PeerOnCall @ work: Providing mental health support in the palm of your hand

Dr. Sandra Moll & Navi Goraya

May 24th, 2023

Mayday Symposium

Background

- High rates of post traumatic stress injury and mental health issues in the public safety community

- Many barriers to seeking support (stigma, access to skilled provider)

Rationale and Goals

- Peer Support as a valuable first line response

- Apps reduce barriers to seeking help –expand reach

- Goals
  - Promote high quality information and support when and where needed
  - Ensure private, secure connection to peer support
  - Enable systematic evaluation of peer support (implementation & impact)

App Development Process (2019- 2022)

- Provincial co-design project (Moll - CIHR Catalyst grant 2019)
  - Stakeholder interviews & focus groups across 5 sectors (61+ PSP)
- National Project (partnership with CIPSRT, DRDC, RCMP, McMaster)
  - Design sprint week at MARS Discovery district (Jan 2020)
- Beta testing across 3 provinces (summer 2021) -4 week trial with 93 users
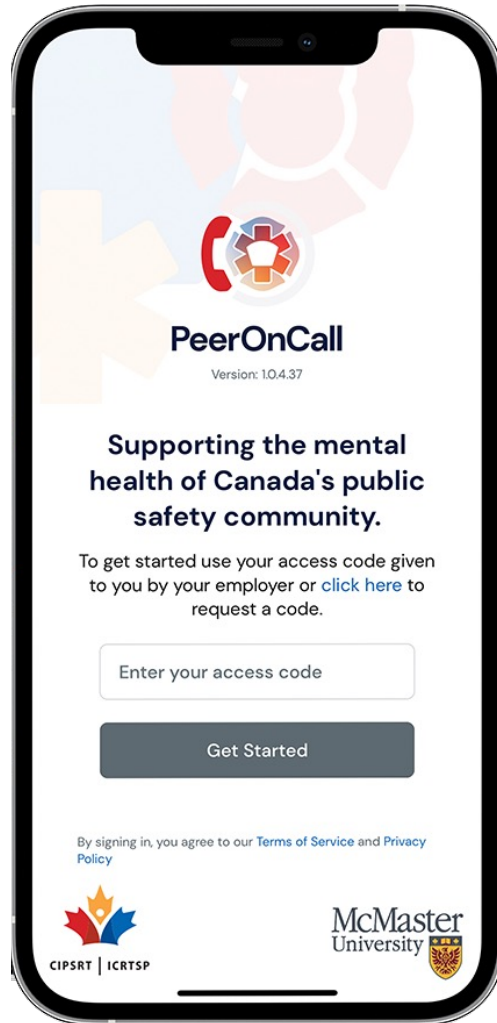
Design Principles

- Privacy/Security
- Easy to use
- Contextually relevant
- Peer Wisdom + Evidence
- Trauma-informed
  - Reduced cognitive load
  - Safe - Avoid triggers
  - Trustworthy/transparent
  - Choice (who/how to access)
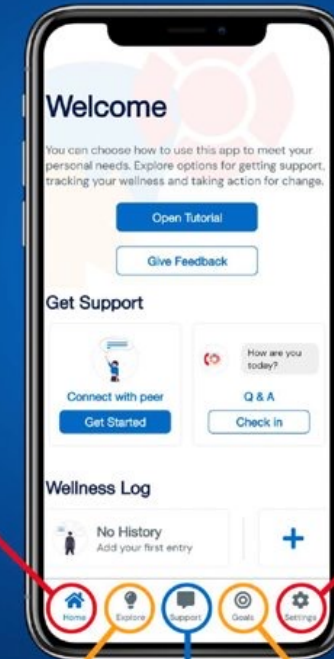 - Strengths based
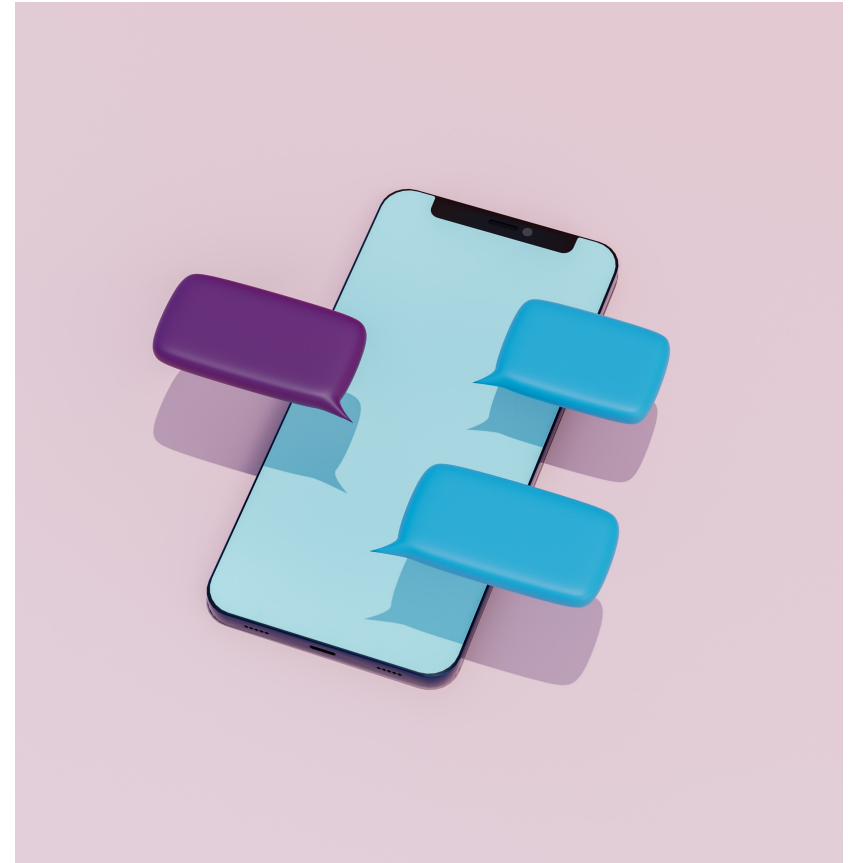
Two Connected Apps

App features

Tools for Frontline Public Safety Personnel

Anonymous access via text or phone to trained peer supporters, matched based on user preferences

Access to peer wisdom videos, articles, and lists of local support services

Personalized, private wellness tools, including a wellness log, and opportunity to set goals or action plans for change

