

October 2024

eheadspace evaluation Snapshot Report



Who are the young people and families using eheadspace, and what help are they receiving?

Digital mental health interventions, such as online chat-based therapy, have revolutionised mental health care, particularly for young people (McGorry et al., 2022; Tal & Torous, 2017). There has been rapid growth in the number of online mental health and crisis services worldwide (Philippe et al., 2022). Online mental health interventions can be effective in reducing anxiety and depressive symptoms (Rice et al., 2018), and their accessibility means they reach people who might not seek help if in-person services were the only option (Rickwood, Webb, Kennedy, & Telford, 2016). They can also reach them at an earlier stage of illness (Rickwood et al., 2016). As well as being effective in their own right, online interventions can be integrated with in-person care and other service offerings, which can further enhance quality of care (Cross et al., 2023).

There is limited evidence around who accesses online mental health services and how, particularly in an Australian context. Evidence that does exist indicates that online services appeal to young people because they are perceived as safe and private, and offer a greater sense of immediacy, compared to traditional in-person services (Navarro, Bambling, Sheffield, & Edirippulige, 2019; Pretorius, Chambers, & Coyle, 2019). There is evidence that online clients are often highly distressed, and that they present with a range of psychosocial issues and disclose their issues quickly (Rickwood, Mazzer, & Telford, 2015). As such, ensuring online mental health services are staffed by highly skilled practitioners who are linked in with the wider service system is of critical importance to effectively assist those seeking help and manage risks.



headspace
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

This report focuses on the Australian digital mental health service eheadspace, presenting data on who uses the service, how it is accessed, why it is accessed, what support is provided, and how it integrates with other services.

What is eheadspace?

eheadspace is a national, digital mental health service that operates 365 days a year. It offers youth-friendly and accessible mental health and wellbeing support for young people aged 12-25 and their families, provided by experienced youth mental health professionals, via email, webchat and phone. eheadspace is a central part of the suite of digital mental health programs offered by headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation (headspace). eheadspace is uniquely positioned to support young people and families in an online environment, and to connect them to in-person support services, with its integration with over 160 in-person headspace centres located across Australia and other community and health organisations (Rickwood et al., 2019).

eheadspace commenced services as a pilot in July 2010 and was rolled out nationally in July 2011. It has since provided more than 750,000 services to 231,000 young people and their families.

headspace digital service offerings



The headspace account (24/7 access to a range of tools and support)



Self-guided website services and supports (including interactive modules and fact sheets for young people and families)



Self-guided clinician supported online therapy



eheadspace



Online group chats

Who uses eheadspace?

During 2022 and 2023, 25,743 young people and their families received 75,125 occasions of service. **Ninety per cent of service users were young people, and ten per cent were family** who received services in relation to supporting a young person.

90%
young people

10%
family

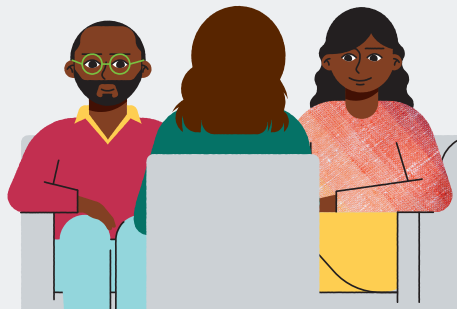
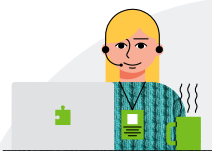
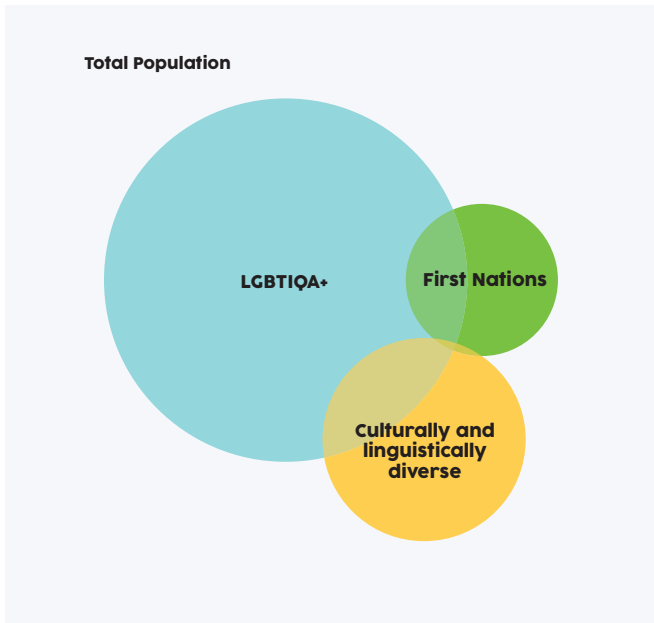


Figure 1. eheadspace service users split between young people and family.



