Apis Case Study

HEAD TO HEALTH WEBSITE

BACKGROUND

Overview of services

In 2016, Apis was engaged to work with the Department of Health to design the concept for a new online mental health portal that would give Australian consumers and carers the tools and information they need to successfully navigate the digital mental health system, and make informed choices about their care.

Since our engagement, Apis' multi-disciplinary team of service designer, user researcher and product manager have led the following activities:

▶ Discovery activities that informed our design concepts for the new portal (referred to Head to Health), including a literature review and interviews with more than 30 leading experts in the field;

▶ A 12-month co-design process with a Ministerially appointed expert reference group and more than 150 end-users, subject matter experts, services providers and peak bodies, that resulted in the development of the Service Concept for Head to Health;

▶ Translation of the service concept into an approach to market (through the Digital Transformation Agency's Digital Marketplace) to engage the services of a digital firm to build the portal;

▶ Refinement of the service concept through co-creation sessions with the expert reference group and a 30+ user reference group of people with lived experiences; and

▶ Product Management through an Agile delivery methodology that resulted in the successful launch of the new portal (www.headtohealth.gov.au) in October 2017.

Key outcomes

Apis delivered a design concept for the new online mental health portal that was universally endorsed by its end-users, service providers and subject matter experts. Through an Agile development methodology, we subsequently oversaw the translation of this concept into the Head to Health website; a website that is quickly gaining traction with its target audience.
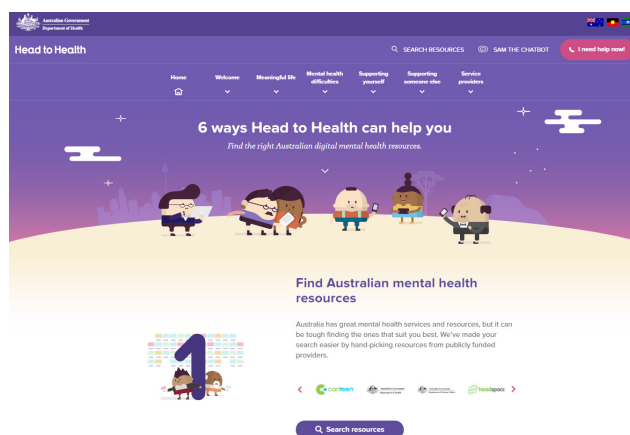
Key success criteria

▶ Immersion observation sessions (researchers observe participants in their natural environment e.g. home, office etc.) are an effective way to avoid the biases that limit the usefulness of findings gained through interviews (e.g. participants not giving honest answers);

▶ Tactics traditionally reserved for e-commerce platforms (such as Search Engine Optimisation) can be effectively applied in the government sector to increase service uptake;

▶ The use of visual aids (e.g. Service Mapping) to show how the new portal would complement the existing range of services helped garner initial support for the new portal;

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▶ Establishing a user reference group of 30+ people with lived experience provided the design and build teams with ready access to end-users;

▶ Establishing an Advisory Committee of influential stakeholders assisted with the sector's acceptance (and subsequent promotion) of the new portal; and

▶ Using visual design artefacts such as user personas, user journeys and service blueprints enabled our design team to quickly and cost effectively test multiple concepts with our reference groups.

DELIVERY

Business problem

The Department's modelling estimated there are more than 640,000 people with mental illness that would benefit from lower intensity, cost effective, services such as digital mental health services.

Australia's digital mental health services are clinically effective, accessible anywhere and at any time - often with no waiting lists, and free or low cost. Through the Australian Government's previous investments in digital mental health, there are a number digital mental health services available to these people. While many of these services have proven to be equally effective (as traditional face-to-face services), their uptake continues to be hampered by:

▶ A lack of community awareness that evidence-based digital mental health services can be an effective treatment source;

▶ Scepticism regarding the performance of digital mental health services over more traditional face to face approaches; and

▶ A lack of established pathways to access digital mental health services – making it difficult for people to navigate on their own to the right service in their time of need.

In November 2015, the then Minister for Health and Aged Care committed to addressing these barriers to uptake by establishing a new online mental health portal, subsequently called Head to Health. Our challenge was to design the concept for the new portal and oversee its development. A challenge made more difficult by the fact that a previous attempt to address uptake barriers had failed to resonate with users and the sector alike.

Approach and solutions

The new portal was designed in accordance with the Digital Transformation Agency's Digital Service Standard. At the core of our approach was a multi-disciplinary Apis team, comprising service designer, user researcher and product manager.

In the Discovery stage, the team's first task was to uncover why the existing website wasn't working. Through service mapping (visual representations of the current service landscape) we identified those organisations and experts best placed to assist with our investigation.
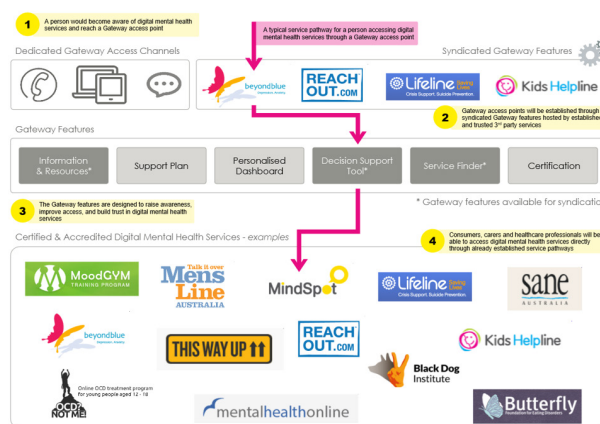

Through expert interviews (with more than 30 subject matter experts, service providers and researchers) and more than 40 immersion sessions we discovered the website had struggled to gain traction with its target audience because it fails to filter information and service recommendations based on need. As an example, a person using the search term "anxiety" was receiving over 1,100 search results; feedback from end-users is that this is overwhelming and discourages help-seeking

behaviour (as is evidenced by the low number of website visitors clicking on outbound links to 3rd party operated digital mental health services).