Home Page

- Open Tutorial
- Give feedback
- Get support (live/Q&A chat)
- Wellness log
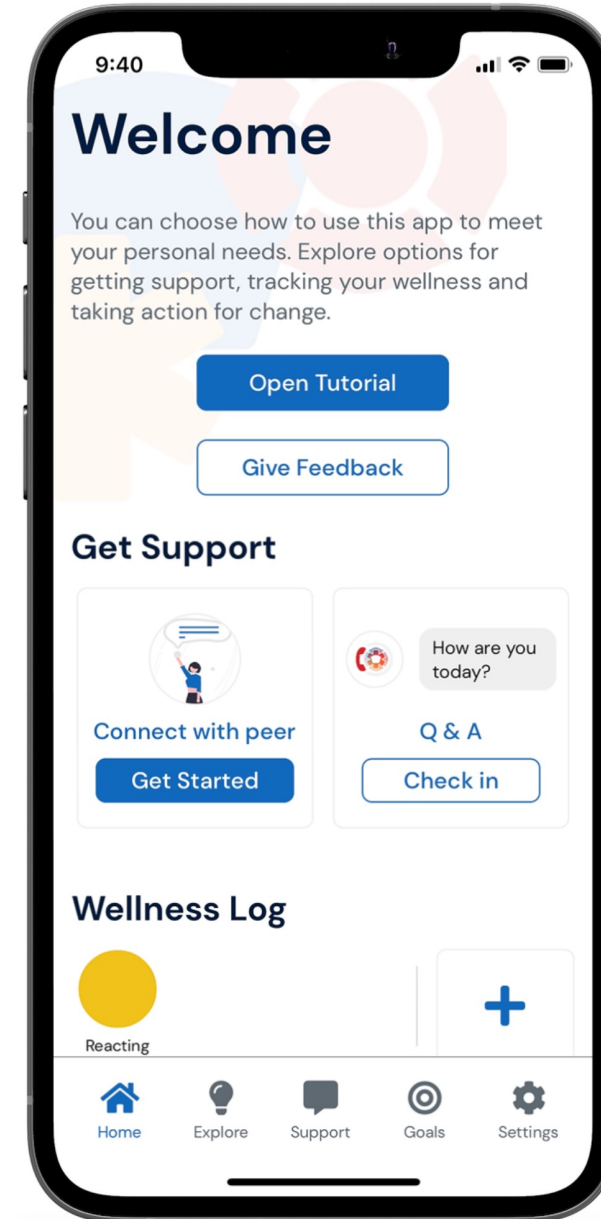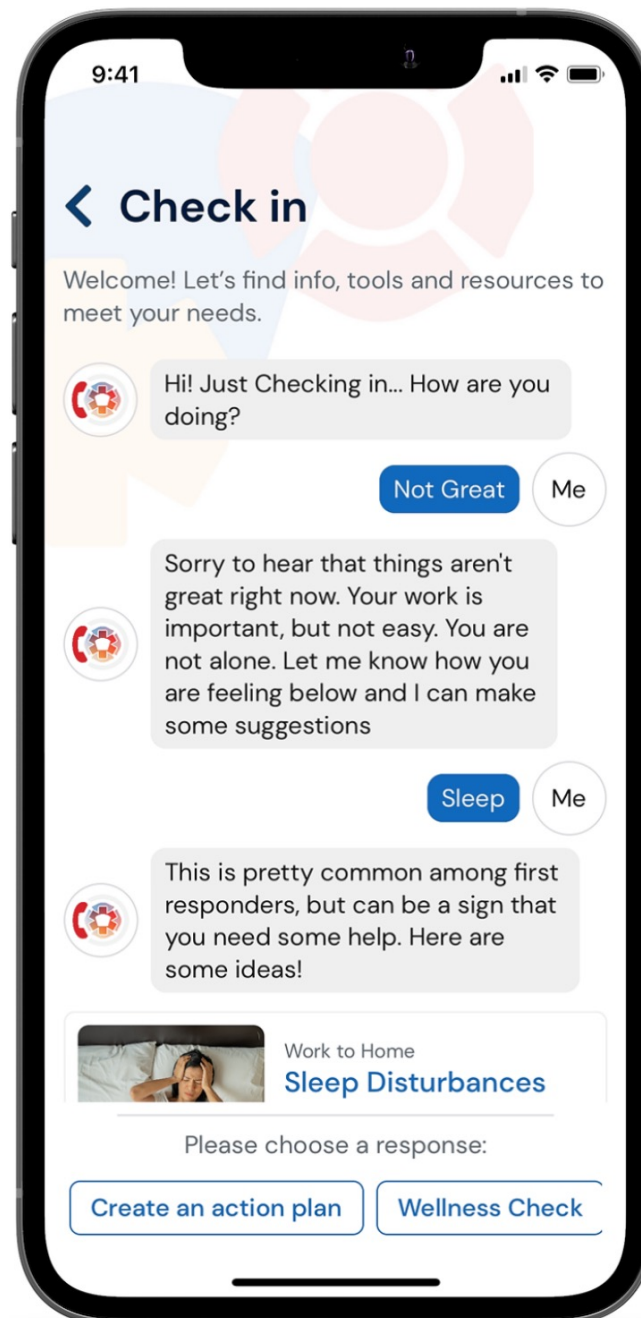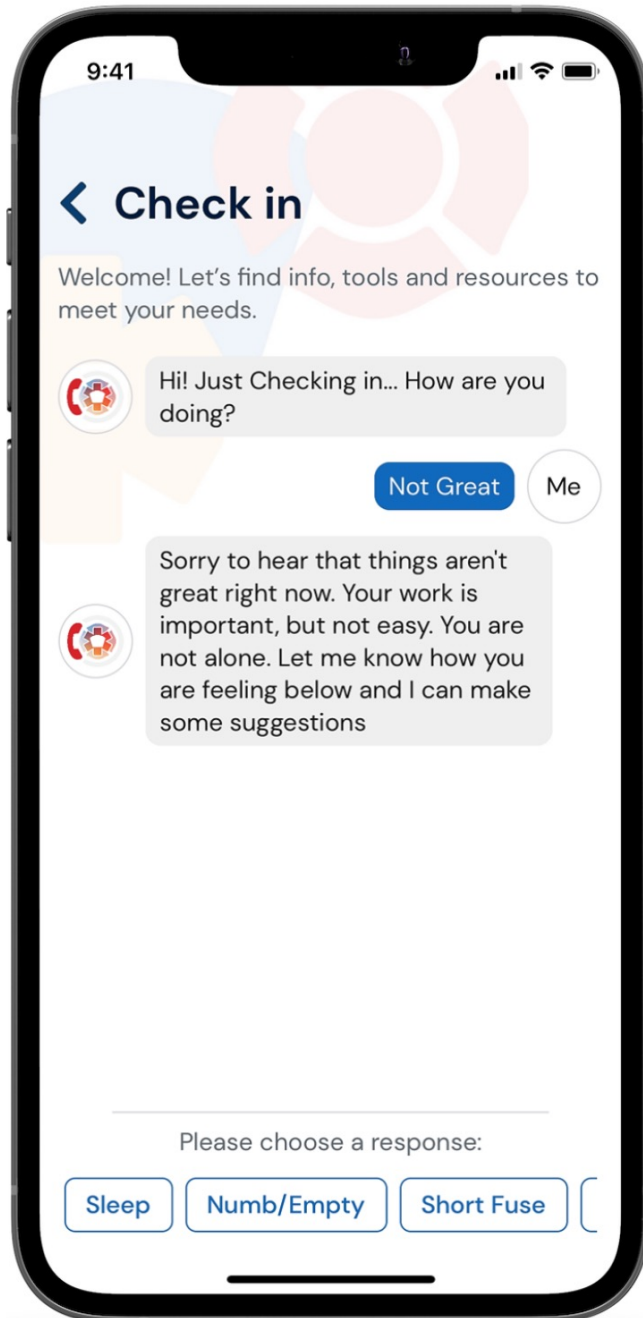
Q&A Chatbot

Series of questions to filter content:
- Sleep
- Numb/empty
- Short fuse
- Hopeless/helpless
- Can't focus
- Relationships

After reviewing, option to
- Create an action plan
- Connect to peer support

Article ratings

Explore

"Tips to Cope"