Just over two thirds of young people accessing eheadspace were female (69%), 21 per cent were male and 10 per cent identified as gender diverse. **More than one third (36%) identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual people, or people otherwise diverse in gender or sexual orientation (LGBTQIA+)**, six per cent were First Nations, and 11 per cent were culturally and linguistically diverse.

As shown in Figure 2, about five per cent of young people had intersecting identities, having a First Nations or culturally and linguistically diverse background and identifying as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Family members accessing eheadspace were predominantly female (83%), most of them being mothers to a young person with mental health needs.

Figure 2. Proportion of young people accessing eheadspace identifying as LGBTQIA+, First Nations, and culturally and linguistically diverse.

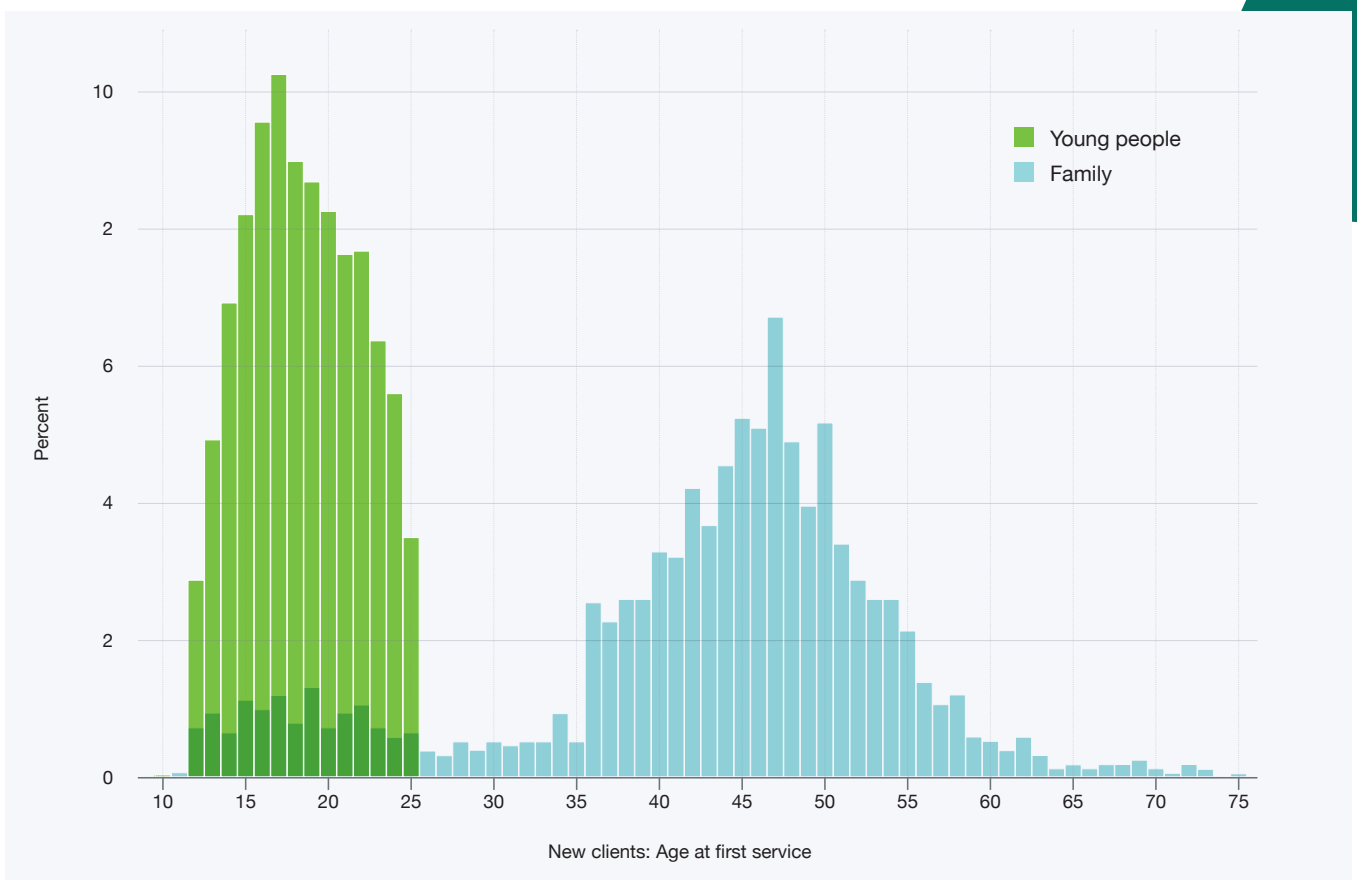


Figure 3. Age distribution of eheadspace service users.

