

# Beacon: An online portal of mental and physical e-health applications

Carl Moller, Kristen Murray, Alison Calex, Lou Farrer, Helen Christensen, Kathy Griffiths, Kylie Bennett, Anthony Bennett



## Background

- The Internet is increasingly being used to deliver a wide range of prevention and treatment programs for mental and physical health disorders (e-health).
- Many individuals face barriers to accessing traditional treatment methods, particularly those in rural and remote areas. The internet may be an effective alternative mode of service delivery.
- E-health services may not always be of high quality; consumers could benefit from guidance in identifying high quality internet based health interventions that are most effective.

## The Beacon Portal

- Beacon ([www.beacon.anu.edu.au](http://www.beacon.anu.edu.au)) is a web portal that aims to assist consumers in finding high quality e-health services by providing site summaries and evidence-based ratings of a variety of e-health services.
- 169 websites in 34 categories (26 specific to mental health) have been rated on a 7-point scale (-1 to 5) based on the level of scientific evidence assessing their efficacy. Ratings are represented by smiley faces.
- To date, 41 sites have been rated as having weak supporting evidence (score=1), 38 some evidence (2), 6 good evidence (3), 4 very strong evidence (4), 1 site has excellent evidence (5), 79 sites no research evidence (0) and no site has been rated ineffective (-1).
- Beacon has the capacity to collect demographic and mental health information from users, to publish user feedback about the websites it lists and to examine associations between users' mental health symptoms and web behaviour.

## Smiley Rating System

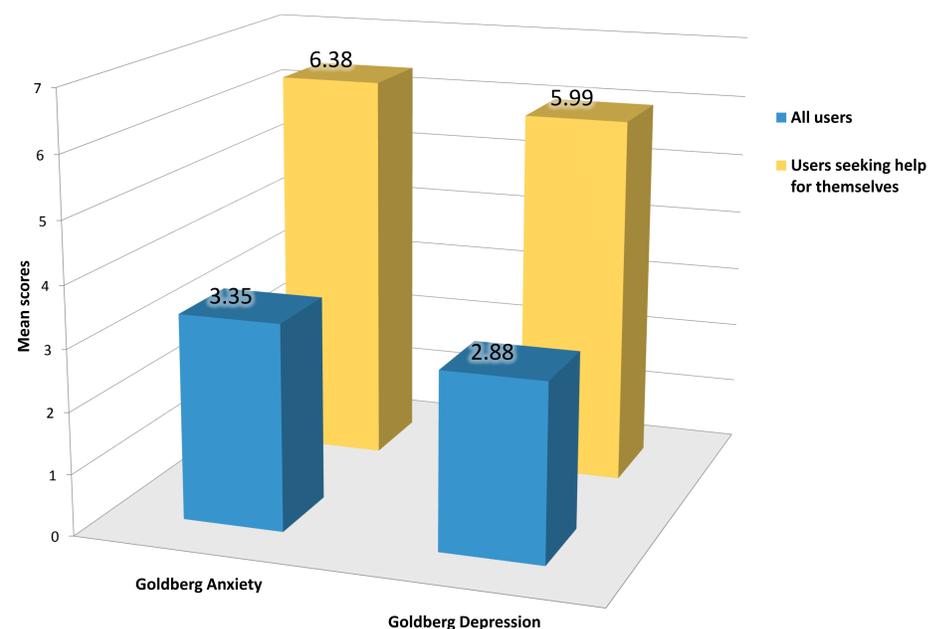
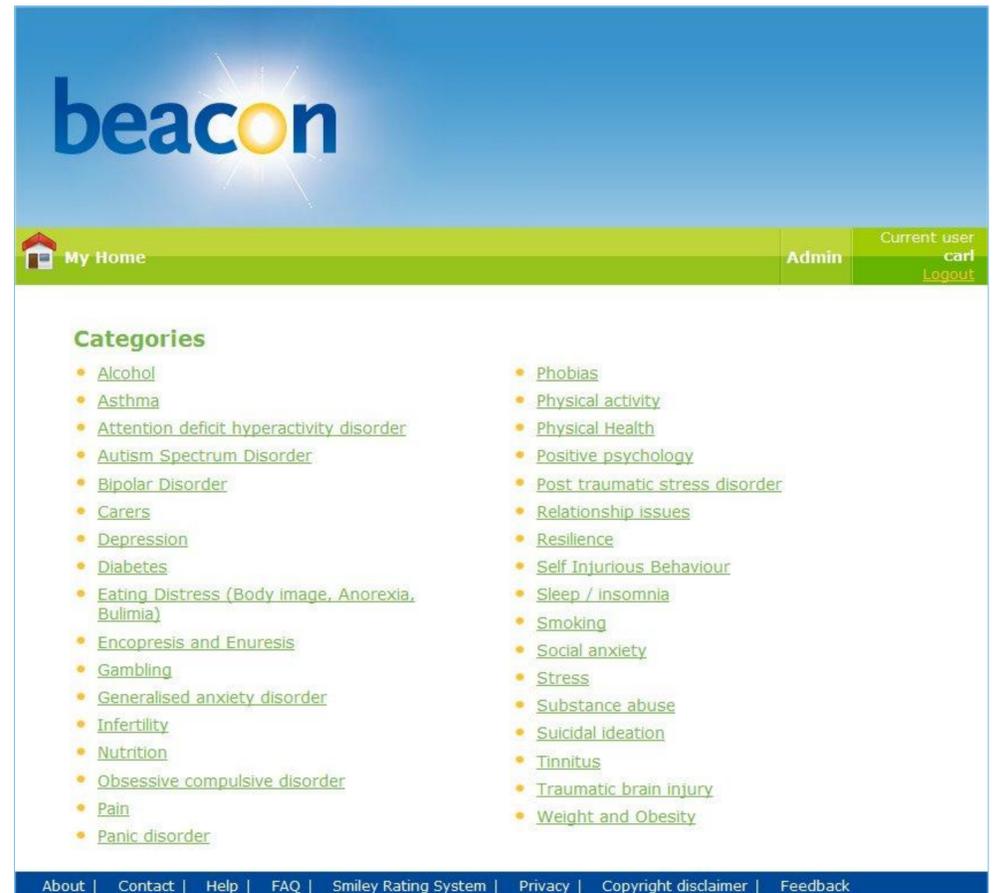
### What do the smiley faces mean?

