

# Drug Addiction - There's an App For That



By Julianna LeMieux — August 3, 2017



Help is just a call away [1]

You would have to be living under a rock to be unaware of the opioid crisis going on today.

It is at an all time high in the US and shows no sign of slowing down. In fact, the epidemic has gotten so bad that members of the White House's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction called on the President this week to "declare a national emergency."

The numbers are staggering with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimating that 142 U.S. citizens die every day from a drug overdose. At the heart of these deaths are opioids such as Percocet, OxyContin, heroin, and fentanyl.

What we are currently doing to stop the crisis is, obviously, not working.

We, as a society, have not made an effort to prevent this from happening and to help those who are addicted. Our standard supports to help people recovering from addiction are not strong enough to hold through this tsunami of addiction.

So, it's time to think outside the box.

One company is doing just that and has designed an app to help called the Addiction-Comprehensive Health Enhancement Support System (A-chess). The tool is for people in recovery and has a multi-layered scaffold designed to support people in their goal to stay clean.

Upon waking up each morning, the app asks the person in recovery, "how confident are you of your abstinence today?" If the answer is "not very confident", the person's support team (family and/or recovery manager) will be notified to stay on high alert.

Another feature of A-chess is the ability to input high-risk locations for that individual, like where they used to buy drugs or locations where people hang out that may be high risk (people that they used to do drugs with). When their phone senses they are heading in the direction of one of these

spots, an alert pops up on the phone that asks, "Are you sure you want to be here?." In addition, the support team is notified so they can potentially intervene. There is also a panic button for more immediate help.

The app also has a message board so that people can reach out to other peers - within a safe community.

There are data that show that [people will use the smartphone app](#) [2] and other studies that show it is effective. Articles published in [JAMA Psychiatry](#) [3] and [Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment](#) [4] used an (unblinded) randomized controlled trial to evaluate whether or not the app actually helped people in their recovery from alcohol addiction. The study included 349 patients who met criteria for DSM IV alcohol dependence. They were split into either the control group (179 people) or the treatment group (170 people). The people who used the app reported significantly fewer heavy drinking days than patients in the control group.

The features of the app, as listed on the website, are

- Surveys to assess one's recovery
- Create Journal entries
- Compile Goals
- Be connected to a community
- Discover content to help you through recovery and locate meetings for NA/AA
- Non-emergency based support Beacon
- High-Risk Location notification

We know that one app is not going to solve the entire opioid crisis. But, it's easy to use, cheap and can be accessed by anyone with a smart phone. If it helps a small percentage of people stay on their sober path, then, it's worth a try. Also, what we are currently doing is not working, so, innovative new tools like this are a welcome addition to the toolbox that is currently available to us. With 142 people currently dying each day, and that number on the rise, we are going to need a lot more tools.

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