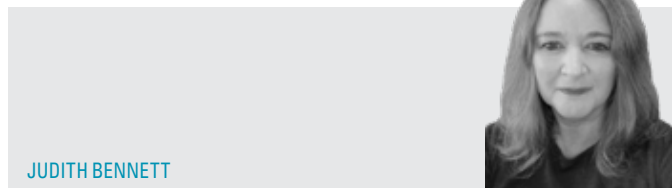


ON LINE HELP – MENTAL HEALTH LEGAL CENTRE

This app provides online legal help for people with mental health challenges.



JUDITH BENNETT

Which practitioners would find this useful?

On Line Help provides guided pathways to information and services for people with mental health challenges and their family members, carers and friends.

This app is useful for legal practitioners and staff in law firms, community legal centres, not-for-profit organisations and government agencies in Victoria, as well as referring organisations.

What is it?

On Line Help provides targeted legal information about services offered by the Mental Health Legal Centre covering the law and services for people with mental health challenges in Victoria. It is free for users. It does not give legal advice.

Background

Co-founded by Samantha Lovrich and Tatiana Lenz in 2019 in Melbourne, Legal Tech Helper combines legal operations and technological expertise with a vision to build accessible and inclusive technology to help the “missing middle” to access the law.

This project was motivated by the rapid increase in demand for Mental Health Legal Centre’s services during the COVID-19 pandemic and their limited resources. On Line Help was launched in 2021 as a joint project, with Legal Tech Helper providing agile project management and technical expertise and the Mental Health Legal Centre and Central Queensland University providing subject matter expertise and user assessment.

How it works

On Line Help starts by asking the user about their role – are they a person living with mental health challenges, a family member and/or carer, a friend, a referrer or other – and targets the information given to that role. The app does not ask for or collect any other private information. In addition, On Line Help aims to acknowledge the user’s emotions and state of mind when using the app. This is particularly important for users.

The app asks what problems the user needs help with. It gives a range of legal and non-legal options including services offered by the Mental Health Legal Centre, different areas of law that may assist people with mental health challenges and associated services. Multiple problems can be chosen.

The app then provides the information in a series of chunks, suggests next steps as actions and then summarises that session. It offers an option of downloading the information as a PDF

(using document automation) that can be kept, emailed and referred to again later. An optional survey asks for feedback.

Features and benefits

On Line Help collates and coordinates legal information about:

- legal and non-legal options as to support with contact details for support services
- the mental health system including Mental Health Tribunal hearing, treatment orders, advance statement and complaints
- money, fines, work and housing
- wills, powers of attorney, advanced care directives, guardianship and administration
- disability
- other problems such as family law and criminal law.

Features include:

- free to use
- accessible on multiple devices – can be used on smartphones and tablets with speedy loading to suit limited data plans
- designed to be easy to navigate, highly readable, in clear language and with useful illustrations
- Urgent Help button.

The app was developed using DocAssemble which is an open source software (FOSS) in the public domain. This is widely used in the US and worldwide with an international community of developers and lawyers providing security, ongoing support and improvements. It is also scalable.

Future features include new pathways – legal and other – such as how to visit people in hospital, prison or aged care, and managing tribunal treatment orders.

Downsides and risks

Currently focused on Victoria. Needs to be updated on an ongoing basis.

Cost

On Line Help is free for users who remain anonymous. The app development project was funded by a grant. ■

Judith Bennett is director of www.business4group.com the business consulting firm for legal professional services.

SNAPSHOT

What is On Line Help?

App giving free legal information for people with mental health challenges

What type of technology?

Web application using open source software

Vendor

Joint project by Legal Tech Helper, Mental Health Legal Centre and Central Queensland University

Country of origin

Australia

Non-tech alternatives

Lawyers, information brochures

More information

<https://pathways.mhlc.org.au/mhlc-online-help.html>