Articles & Videos

Local resources & content

Search Topics:
• Are you OK?
• Getting help
• Bad call
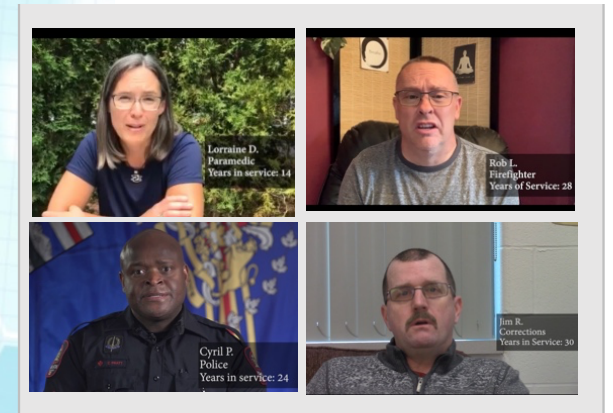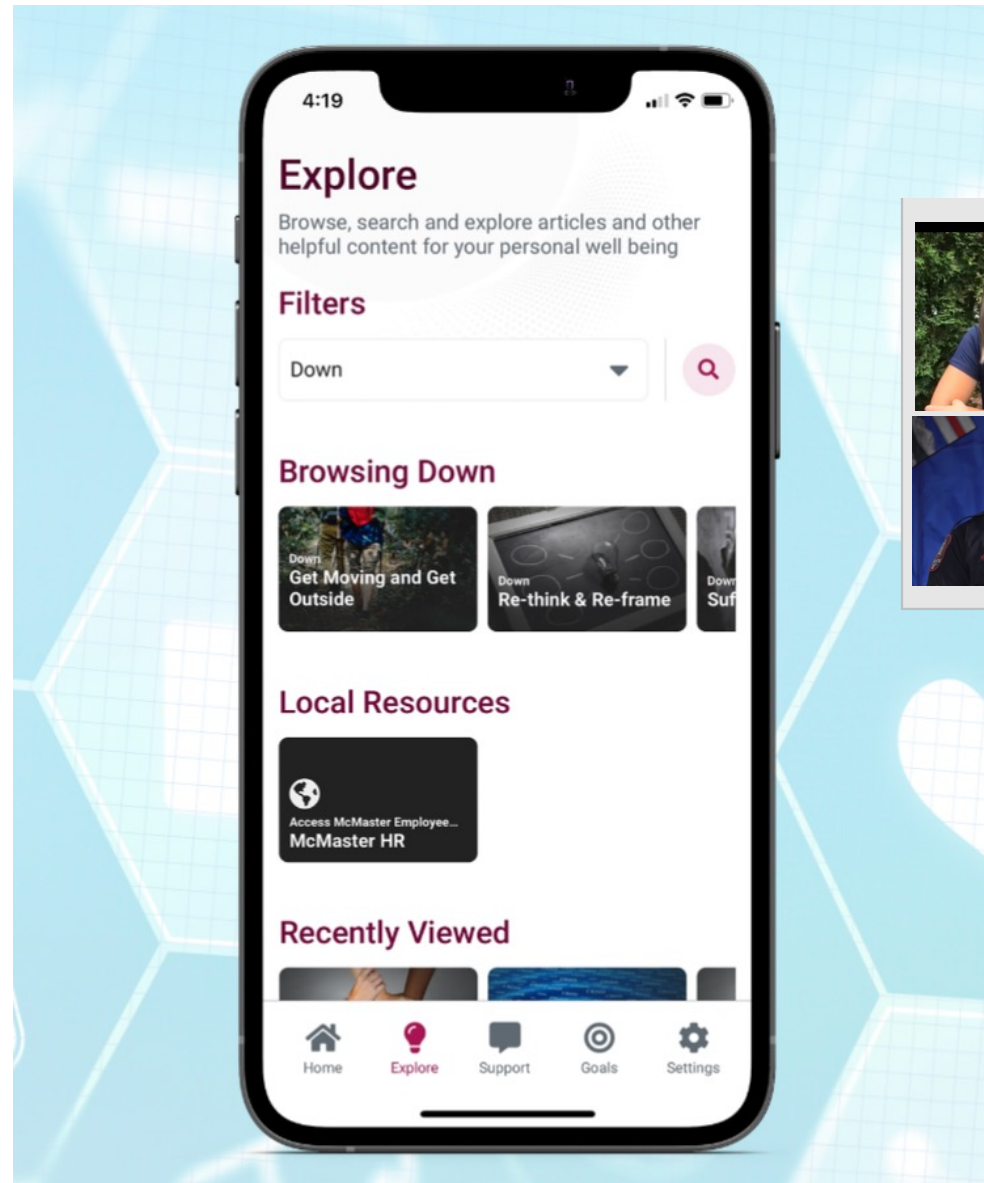• Work to Home
• Resilience
• New Recruits
• Helping a Colleague