Beacon examines all research data and assigns one of seven ratings.

- ☹️ There is no evidence at the moment.
- 😞 The evidence suggests the site doesn't work.
- 😊 😊 😊 😊 There is evidence that the site might work. More conclusive studies are needed. [More >>](#)
- 😊 😊 😊 There is some evidence that the site works. One or two good studies support its use. [More >>](#)
- 😊 😊 😊 😊 There is good evidence from well conducted studies that the site works. [More >>](#)
- 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 There is very strong evidence from the research literature that the site works. [More >>](#)
- 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 Sign up! [More >>](#)

## User Data

- 1,456 people (501 male, 955 female) from 58 countries have registered on beacon. The majority are from Australia (65.4%), the United States (13.0%) and the United Kingdom (6.3%).
- Most users (61.5%) are aged 26-50 years. 19.8% of all users are from rural or remote areas.
- Health professionals who treat people with mental or physical health problems and people looking for health information for themselves comprise the majority of beacon users (38.4% and 28.1% respectively).



- Users seeking information for themselves showed significantly elevated ( $p < .000$ ) Goldberg Anxiety and Depression scores compared to other users.
- 32.2% of all users endorsed a measure assessing social anxiety. 22.2% of users indicated that they had had an anxiety attack in the last 4 weeks. Of these people, 27.3% indicated that the attacks bothered them.

## Summary

- There are a number of high-quality mental and physical e-health services available to consumers. Beacon provides information on a wide variety of these through a freely accessible website that is utilised by the public and health professionals.
- User data shows that Beacon is accessed by individuals experiencing common mental health problems and those who are geographically isolated, who may have difficulty in accessing conventional mental health services.