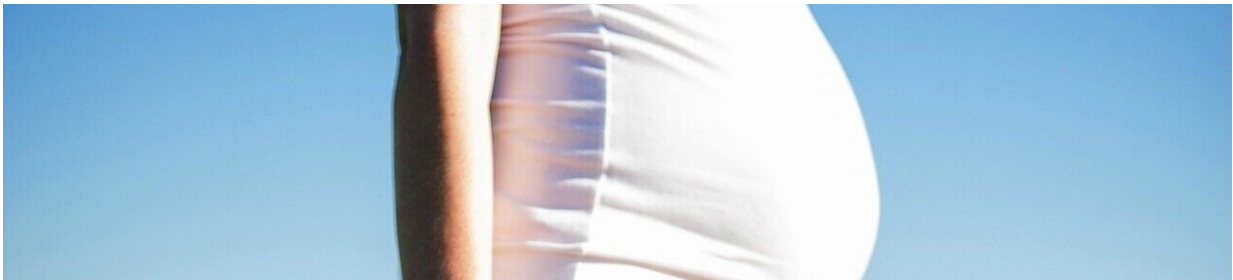


MoMba app: Social media application for the mental health of young mothers

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Research has shown that social support and social connection are important factors in the mental health of young mothers (Huang, et al., 2014). Furthermore, we know that the mental health of mothers is incredibly important for the healthy development of children (Manning and Gregoire, 2006). If a mom is too depressed to get out of bed for example, it will be incredibly difficult for her to engage with and read to her young child. What the lived experiences of mothers tell us, and research increasingly corroborates, is that when mothers feel they have strong support systems and other local mothers to share in their journey of parenting their children are more likely to thrive too (Andresen and Telleen, 1992).

That's why Elevate, a policy lab at Yale School of Medicine, and

Hopelab, a social innovation lab based in San Francisco, Calif., recently teamed up in a collaboration focused on the MoMba app, a social media application designed to strengthen the mental [health](#) of [mothers](#) as well as their connections with their young children. The app was originally developed as part of the Mental health Outreach for MotherS (MOMS) Partnership, which Elevate is working to scale to new communities across the U.S. MoMba provides a safe and supportive social network of local mothers by encouraging users to connect via interactive challenges and rewards.

While the app was initially piloted in New Haven, where MOMS was originally founded in 2011, Elevate sought the expertise of Hopelab to begin thinking about opportunities to scale and test MoMba in new contexts. Together, Elevate and Hopelab worked to better articulate MoMba's value proposition, talking to key stakeholders about potential opportunities for scaling the solution to other markets and contexts.

Several things became clear throughout the research and engagement:

- Given the prevalence of maternal mental health issues and the costs associated with them, the development and provision of effective treatment interventions is an area ripe for innovation. About one in seven pregnant and [postpartum women](#) nationwide are affected by perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, regardless of income. For low income women, rates of depressive symptoms are reported to be much higher, between 40 and 60 percent. [A cost model created by researchers at Mathematica](#) found that untreated mood and anxiety disorders among [pregnant women](#) and new moms cost the U.S. about \$14.2 billion in 2017.
- Unfortunately, in many healthcare organizations, maternal mental health can fall through the gap between maternal health and behavioral health services. Because neither group fully "owns" the problem, or because the problem crosses silos, it may not be

prioritized and get the attention required given the scope of the problem. It will be critical for Elevate to identify and work with partners who have internal champions for integration of behavioral health/mental wellbeing for pregnant and postpartum moms.

- Researchers have found that programs addressing mental health issues before they become acute in pregnant women and new mothers could be scaled up through digital solutions, and that this has great potential to improve overall population health. This recent [piece](#) by Dr. Ricardo Munoz does an excellent job of summarizing the research and opportunities in this space.
- Fostering social connections, reducing loneliness and increasing social capital are essential to improving and supporting mental health, particularly during significant life transitions. Extensive scientific research has shown that loneliness can lead to poor health outcomes and that improved [social connection](#) and a sense of belonging can buffer us from symptoms of depression and anxiety (Xia and Li, 2018). Health system stakeholders are also interested in solutions that create social connections as a patient engagement strategy, particularly for hard to reach and underserved populations.
- Developing digital solutions that include social connection that work for large healthcare or government systems—from a workflow and financing perspective—can be challenging. Open social applications and networks can raise concerns about privacy as well as concerns about improper information being shared by members, and there must be a process in place to moderate these online forums.

Despite these challenges, it is clear that young people expect and want [digital tools](#) to include social networking components to help them connect with others like them and to get support from others who have gone through (or are going through) similar life and health challenges.

Designers and innovators need to continue to work together to build digital tools that work both for the young person and for the stakeholders implementing and/or paying for the interventions.

The MOMS Partnership and MoMba show great promise as community and digital interventions: in fact, Hopelab found that funders have a desire and need for evidence-based programs and digital solutions that can be trusted to effectively improve behavioral health outcomes. With plans to update the app's interface, Elevate hopes to continue to test and assess the digital platform's impact on reducing depressive symptoms for mothers and facilitating social connection. Additionally, Elevate is excited to begin exploring opportunities to integrate MoMba into existing MOMS Partnership sites, with goals of ultimately embedding the digital platform into government systems as it has done with MOMS in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) systems in Washington D.C., and VT.

Hopelab and Elevate are thrilled to have worked together to highlight mental health and social connection as keys to improving the lives of mothers and their young children. The Hopelab team is excited to see how Elevate moves forward with the MoMba app in the months and years ahead, supported and informed by this collaboration.

More information: Learn more at hopelab.org

Provided by Yale University

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