Goals

Set goals to improve your health and well-being, along with a timeline (1-30 days). Choose from a list or set your own goals for change. Earn badges to track your progress.
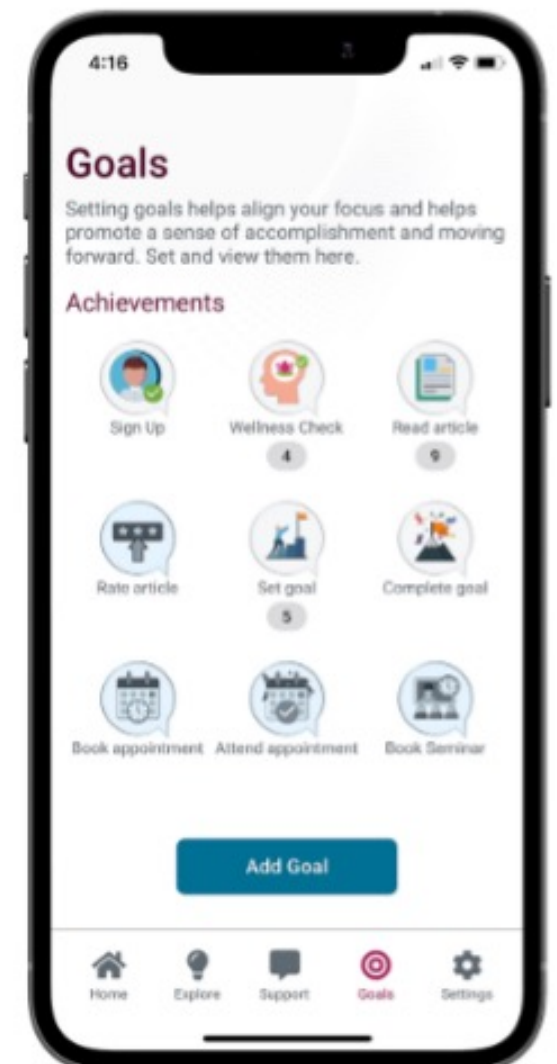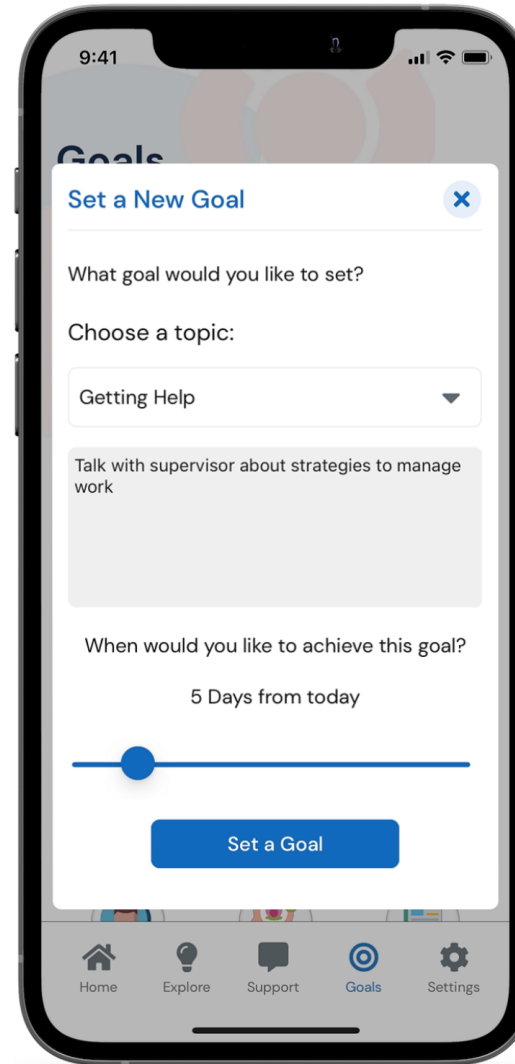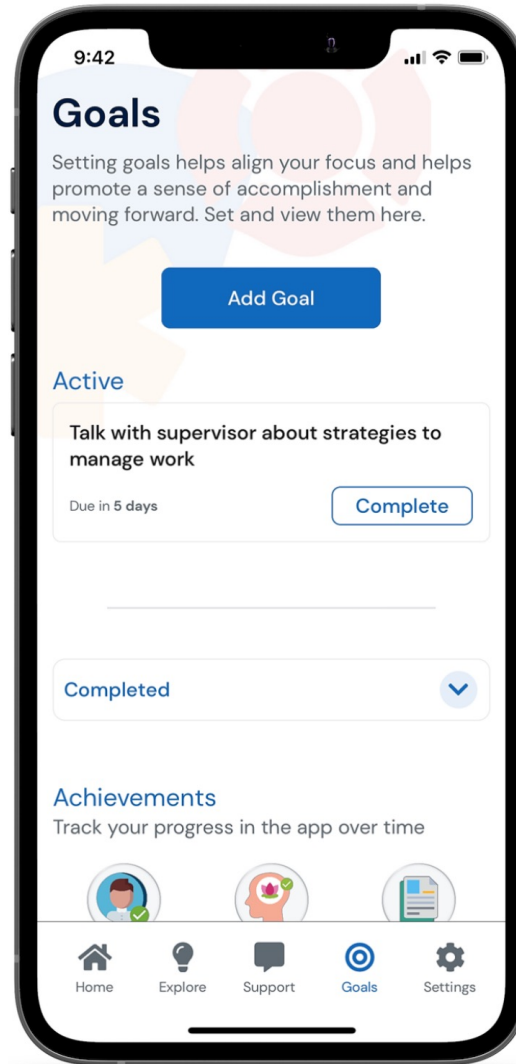
Wellness Check

Rate and monitor your wellness over time using the sliding wellness scale. Patterns of orange and red are cues to reach out for support.
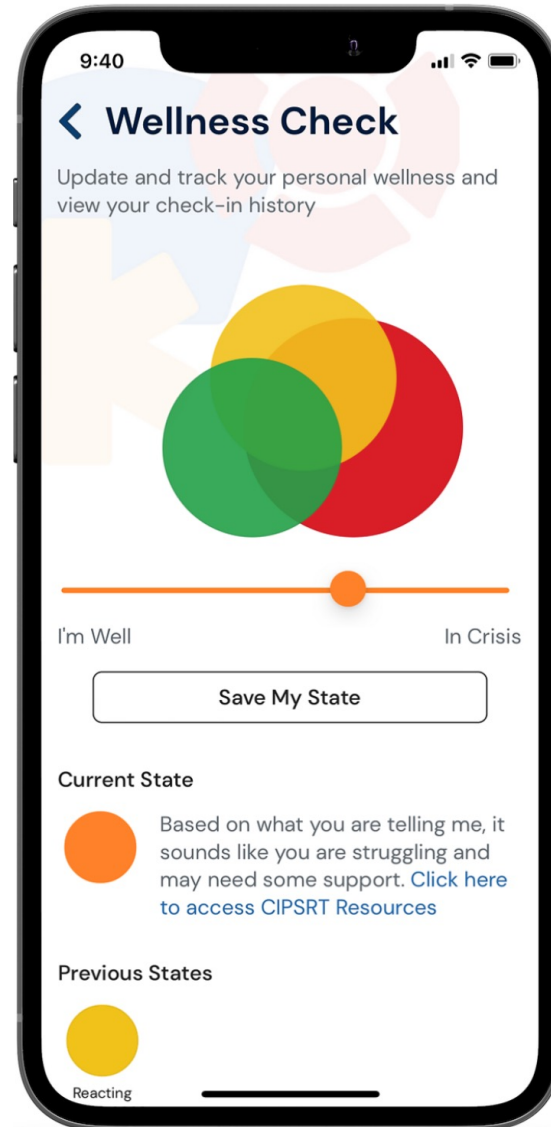
Wellness Toolbox