As shown in Figure 3, **eheadspace effectively reaches all ages within the target age range of 12-25.** In 2022 and 2023, the median age of young person service users was 18 years, with 15 to 22 being the peak ages. Family service users were predominantly 35 to 60 years of age, but some were as young as twelve and others as old as 75.

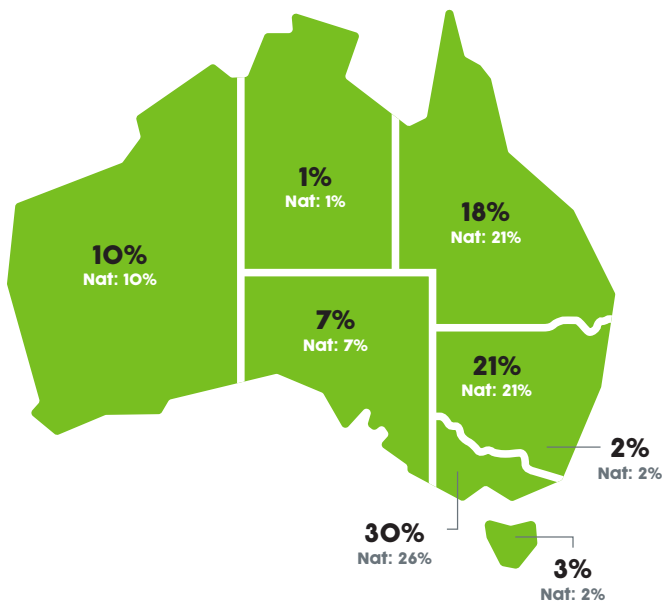


Figure 4. Geographical representation of eheadspace service users in comparison to the location of 12-25 year olds nationally (ABS, 2021).

eheadspace is used by young people and families across Australia, with the state/territory and remoteness representation of eheadspace service users broadly in line with national figures for 12-25 year olds (ABS, 2021). As shown in Figure 4, seventy per cent of eheadspace users lived in the major cities of Australia, 21 per cent in inner-regional and 8 per cent in outer-regional areas, and 1.3 per cent accessed eheadspace from remote locations.

How do young people come to eheadspace?



Young people have varied journeys in terms of how they find out about eheadspace, their decisions to access eheadspace, and prior help-seeking experience. In terms of how they became aware of eheadspace, across 2022 and 2023, 44 per cent of new young people indicated that they heard about it from someone, most commonly family and friends, school/university teachers, counsellors or health workers, and 37 per cent noted that they found it online, mostly via a search engine. With regard to whose idea it was to access eheadspace, **two thirds of new young people said it was their own idea to access eheadspace**, while 20 per cent were given the idea by a family member, friend or partner.

For many young people, eheadspace is their first point of contact with the mental healthcare system. One in five new young people (42%) indicated that accessing eheadspace was their first experience of seeking support from a mental health professional. For those who had previously sought support, 41 per cent indicated that this was more than a year ago, 29 per cent indicated it was within the past year, while 30 per cent were currently seeing another mental health professional. Additionally, about one in five (21%) had accessed support from a headspace centre, prior to their first contact with eheadspace.

Why do young people come to eheadspace?

Young people access eheadspace for a range of different issues. Among young people who received at least one 1:1 support session in 2022 and 2023, **mental health and behaviour issues were the primary issue for 66 per cent of the services they received** (most commonly anxiety symptoms, depressive symptoms, and stress-related issues), while **situational issues such as difficulty with personal relationships accounted for 28 per cent** of the services they received.

In terms of the severity and complexity of presentations, a considerable proportion of young people present with suicidal thoughts/behaviour and/or deliberate self-harm. In 2022 and 2023, approximately 10 per cent of all support sessions with young people were in relation to these issues. Additionally, 19 per cent of support sessions with families were in relation to their young person experiencing these issues. Almost 90 per cent of young people were experiencing high or very high psychological distress at the time they requested a support session¹. These results were even higher for young people identifying as gender diverse, LGBTIQ+, female, and/or First Nations.

