

## AIHaMBRA Project

### Thematic Policy Workshop, ***Application of eHealth Tools to Reduce Alcohol-Related Harm***

Europe has the highest level of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm in the world.<sup>1,2</sup> Overall, alcohol consumption in Europe has fallen in the past 20 years, however it remains the highest in the world, and the recent decline is expected to slow in coming years.<sup>3</sup> In the EU there are both opportunities and challenges for implementing effective policy aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm.

The AIHaMBRA Project workshop *Application of eHealth tools reduce alcohol related harm* was held with the objective of supporting European Member States in knowledge gathering, sharing best practice, capacity building in the role of digital health technologies (DHTs) and strengthening evidence-based alcohol policy to reduce alcohol-related harm across multiple sectors, adopting a health in all policies approach. It is the fifth workshop in a linked series in collaboration with the DEEP SEAS and FAR SEAS contracts.

There is growing evidence that digital health technologies (DHTs) or 'eHealth' tools can improve health and care outcomes<sup>4</sup>. DHTs allow for novel delivery channels and enable better targeted and personalised medicine<sup>5</sup>. They can enable patients to self-manage their treatment and health, freeing up time for healthcare providers and optimising resources<sup>6,7</sup>. With regard to alcohol, DHTs might facilitate the systematic collection of patient-reported data on lifestyle risk factors like alcohol consumption and improve clinical management by providing tailored feedback, point-of-care reminders, tailored educational materials, and referral to online self-management programs<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, digital interventions facilitate non-stigmatising detection, disclosure and monitoring of alcohol problems due to anonymity and 24/7 accessibility<sup>8,9</sup>. Thus, the effectiveness of DHTs in tackling alcohol harm and the potential for their large-scale implementation are important considerations for public health.

DHTs to prevent and treat alcohol consumption started appearing at the end of the 2000s, hand in hand with the increased digitalization of medicine and increased use of digital devices in daily life. However, 20 years later examples of large-scale implementation are scarce. Moreover, while the use of computers and smartphones is widespread, technologies such as wearables, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, motivational robots or digital human advisors are just emerging. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the development and uptake of digital health tools to serve isolated and hard-to-reach populations.

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<sup>1</sup> Manthey J, Rylett MA, Hasan OSM, Probst C, Rehm J. Global alcohol exposure between 1990 and 2017 and forecasts until 2030: a modelling study. *Lancet* (London, England). 2019;393(10190):2493-502.

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization. *Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health*. Geneva; 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Manthey J, Rylett MA, Hasan OSM, Probst C, Rehm J. Global alcohol exposure between 1990 and 2017 and forecasts until 2030: a modelling study. *Lancet* (London, England). 2019;393(10190):2493-502.

<sup>4</sup> Muench F. The promises and pitfalls of digital technology in its application to alcohol treatment. *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews*. 2014;36(1):131

<sup>5</sup> Communication From The Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on enabling the digital transformation of health and care in the Digital Single Market; empowering citizens and building a healthier society, (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Alpay L, van der Boog P, Dumaij A. An empowerment-based approach to developing innovative e-health tools for self-management. *Health informatics journal*. 2011;17(4):247-55.

<sup>7</sup> Carey M, Noble N, Mansfield E, Waller A, Henskens F, Sanson-Fisher R. The role of eHealth in optimizing preventive care in the primary care setting. *Journal of medical Internet research*. 2015;17(5):e3817.

<sup>8</sup> Resko SM, Brown S, Lister JJ, Ondersma SJ, Cunningham RM, Walton MA. Technology-based interventions and trainings to reduce the escalation and impact of alcohol problems. *Journal of social work practice in the addictions*. 2017;17(1-2):114-34

<sup>9</sup> Sundström C, Blankers M, Khadjesari Z. Computer-based interventions for problematic alcohol use: a review of systematic reviews. *International journal of behavioral medicine*. 2017;24(5):646-58.

## The workshop

The workshop comprised two sessions:

- Session 1, Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022, *Digital approaches to identify and reduce alcohol consumption and harm: do they work and how are they best used?*
- Session 2, Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2022, *Digital approaches to identify and reduce alcohol consumption and harm: do they work and how are they best used?*

The sessions brought together over 70 participants from the EU and beyond. During the sessions, participants heard from speakers and experts from the Spanish Ministry of Health, HaDEA and the JRC of the Commission, the European Public Health Alliance, the Pan American Health Organization, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United States of America.

Through short videos, live question and answer sessions, and small-group discussions, participants exchanged knowledge and shared learnings from their work in research, policy making, clinical practice and civil society on the development and implementation of digital health interventions. Tackling policy-oriented discussion questions, priorities and points for further consideration were reported back to the whole group and discussed to draw out conclusions and points for future consideration.

The main take-home messages raised and priorities supported by participants in the session were:

- Member States should support **community actors** to co-design tools, bridge the gap between developer and user, and encourage digital literacy for increased health-promoting effect
- Interventions to address alcohol use can be **embedded with broader lifestyle targeting interventions**
- **Access, inequity, literacy and the digital divide** are important issues to be addressed
- Investment and regulation is needed to ensure **data security, ethical use of information and privacy**, and to reassure users
- **Tailored and targeted interventions**, using human-centred design can contribute to uptake and adherence
- There are lessons to be learned from commercial practices, in terms of **development and marketing**
- The **evidence** behind digital health tools, and **potential conflicts of interest**, should be evaluated to ensure quality, evidence-based tools and drive **trustworthy accreditation systems**
- eHealth and DHTs can be used **to train professionals and for myth-busting** (i.e. health literacy)
- A **balance needs to be reached between guided (human interaction) and non-guided interventions**
- **Social marketing and profile analysis** can help reach target groups obliquely and secondary target groups.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND DISCLAIMER

This workshop was produced under the service contract for the **AIHaMBRA Project** (Alcohol Harm - Measuring and Building Capacity for Policy Response and Action, Contract No. 20197105). The information and views presented in the sessions are those of the speakers, and hence represent their sole responsibility. Accordingly, the information and views presented during sessions cannot be considered to reflect the views of the European Commission and/or the Health and Digital Executive Agency or any other body of the European Union. The European Commission and the Agency do not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information presented during the workshop sessions.



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