Customize your own personal, private wellness kit. Keep your most positive, grounding memories in one place for easy access. Add photos of loved ones, pets, or any other images that bring you happiness.
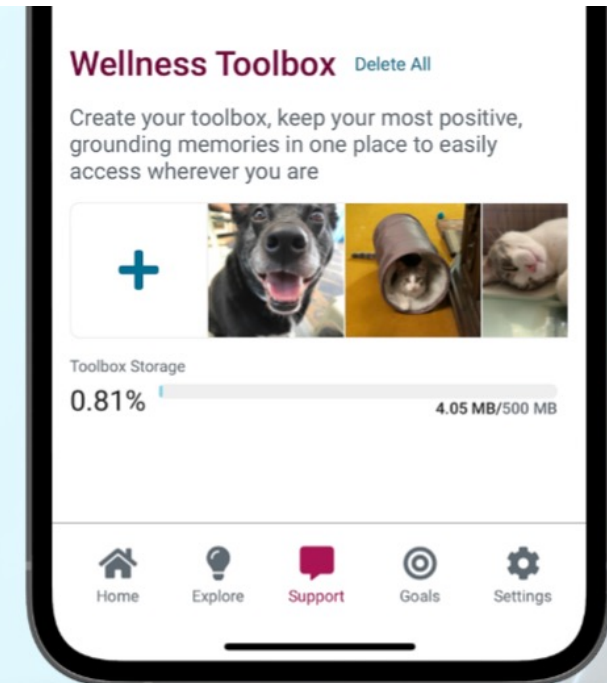
Connecting to Peer Support
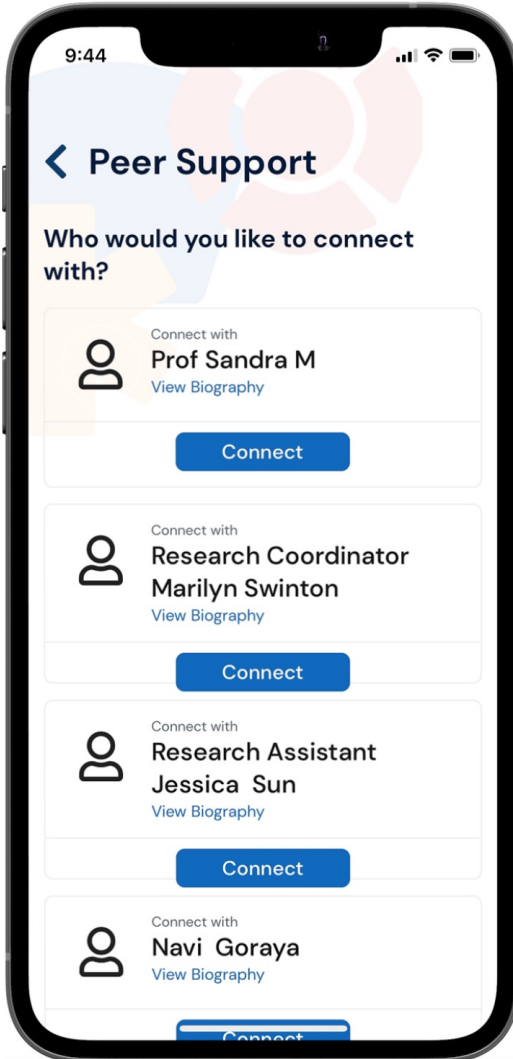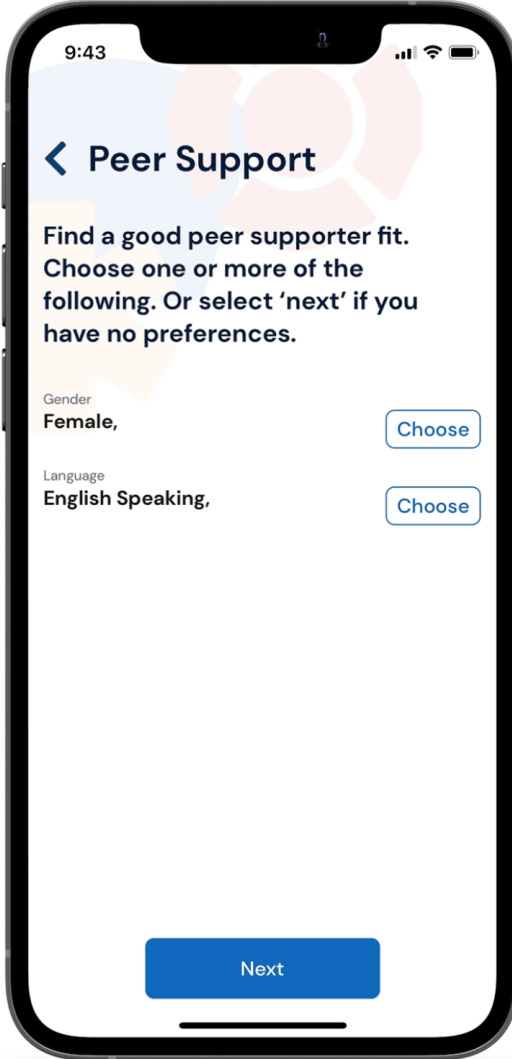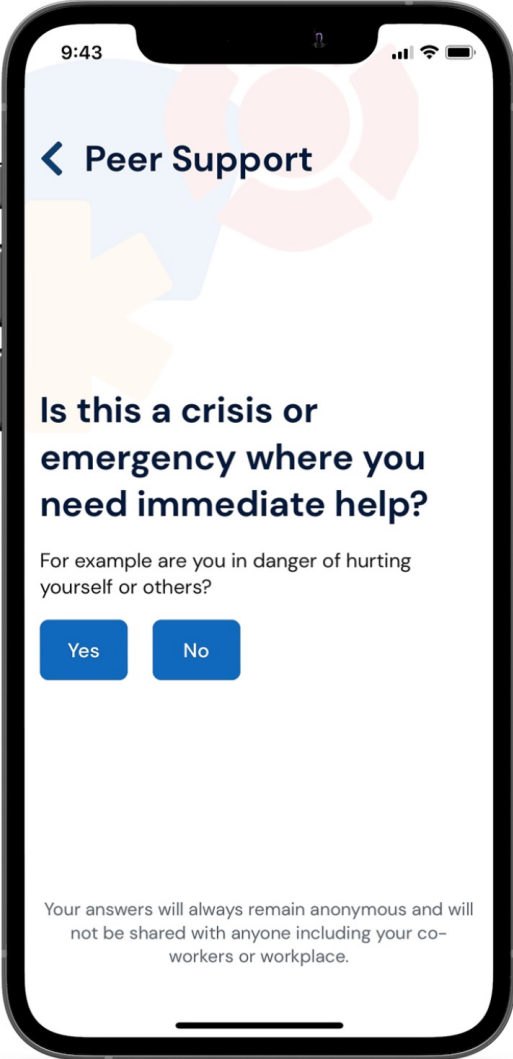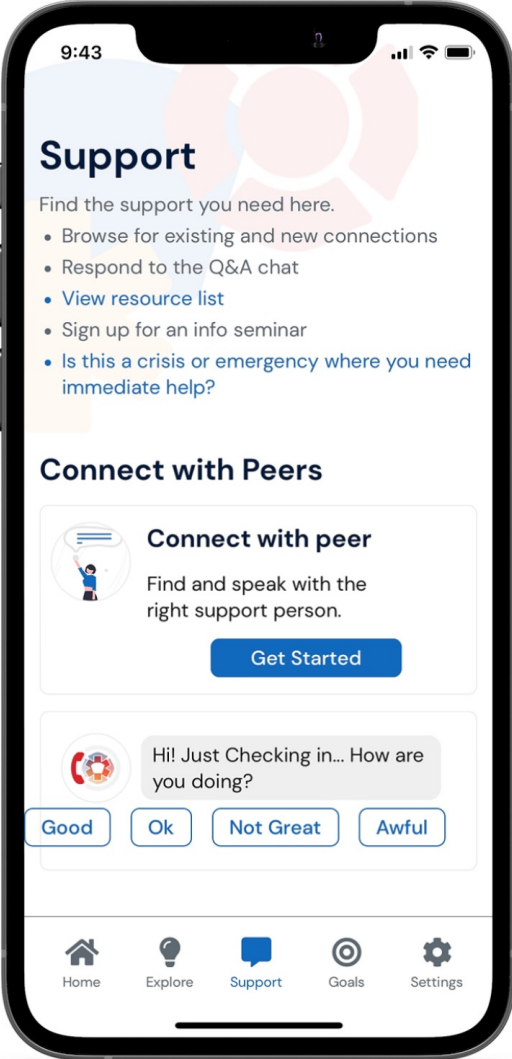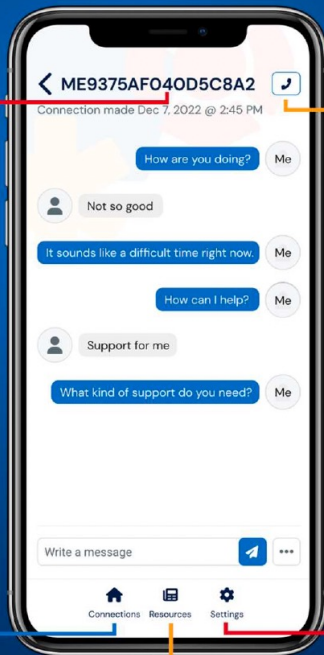
Tools for Peer Support Providers

Personal profile & bio

Availability indicators

Tools to manage risk

Opportunity to block/ unblock app users

Post-call reporting

Access to resources

Implementation Research

- Hybrid implementation-effectiveness study design across multiple case study sites

- Purposive sample of 6-8 case study organizations (diversity in size, location, sector)

- Six-month implementation trial in each organization

- Research questions:
  - How do employees utilize the peer support app? (reach, adoption, patterns of app use)
  - What shapes patterns of app use in an organization (e.g., organizational context, communication strategies, employee and intervention characteristics)
  - Does app implementation affect mental health literacy, mental health, outreach to support?