This discovery finding was essential to our design concept for the new online mental health portal. That is, one of the most important user features for the new portal would be its ability to present users with a personally curated view of digital mental health services.

To ensure we got its design right, we developed a series of low fidelity wireframes to seek user feedback. These wireframes provided the blueprints for Sam – the Head to Health virtual assistant.

(developed by a digital services firm engaged off the Digital Transformation Agency's Digital Marketplace).
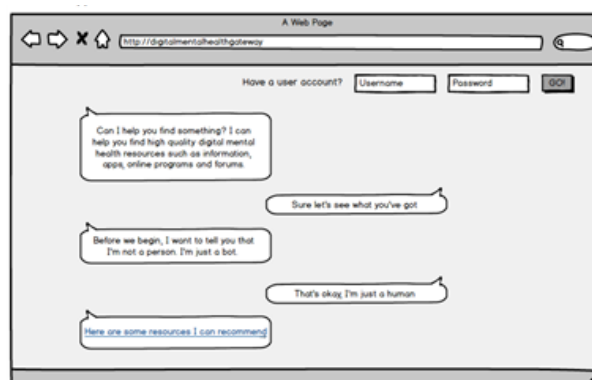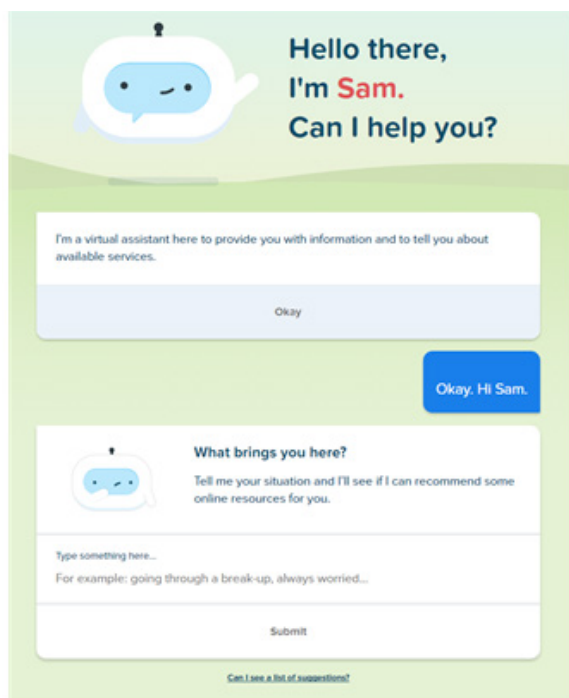
The iterative approach to product development and ongoing user engagement was a key feature throughout the design and delivery process, as summarised in the table below:

Table 8 – Product Development and User Engagement

	Discovery	Alpha	Beta	Live
Apis Activities	Engage 30+ experts to get a systems-level view of the challenges, discover recent innovations, identify successes and failures, and understand different perspectives. Gain insights into user behaviours, needs, and motivations through 45 immersion observation sessions.	Develop problem statement and solution concepts by engaging 100+ users, service providers and experts through a series of co-creation workshops. Develop mockups and wireframes for key design features (e.g. guided search function) and seek feedback directly from a user reference group – 30+ people with lived experience from a variety of backgrounds.	Manage Product Backlog through an Agile development process. Continue to engage with the user reference group through Showcase reviews. Seek feedback directly from users through direct observation of users interacting with the website.	Continue to manage Product Backlog through an Agile development process. Continue to seek feedback directly from users through analytics and direct observation of users interacting with the website.

	Discovery	Alpha	Beta	Live
Tools/methods	• Expert Interview • Immersion Observation • Secondary Research (e.g. literature review and search behaviour analysis)	• Co-creation workshops • Brainstorming sessions • Service blueprinting • Wireframing • Mockups (high fidelity visual designs to show website layout and content structure)	• Sprint planning • Showcases • Immersion Observations	• Immersion Observations • User Analytics
Apis deliverables	• User journeys • User personas • Service landscape maps	• Service Concept (incl. an online content strategy design to increase traffic to the new website) • Wireframing • Mockups • Digital Marketplace Brief (to engage a digital services firm)	• Head to Health Roadmap • Product Backlog	• Head to Health Roadmap • Product Backlog

HOW WE WORKED

We worked in a blended team

Our multi-disciplinary team worked onsite as part of a blended team to ensure the transfer of knowledge and maximise the close involvement of both Departmental staff and senior executives. Key decision-makers were provided with frequent exposure to content in a simple and understandable format (e.g. working prototypes of the website) and opportunities for review and feedback.

Strong relationships were formed with key sector stakeholders early in the engagement, which built trust and helped with their acceptance of the new portal.

We consulted early and widely

Due to the complexity of the existing service landscape, Apis used various methods of communication and engagement to collect data, seek feedback on design concepts and present findings to key stakeholders. To capture existing perspectives, Apis undertook expert interviews with more than 30 subject matter experts, industry specialists and people with lived experience.

An advisory committee (influential sector stakeholders) and user reference group (30+ people with lived experience) were also established and regularly engaged to seek feedback on design concepts. At the end of each build sprint, these groups participated in showcase reviews (each fortnight) so that they could see the website evolve throughout the Beta stage.

We leveraged concepts from other industries

Our design concept for the new portal leveraged the latest advancements in web and app development, particularly those related to the online tactics used by e-commerce sites to increase customer acquisition, engagement and retention. Through the use of tactics such as Search Engine Optimisation and Conversion Rate Optimisation the new portal is quickly gaining traction with its target audience.

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