

NYC Well expands access to care for New Yorkers with diverse mental health needs

Abt Associates' June 2020 report presents findings from a mixed-methods evaluation designed to describe the characteristics of NYC Well users, assess users' access to care after contact, track changes in mental health outcomes, and understand differences in experience and outcomes by race/ethnicity, gender, age, mental health status, and mode of contact.

The study combined survey data from users tracked at two points in time, soon after contact and six months later, in-depth interviews, and NYC Well administrative data, collected from September 2018 to May 2020. The survey sample included 1,073 respondents, some of whom were individuals calling for themselves (primary users) and others who were calling for someone else (intermediary users). The sample contained a disproportionately high number of repeat callers as compared to all NYC Well users. These individuals represent an important group of NYC Well users.

Key Findings

NYC Well is increasing access to mental health support and playing an important role in filling service gaps for individuals who would otherwise defer care or utilize the emergency department. Results from this evaluation show:

- Users included in the study reported broad satisfaction with NYC Well
- Many users indicated that NYC Well provided support that they otherwise would not have been able to access
- Users who had been experiencing moderate or serious psychological distress upon contact with NYC Well reported significant improvements in mental health outcomes six months later

About NYC Well

NYC Well is a 24/7 free and confidential mental health helpline, serving all New Yorkers. Launched in 2016, the program is managed by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and operated by Vibrant Emotional Health. NYC Well is a key initiative of ThriveNYC. ThriveNYC partners with 12 City agencies to implement over 30 innovative mental health programs, serving hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers each year.

NYC Well offers crisis and suicide prevention counseling, short-term counseling, peer support, help setting appointments with mental healthcare providers, and connection to Mobile Crisis Teams, which respond to urgent mental health situations and often serve people in their homes. The service is accessible in over 200 languages, and available regardless of insurance or immigration status.

As of August 2020, NYC Well has answered 1 million calls, texts and chats from people seeking mental health support since launch.

NYC Well is reaching a diverse population, across race/ethnicity, gender identity, and age. Black and male survey respondents were least likely to contact NYC Well on behalf of themselves, but were more likely to have an intermediary contact the program on their behalf.

Most surveyed users reported that NYC Well helped them deal with their problems. Two-thirds of respondents reported that contact with NYC Well helped them deal more effectively with their problems a lot, and 90% reported that it helped at least a little

Mental health outcomes for people in serious psychological distress improved after contact with NYC Well. After contact with NYC Well, there were significant decreases in the percentages of users who were in serious psychological distress, who said they were nervous or hopeless most or all of the time, and who were depressed.

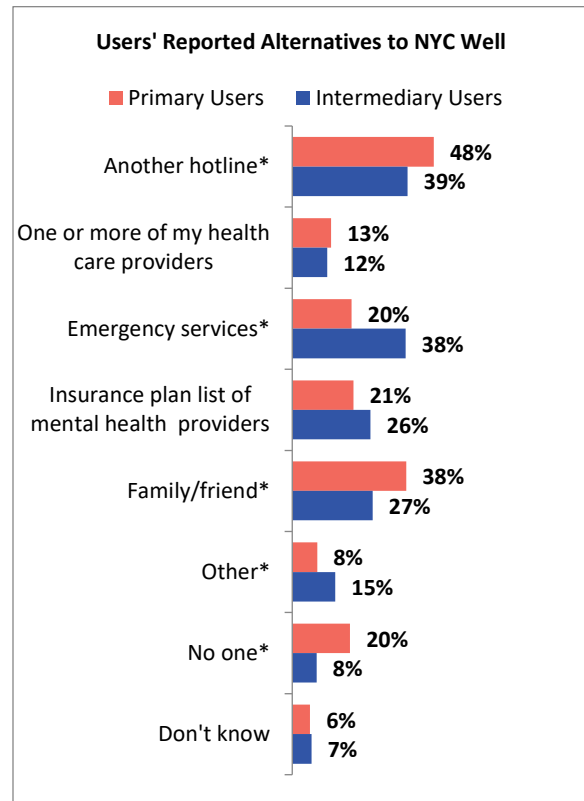
Without NYC Well, many users would have gone without care. A fifth of study participants reported that they would not have sought any care if NYC Well did not exist.

NYC Well may be playing a role as an important alternative to emergency services. Over 20% of respondents, including both primary users and those contacting on behalf of others, reported that, if not for NYC Well, they would have considered using emergency services.

There was important variation across subgroups in the study. Individuals who identified as other than male or female, transgender, or gender non-conforming expressed less satisfaction with NYC Well and did not see significant changes in their mental health outcomes. Asian populations were somewhat less likely to report positive experiences as compared to all other races. This suggests that NYC Well should pay particular attention to providing culturally competent care and incorporating user feedback.

Barriers to utilizing referred services were common. Although 64% of survey respondents were given a referral, only a quarter of these users made an appointment with the referred provider. Interviewees cited challenges with availability and accessibility of services, including ineligibility with their insurance or long wait times to see a provider. These issues

reflect system-wide policies and shortages in mental health services. Notably, only 10% of respondents had been seeking a referral when they contacted NYC Well and most users were satisfied with their experience due to the quality of counseling provided directly by NYC Well.



*Statistically significant difference

Notes: Chart reflects responses from 896 primary users and 201 intermediary users. Response options were not mutually exclusive and therefore the totals may add up to more than 100 percent.

Further Reading:

- ◆ [2020 Abt Associates Evaluation Report](#)
- ◆ [NYC Well Website](#)

Looking Ahead

In recent months, NYC Well has played an important role in New York City's COVID-19 response, and has expanded service capacity to meet increased demand. This study of NYC Well provides insight into the program's reach, service quality, and outcomes. It also highlights areas for further attention and research. Although NYC Well provides immediate support to many in need, challenges in the broader service landscape are barriers for individuals in need of continued and ongoing care. ThriveNYC plans to advance research to understand the unique mental health service landscape of New York City, looking at service capacity, composition, and distribution of providers, and incorporating both provider and user perspectives.