Data Collection

Organizational champions:

◦ Baseline, and 6-month interviews to explore org culture, functional strategies

◦ Workplace environment survey (MCC scale)

App users

◦ Baseline & follow-up surveys to track changes in MH literacy, mental distress, help-outreach

◦ App utilization metrics (reach, adoption rates, rating of features)

◦ In-app feedback surveys re: peer support service

Peer Support providers

◦ Post-call action reports on peer support encounters (ongoing)

◦ Focus groups at 3 & 6 months to gather feedback on their experience

Analysis: What works for whom and in what context?
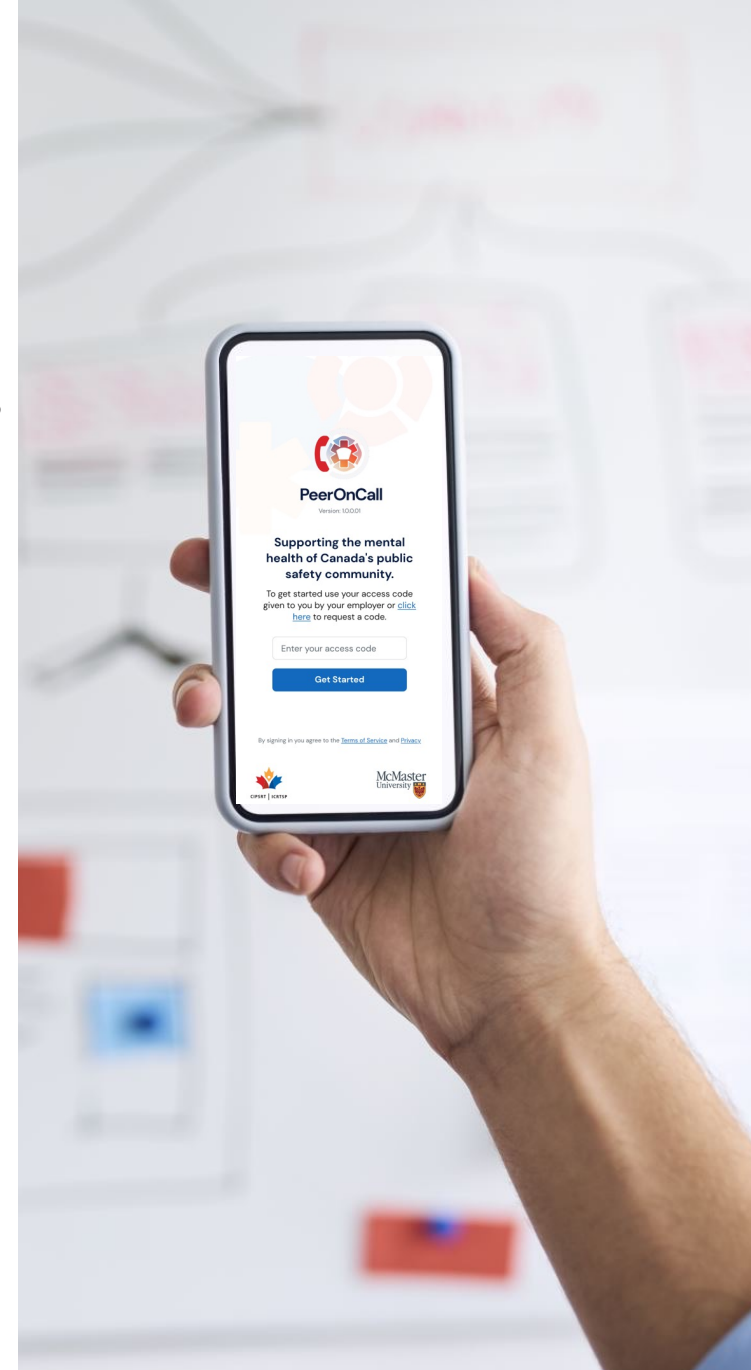
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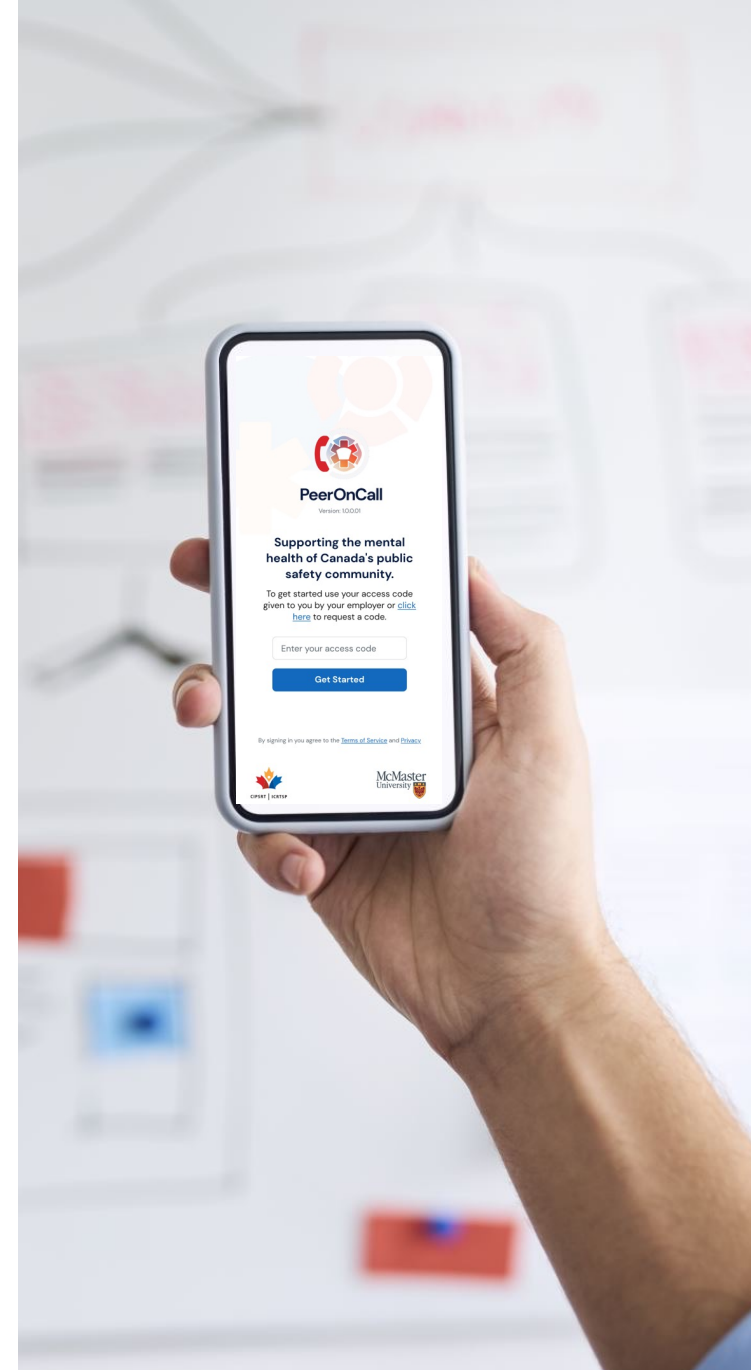
Data Analysis
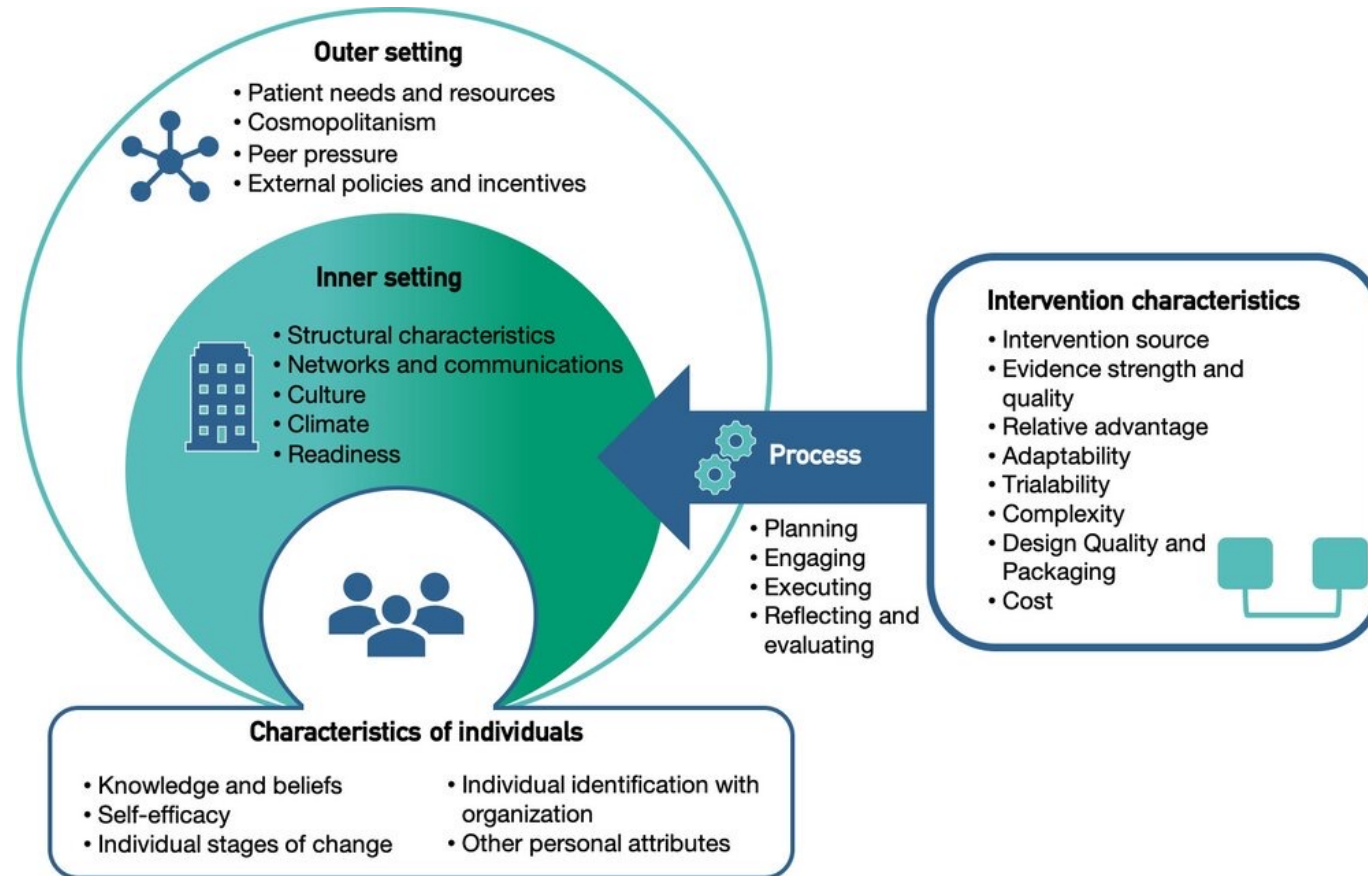
Data collection and analysis informed by the CFIR framework
- How is implementation shaped by:
- Outer setting (social context)
- Inner setting (organizational context)
- App Intervention characteristics
- Characteristics of employees & peer providers
- Process of implementation