¹ Indicated by the Kessler et al. (2002) 10-item psychological distress scale having a value of 22 or greater.

When asked how they feel about different areas in their life, **young people were most critical with “themselves” in their life, followed by their romantic relationships, their life in general, school or work, friendships and family life (see Figure 5)**. Some of these feelings were amplified for certain demographics: females reported lower satisfaction with themselves and their life, males were relatively less satisfied with romantic relationships, culturally and linguistically diverse young people with family life, and regional/rural young people had lower satisfaction with where they lived. LGBTIQ+, gender diverse and First Nations young people rated almost all areas lower than average.

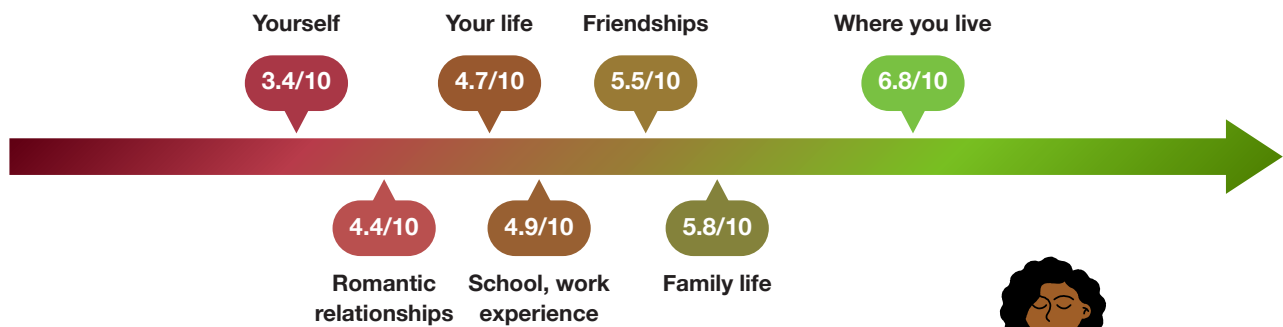
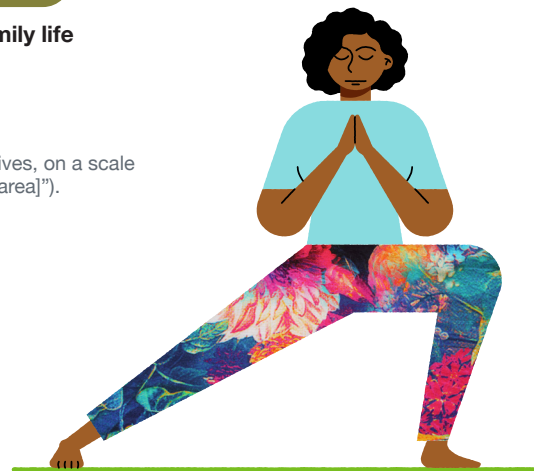


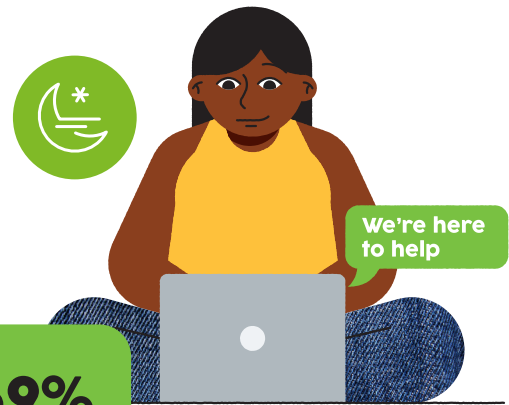
Figure 5. Average values of how young people feel about different areas of their lives, on a scale from 0 (“the worst possible life [in this area]”) to 10 (“the best possible life [in this area]”).



How do young people and families use eheadspace?

eheadspace has operated primarily as a 'drop-in' service, in that service users can request support when they want it, without needing to have a scheduled appointment. Additionally, eheadspace offers scheduled appointments depending on the service user's needs, preferences and frequency of contact (service users may be allocated to a particular service provider so that they can have regular appointments, and trauma and relationally informed care plans may be developed to enable coordinated responses across service providers).

Over the last two calendar years (2022 and 2023), **most contacts (69%) to eheadspace were made outside of standard business hours**, with sixty per cent of services delivered after 5pm and over twenty per cent of services recorded on weekends.



69%

of 1:1 support sessions are provided outside of standard business hours

(i.e. provided after 5pm and/or on weekends)

Figure 6. Service provision outside standard operating hours.



