decide to proceed and develop a plan for you to access additional supports as necessary.

Generally, in-person/ face to face therapy is more suitable for situations where people feel that they may harm themselves or other people; where they may be harmed by others (e.g., in a violent relationship) and conditions where people may feel unsure about their experiences or have experiences that others do not share (e.g., dissociation or psychosis).

You can decide not to use telepsychology if at any time you feel that it is not the best option for you. If this happens, it will not affect your access to other services and your therapist will help you find a service that suits you better.

Possible misunderstandings: Much of the information that is exchanged during conversations
with other people is non-verbal. Even with a good telepsychology connection, people may not receive as much information about each other as they do when they are in the same room. Occasionally this may lead to misunderstandings.

From time to time, your therapist will check in with you to make sure they understand what you have said correctly. If you think there is a misunderstanding or something just doesn’t seem right to you, please let your therapist know.

Pace of sessions:

People vary in how easy they find it to talk about personal issues over the internet. Compared to in-person sessions, some people find it about the same, some find it easier and some people find it more difficult.

We will check with you to make sure the pace of therapy is comfortable for you, just as we would in face to face sessions. Please let us know if things are moving faster or slower than you would like.

During assessment and treatment, there may be things that you do not wish to discuss at that time. Please advise your therapist if this is the case.

Connection quality: The signal in your region is generally good enough for telepsychology.

However, quality can vary over smaller areas and some places have weak signals.

Your therapist will help you check the signal strength at your house. If the signal is too weak, we will try to find a local place that you can connect from, such as a GP surgery.

In places that have a good signal, there can still be times when the signal might not work well. It may start well but drop out during a session or it might not be possible to connect at all.

- It might help to avoid scheduling sessions at times when other people in your house are using the internet (e.g., to play games or stream videos).
- Your therapist can adjust the videoconferencing settings to manage weaker signals.
- If a good signal can’t be established, a different way of contacting you will be used. The back-up plan is usually to talk on the phone. At each session, we will check that we have the right phone number for you.

Are there any risks with telepsychology and how can they be reduced?

All services have potential risks as well as potential benefits. Like other mental health services, telepsychology services need to have safeguards for the provision of emergency/crisis support and the protection of personal information.

Emergency Support:

The Clinic is a therapy service, is not staffed all of the time and is not set up to provide emergency or crisis support. Also, telepsychology may be of limited use in emergencies.

If you are interested in accessing therapy via video-conferencing, we will carefully consider the potential risks and benefits and explore sources of additional support that you can access in your local community and/or online. We will discuss emergency support and agree a plan for you to access suitable supports in addition to your therapy should the need arise.

If our service cannot provide sufficient support, it may not meet your needs at this time and it may be best for us to help you find a service that suits you better.

Privacy and information security:
Your privacy and the security of your information is very important and ANU and RSP staff and students are required to treat personal information with care, and in accordance with the ANU’s Privacy Policy, other applicable laws and professional standards.

What the e-therapy clinic does to protect your privacy:

The e-Clinic takes reasonable steps to secure your personal information from misuse, interference and loss, as well as unauthorised access, modification or disclosure.

These steps include
- using health-care grade technology which complies with Australian standards
- using electronic and physical methods of securing information
- engaging independent cyber security experts to make sure that the e-clinic procedures are as good as possible

More details about the e-clinic’s privacy policy and procedures are available here

The Clinic uses the internet for therapy sessions, for communications with clients and referrers and it also stores records electronically. With any electronic communications over the internet, there is always a risk that security measures will fail – for example, that communications may be intercepted by unauthorized people.

What you can do to protect your privacy:

In telepsychology, you have an important role in protecting your privacy. When you meet a therapist in their office, they can control the physical environment to make sure that it is private and secure. In telepsychology, the therapist can only control their environment and you will also need to take some steps to protect your privacy. Your therapist will help you work out steps to take in your specific situation. These will include logging into session from a private space on a device that is not shared with others or which is password protected, not using public wi-fi and making sure that your software (including your browser) is updated.