

The Effectiveness of Pre-Installed Mobile Applications in the TLC Program

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Introduction

- ✓ People living with STBBIs (Sexually Transmitted and Blood-Borne Infections, like HIV) are more likely to have experience with incarceration, use drugs, and/or face marginalization, resulting in difficulty accessing care
- ✓ Test, Link, Call (“TLC”) is a program that aims to support people living with STBBIs to be able to access care and treatment
- ✓ The participants receive free phones with 6 months of texting and calling credit so they can contact healthcare providers for appointments
- ✓ The phones given have pre-installed mobile applications (“apps”) on them which aid in access to healthcare, overdose prevention, etc.

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Objective

To understand the barriers and facilitators of accessing and using the phone apps, then to apply that understanding to identify opportunities for further improvement to the TLC program

Methods

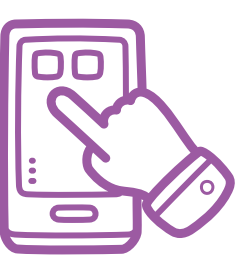
Thematic analysis of qualitative data from testimonies collected through semi-structured interviews. The participants in the interviews included a mix of healthcare providers (n = 8), peer health mentors (n = 6), and program participants (n = 20)

Results & Discussion

Barriers



“...Going into the apps I play around with them like I'm I'm curious on how to go into apps and it's like, OK what's it for?”
- Client 4



Lack of knowledge regarding the uses of the pre-installed apps

- **Limits** the amount of help the phone and apps are able to provide
- Amount of apps can be **overwhelming**



Lack of digital literacy

“...I think some of my patients who have been able to actually understand how to get on the Internet, I think that opens a world of everything for them...”
- Health care provider 3

- Many TLC participants are people who were incarcerated, leading to a **lack of experience** with modern technology
- Some participants didn't previously know how to text, use the internet, etc.



Phone theft

“He's terrified of getting it stolen. Uh, because he is in a shelter, so he's basically asked the outreach team to hold on to it ... So it's not great 'cause you still don't talk to him.”
- Health care provider 4

- **Widely** reported by participants
- Homelessness, unstable housing, and criminalization make it more **difficult** to prevent phone theft
- Participants have found ways to **stop** phone theft by using apps like “Find My Phone,” storing them in a safe place, etc.

Facilitators



“I go on Facebook, but like we have Wi-Fi where I am so I just like check my e-mail...”
- Client 8



Access to Wi-Fi

- **Many** apps require Wi-Fi
- Places like fast food restaurants and some homeless shelters offer **free Wi-Fi**
- Most quotes don't directly talk about Wi-Fi, but talked about using their phones
- Based on anecdotes **outside** of qualitative interviews, access to Wi-Fi might not be as prevalent, acting as a barrier



Belonging and connection with community

“Everybody's watching YouTube all the time. Yeah and TikTok. I watch videos of them. I could do that for hours haha.”
- Client 2

- When others are using certain apps, you want to use those apps too
- Using social media and other apps allows you to **connect** with others
- Sharing content could be seen as a form of **social currency**



Increased access to information

- “I also look up, you know, information for like communicable diseases and stuff like I'm interested in that kind of stuff, right?...”
- Client 1

- **Able** to find out where to get your ID, etc.
- Have the **freedom** to look up information and learn information they're curious about

Conclusion

- ✓ Obstacles to accessing the apps and using them to their potential include being unaware of the app functions, lack of digital literacy, and phone theft
- ✓ Things that help make the apps become more effective are access to wifi, connection to community, and increased access to information

Recommendations

The TLC program should consider:

- Providing verbal, more engaging methods of explaining uses of apps
- Making referrals to community programs/resources to help teach people how to use their phones
- Including questions to understand the impact of Wi-Fi and cellular data access on participants' use of the phones in future interviews done with the participants as part of ongoing evaluation

Acknowledgements

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References

Amrit Tiwana, Nicola Gale, Mike Mahay et al. Addressing digital exclusion to improve access to HIV and viral hepatitis care for people who experience criminalization: A mixed methods evaluation of a quality improvement project, 17 December 2024, PREPRINT (Version 1) available at Research Square [https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-5442220/v1]

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List of apps pre-installed on phones provided by the TLC program