

New digital tool to improve treatment for people with alcohol addiction

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An online system to monitor symptoms and cravings will help combat heavy drinking and alcohol use disorders, which affect about a third of Australian men and a quarter of women at some point in their life.

University of Queensland researchers and Queensland Health practitioners developed the system—known as [iAx](#)—which is being evaluated in alcohol and drug units at the Princess Alexandra and Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospitals.

Associate Professor Matthew Gullo, from UQ's National Centre for Youth Substance Use Research, said his aim as a [clinical psychologist](#) had been to replace paper-based assessment tools with an accessible computerised delivery system designed by practitioners, for practitioners.

"With iAx, both the patient and their health [practitioner](#) can gain a better understanding of the alcohol use problems they are working to address," Associate Professor Gullo said.

"Severity of symptoms, frequency of cravings and patient's confidence in [drinking](#) control are monitored throughout treatment to review and discuss at each consultation.

"I find that patients really value being able to clearly see how much progress they make in treatment, especially when they have had a slip and lost confidence."

The project was funded by the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) Translating Research into Practice (TRIP) initiative.

Associate Professor Gullo said preliminary findings had been positive.

"We've shown iAx led to improvement in [patient outcomes](#) and a significant increase in practitioners using reliable, valid assessment tools," he said.

"The next stage is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of improvements

in specific patient drinking outcomes.

"We want to know if iAx helps practitioners deliver better treatment, resulting in fewer lapses into [heavy drinking](#) and less drinking during any lapses.

"We are also conducting interviews with patients about their experience of iAx in their treatment and asking practitioners about how they believe it affects their delivery of care."

Provided by University of Queensland

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