

Introduction to Link-me

What is the Link-me trial?

1 in 2 Australians will experience mental health problems in their lifetime. Mental health problems can make it hard for people to live the life they want. Lots of things can help improve mental health, but it can be hard for people to know what is the best option for them.

Link-me is a randomised controlled trial that is testing a new approach to helping people find support that works for them. It is funded by the Australian Government and is being conducted by researchers at the University of Melbourne.

Link-me builds on almost 15 years of research in Australian general practice. This research has shown that about one third of people attending a general practice are experiencing difficulties with their mental health. GPs currently have no systematic way of identifying the best way to tailor mental health care to each individual's needs. In this trial, we aim to address this gap and determine whether a simple, purpose-built online tool can improve mental health outcomes in a cost-effective way. Using the tool, GP patients can:

- complete an assessment
- receive feedback on their results
- set priorities based on these results
- receive a suggested treatment option matched to their risk of future mental health problems.

What does the trial involve?

Reception staff at participating general practices will invite patients to complete a 1-minute survey on an iPad before they see their GP. Whether or not someone completes the survey is entirely up to them. The survey identifies whether or not a person is eligible for the trial – if so, they are invited to read the study information and provide informed consent to take part.

People who are interested in participating then answer a few more questions on the iPad. The questions take about 2-5 minutes to answer and at the end, the iPad will randomly allocate people to one of two groups. Each group will provide us with different information about managing mental health and wellbeing. Some people will be asked for feedback on how mental health is currently managed, others might be asked to try something different (like using the internet or working with their GP clinic to find other options).

People taking part in Link-me will be contacted 6, 12, and 18 months after they complete the initial iPad questions to complete short online surveys. Answering these surveys will help us understand whether the Link-me approach to care can help people improve their mental health.

Taking part in Link-me is completely voluntary and people who do decide to take part can change their mind at any time.



Where is the trial happening?

This trial is a collaboration between North Brisbane PHN, North Coast PHN, and North West Melbourne PHN. Approximately six general practices in each PHN will be involved in the trial.

Participating general practices will display posters and information pamphlets in the waiting room. The practices taking part in the Link-me trial been through an application and selection process conducted by their PHN. All practices and their staff have agreed to participate in the trial but individual patients are free to make their own decision about whether or not they want to take part. All practices, GPs, and practice staff involved in Link-me will continue to care for all their patients as usual, whether or not the patient is participating in the trial.

Because this is a research trial only a small number of practices will be testing the Link-me model of care. This is because we don't know if the Link-me approach to care is more effective than the care GPs already provide. Randomised controlled trials like this are the gold standard for scientific testing and until we have finished the trial and worked out whether Link-me is better or no different to usual GP care, it wouldn't be right for us to offer the Link-me approach to more people. At this stage, only patients in participating practices are able to complete the iPad survey and take part in the trial.

How long is the trial running for?

This trial will run for about 2.5 years. Across the three PHNs a total of 5400 patients will be recruited to the trial, over 12 months from September 2017. Once recruited, each patient will remain in the trial for 12 months. The final results of the trial will be submitted to the Department of Health in July 2020. Outcomes may also be presented via conference presentations and publication of journal articles. No individual practice, GP, or patient will be identified or linked to the results.

Who are the researchers?

The University of Melbourne leads this trial; ethical approval is currently being sought from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. The anticipated commencement of this trial is September 2017.

The research team includes:

Professor Jane Gunn, Professor Jane Pirkis, Dr Susie Fletcher, Dr Bridget Bassilios, Dr Meredith Harris, Associate Professor Cathy Mihalopoulos, Professor Philip Burgess, Dr Victoria Palmer, Associate Professor Matthew Spittal, Dr Patty Chondros, Ms Anna Wood.

Who can I contact for more information?

If you have questions about the trial please email link-me@unimelb.edu.au and one of the researchers will get back to you soon.

