

Big White Wall shows quantifiable benefits for mental health in Ontario

John lives in eastern Ontario, in an area with limited access to mental health resources, particularly after business hours. Having access to help when he needed it wasn't a sure thing. He was relieved when Big White Wall (BWW), a new online mental health service free to Ontarians, became widely available.

"With BWW there was immediacy of contact, either with someone going through a similar situation, or had been, or a moderator who could step in and give me nice guidance to get me through that moment safely," says John.

Big White Wall (bigwhitewall.ca) is an online support community designed to help individuals ages 16 and up cope with depression and anxiety, as well as social isolation.

The service doesn't require a referral, however, a healthcare provider can refer to the service. It is available free to users thanks to funding through the Ontario government and the support of the health regions in the province.

Users can connect with others around specific topics or challenges. The site offers guided support courses on topics, such as depression, anxiety, weight management, and smoking cessation. It also provides an opportunity to display feelings using images, drawings, and words to make bricks that are posted to the Wall.

"Big White Wall can be a tremendously useful option for people struggling with anxiety and depression while waiting for in-person support or as a stand-alone tool for those seeking a supportive community," says Harriet Ekperigin, Senior Business Lead for the service at the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN). "This is an exciting first for Ontarians to have direct access to this type of impactful tool at no cost."

Big White Wall, which originates in the UK, has been adapted for the Canadian population, and any information shared is safeguarded securely in Canada.

The service was introduced into Ontario by OTN and the Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences, and was piloted at Ontario Shores, Lakeridge Health, and Women's College Hospital, with evaluation by the Women's College Hospital Institute for Health System Solutions and Virtual Care, before being offered province-wide.

A member survey conducted by Big White Wall found that:

- 70% of users saw improvement in at least one aspect of their well-being
- 46% of users reported sharing an issue for the first time
- 51% of users reported less mental health-related time off work using Big White Wall

Ekperigin is gratified to see the steady uptake of BWW and is working with the Local Health Integration Networks and colleges and universities to promote its availability. She sees great potential for Big White Wall to make a difference particularly among the youth population, with its well documented challenges with mental health stigma and judgement.

While Big White Wall is directly accessible without a referral, OTN is also supporting access to, and the scaling of, additional mental health resources for healthcare

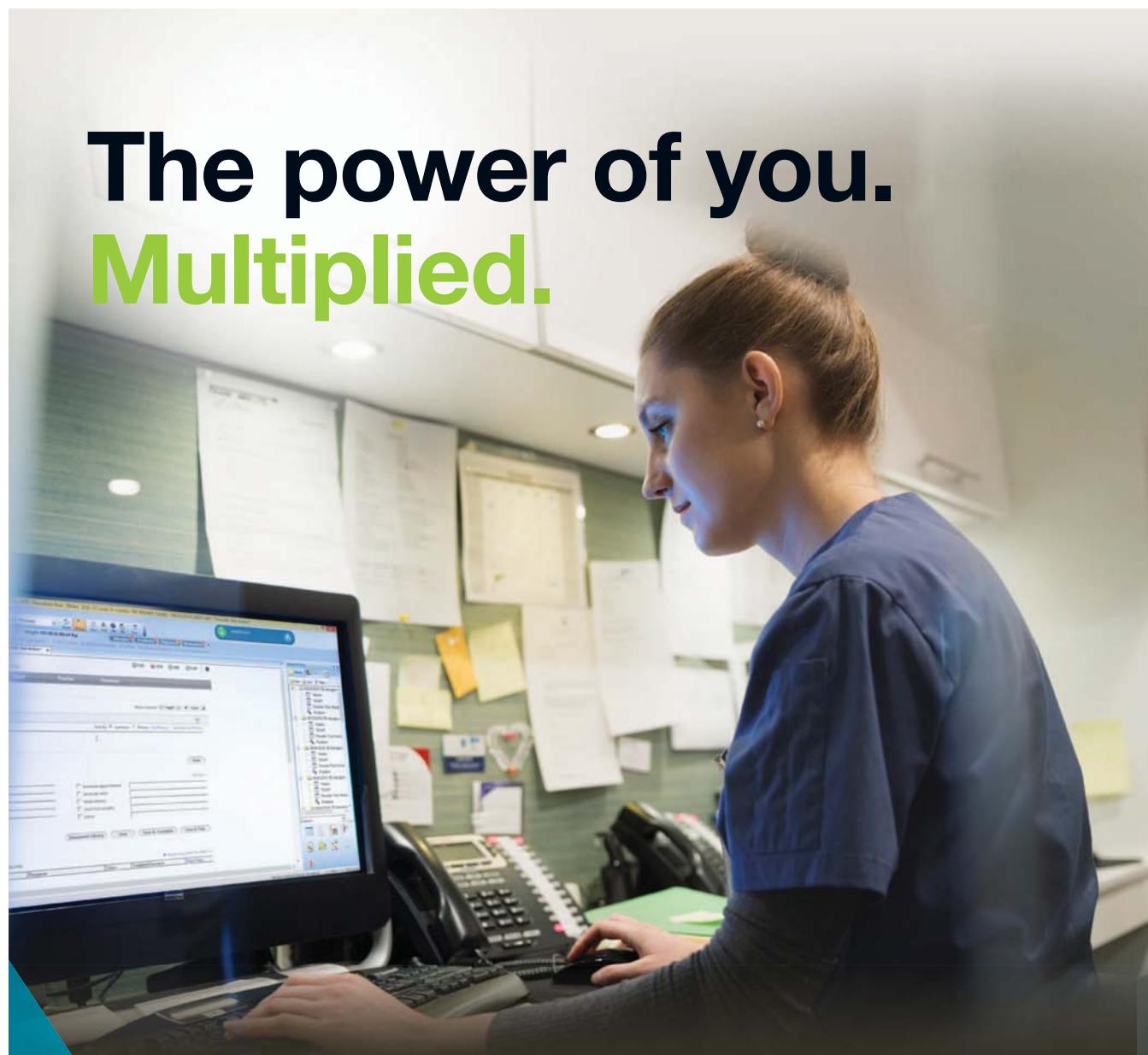
providers and organizations seeking solutions for their patients. These tools address the Mental Health Strategy for Canada recommendation to 'use technology to foster collaboration, increase access to services, and engage people in managing their mental health problems and illnesses.'

A mood and anxiety vendor of record arrangement is available through OTN's online Innovation Centre. It features four vendors: Big White Wall Ltd., MindBeacon Health Inc., Morneau Shepell Ltd., and TruReach Health Incorporated.

Each offers mature and market tested

mood and anxiety tools that support timely access to care, enhance self-management skills, and improve quality of life. Big White Wall was the first vendor selected from this VOR arrangement to support the provincial peer support platform.

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