Analysis using inductive thematic analysis to determine key themes

https://thecenterforimplementation.com/implementation-in-action-bulletin/mar-2021

Damschroder LJ, Aron DC, Keith RE. et al. Fostering implementation of health services research findings into practice: a consolidated framework for advancing implementation science. Implement Sci. 2009;4(1):50. [PubMed].

Participating Organizations (May 2023)

Large, urban police service (Ontario)
- ~2200 uniform members
- ~930 civilian members
- ~80 peer support providers

Mid-sized urban paramedic service (Alberta)
- ~120 FT employees
- ~60 casual employees
- 14 peer support providers

Small, rural paramedic service (Saskatchewan)
- ~150 field staff
- ~20 support staff (supervisors, quality control, management)
- 12 peer support providers

Organizational Champion Participants

Police Organization - Ontario
- P1 – Peer support constable (Female)
- P2 – Early intervention strategist (Female)
- P3 - Staff sergeant (Male)

Paramedic Organization - Alberta
- E1 – Peer support supervisor (Male)
- E2 – Operations manager (Male)

Paramedic Organization - Saskatchewan
- E4 – Peer support provider (Male)
- E5 – Manager (Female)

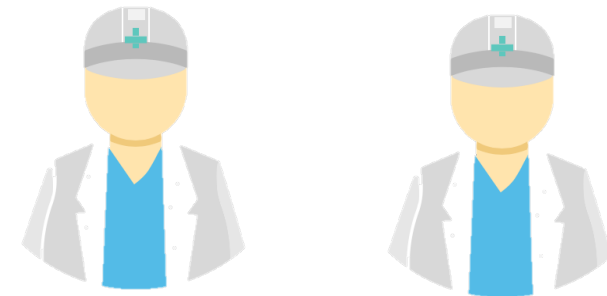# Preliminary Findings on Culture

But first, a word cloud…

What would you expect the culture of a public safety/first responder organization to be like?
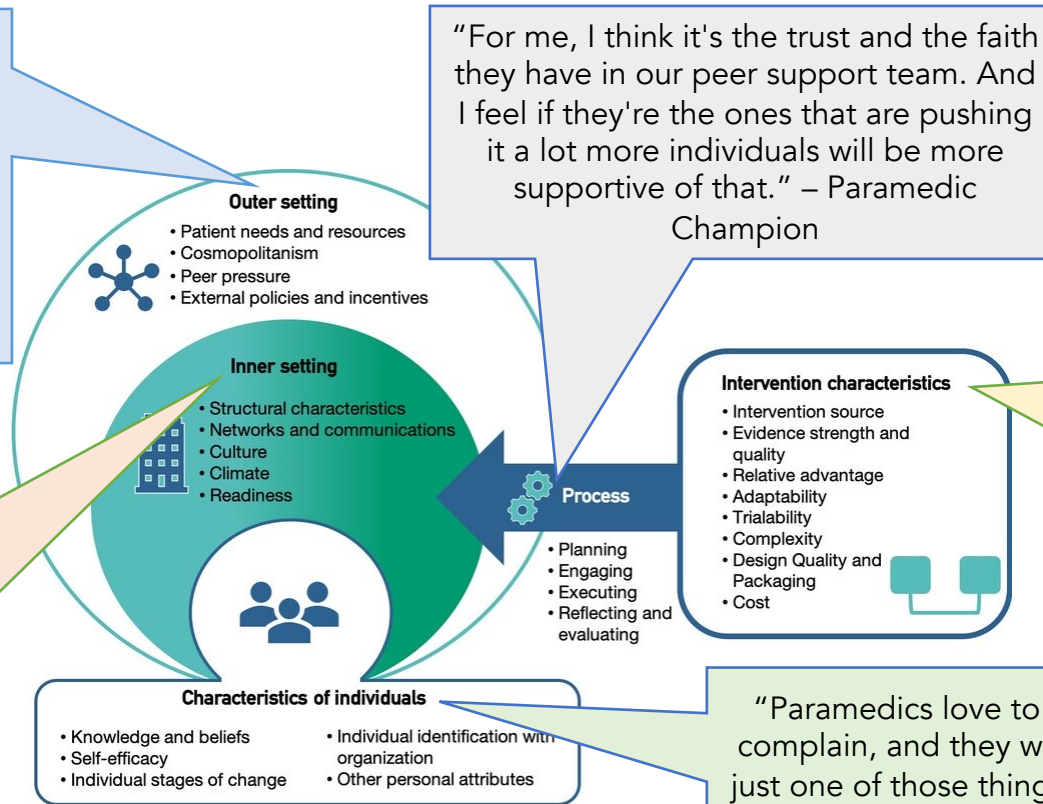
Preliminary Findings on Culture

"And the company recently, especially through COVID, […] they're starting to promote mental health resources and funding and stuff a lot more heavily than they ever used to. So, the stigma about mental health and seeking help has gone away, which is great." – Paramedic Champion

"For me, I think it's the trust and the faith they have in our peer support team. And I feel if they're the ones that are pushing it a lot more individuals will be more supportive of that." – Paramedic Champion

"[Promotion is] going to be primarily us like interacting with people and being like, 'Hey, like, you know, if you don't want to call peer support, did you know that there's this app you can download and it's free, and you don't actually have to interact with anybody if you don't want to? You can do it all anonymously, whether it's just via text message or calling.' Like, I feel like knowing that they have more options will promote the app itself." – Paramedic Champion

"The culture is bright. I think there is a massive change that's gone on with our [chief's management group] in the last few years [..] honestly, in the 14 years that I've been here, just something like mental health, you know, it wasn't as destigmatized as it is now. We're seeing our senior leadership actually invest in things that people need…" – Police champion

"Paramedics love to complain, but sometimes they just only like to complain, and they won't want to actually change their stars. And it's just one of those things within EMS, but it'll be a little bit of an apathy kind of thing. So, we've got to kind of sell it and make sure that you know we get good buy-in from the right individuals and that will help sell the program a little bit more" – Paramedic Champion

Outer setting
- Patient needs and resources
- Cosmopolitanism
- Peer pressure
- External policies and incentives

Inner setting
- Structural characteristics
- Networks and communications
- Culture
- Climate
- Readiness

Intervention characteristics
- Intervention source
- Evidence strength and quality
- Relative advantage
- Adaptability
- Trialability
- Complexity
- Design Quality and Packaging
- Cost

Process
- Planning
- Engaging
- Executing
- Reflecting and evaluating

Characteristics of individuals
- Knowledge and beliefs
- Self-efficacy
- Individual stages of change
- Individual identification with organization
- Other personal attributes

Implications/Next Steps

- Additional recruitment of organization

- Collect data about app utilization x 6 months

- Generate recommendations to optimize implementation and impact
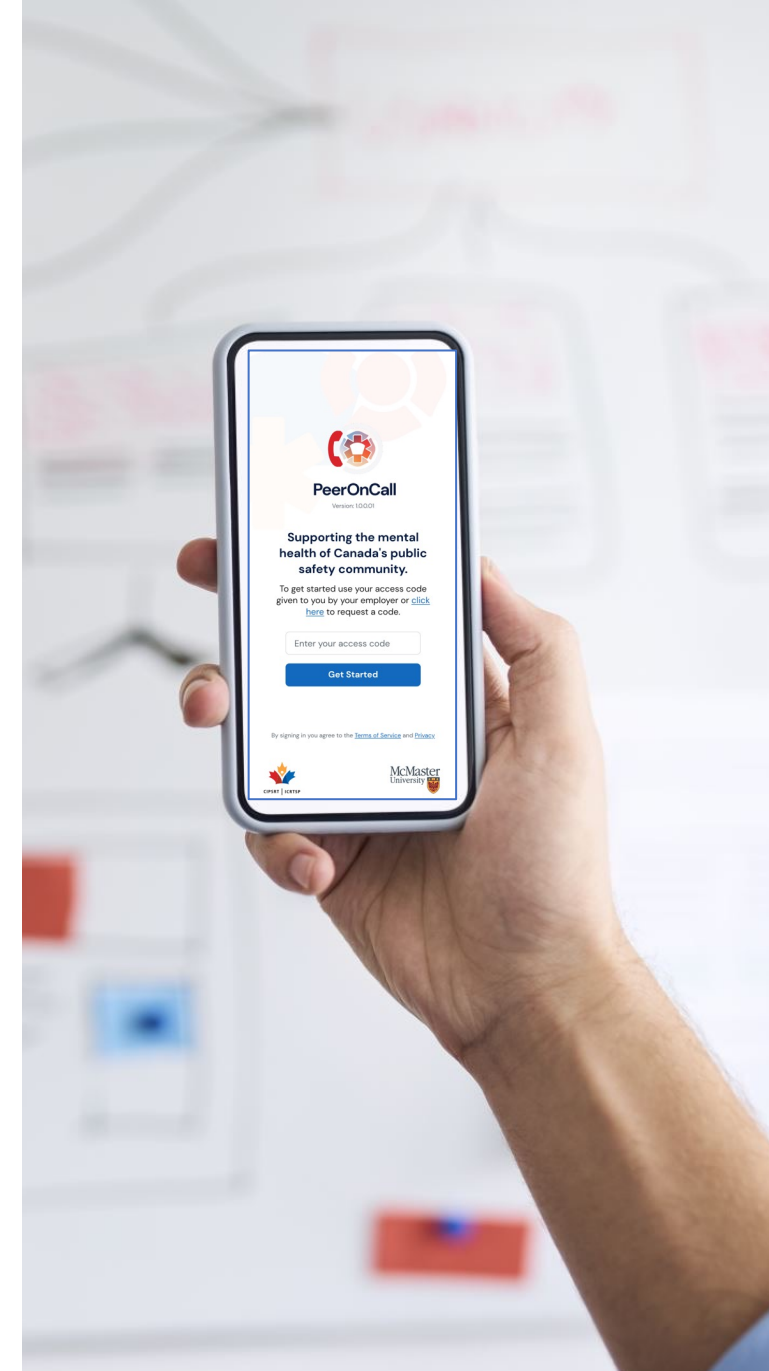
Questions?

Contact Us

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Email: oncall@mcmaster.ca

Researcher contact:

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Navdeep (Navi) Goraya
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Implementation Process

- Meetings with organization leaders
- Organizational agreements
- Interviews with organizational champions
- Orientation with peer support providers
- Onboarding with frontline workers
- Follow-up to sustain engagement