Figure 7. Webchat is the most frequent mode of contact with eheadspace.

Over fifty per cent of eheadspace services were delivered via webchat (55%), 35 per cent via phone and ten per cent via email. Family members in particular preferred phone support, with over 40 per cent having had at least one phone contact with eheadspace. The average duration of a webchat was 43 minutes, while an average phone call lasted 31 minutes.

What services do young people and families receive at eheadspace?

In each quarter, about **two thirds of service users are new to eheadspace**, requesting their first ever service, and one third are returning service users who have had at least one eheadspace service at an earlier date. Over the course of 2022 and 2023, new young people received, on average, three to four services from eheadspace: one or two 1:1 support services, one service of clinical contact or administration, and one service of care coordination. New family members received on average two services from eheadspace: one 1:1 support service, and one service of clinical contact or administration.

In 2022 and 2023, more than **four out of five (83%) of 1:1 support services provided to young people were direct mental health services**. The remainder primarily included engagement services and assessment services, reflective of the fact that for many young people, eheadspace is their first experience of seeking mental health support. Psychoeducation was the most common mental health service, at 52 per cent. Other mental health services included supporting young people to develop skills in distress tolerance and self-soothing (particularly for young people with very high levels of distress), crisis management (particularly for young people with suicidal thoughts or behaviour), as well as other therapeutic approaches such as cognitive interventions, cognitive behavioural therapy, problem solving therapy, interpersonal therapy and motivational interviewing/enhancement.

Primary issue of young person	Predominant 1:1 support services provided by eheadspace
Anxiety symptoms	Psychoeducation, Cognitive interventions, Distress tolerance or self-soothing, Cognitive behavioural therapy
Difficulty with personal relationships	Psychoeducation, Skills training, Interpersonal therapy
Depressive symptoms	Psychoeducation, Cognitive interventions, Cognitive behavioural therapy, Distress tolerance or self-soothing
Stress related	Psychoeducation, Distress tolerance or self-soothing
Suicidal thoughts / behaviour	Crisis management, Distress tolerance or self-soothing
Deliberate self-harm	Psychoeducation, Distress tolerance or self-soothing, Crisis management
Conflict in home environment	Psychoeducation, Skills training, Problem solving therapy, Distress tolerance or self-soothing, Interpersonal therapy

Table 1. 1:1 support service types by primary issue as recorded in 2022 and 2023 data.

The predominant types of support provided to family members were psychoeducation (57%), crisis management advice / strategies (11%) and systemic therapy (10%), among other approaches.

eheadspace service providers link young people and families with the wider mental health system



Aside from providing direct 1:1 support for young people and families, and being an important first point of contact for young people with the mental health system, eheadspace also **helps young people and families understand and navigate the health system and appropriate service pathways**. Service providers often provide service users with information about other support services during 1:1 support sessions. Across 2022 and 2023, information about another support service(s) was provided in 68 per cent of all 1:1 support sessions with young people, and in over 80 per cent of 1:1 support sessions with families.

The most commonly recommended support options were eheadspace centres, General Practitioners, and other online mental health services. This was followed by school-based services, eheadspace online group chats, and community-based mental health services. These linkages with other support services can help simplify the system and help-seeking experience for young people and families.

Methods used

This report summarises the analysis of routinely collected eheadspace data for service users across calendar years 2022 and 2023. Some analyses included all service users across the two calendar years (n=25,743), while others focussed on service users who were new to eheadspace (n=21,475). The analysis of mental health presentations included only new service users who had a full set of outcome measures recorded and had answered the questionnaire on the date of their first 1:1 support service.

More eheadspace data insights

The 2023 report “Evaluation Snapshot: eheadspace satisfaction” (available via headspace.org.au/our-impact/evaluation-research-reports/) provides a recent insight into user satisfaction and feedback. Data in this report comes from over 2,500 optional surveys that young people and family completed after 1:1 support sessions.

The 2024 report “Evaluation Snapshot: the eheadspace young person experience” (available via headspace.org.au/our-impact/evaluation-research-reports/) presents findings from over 200 young people on their perceived mental health, wellbeing and awareness outcomes from attending eheadspace.

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headspace centres and services operate across Australia, in metro, regional and rural areas, supporting young Australians and their families to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.



headspace would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians. We value their cultures, identities, and continuing connection to country, waters, kin and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and are committed to making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, by providing services that are welcoming, safe, culturally appropriate and inclusive.



headspace is committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the provision of health services. headspace welcomes all people irrespective of ethnicity, lifestyle choice, faith, sexual orientation and gender identity.