

Apps 'valuable tool' in helping manage chronic pain

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Smartphone apps have proved invaluable for helping people manage chronic pain during the COVID-19 pandemic, but researchers warn that the need for information sharing and education in this area is being

neglected.

That is the conclusion of new research published in the journal *Geriatrics*, which examined studies on several "telehealth" applications—[smartphone apps](#) used by patients and [healthcare professionals](#) to manage their condition.

Researchers found that smartphone apps and telehealth initiatives have the potential to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of healthcare systems and patients' quality of life in relation to pain management

The authors also emphasize that user involvement in development and construction of smartphone apps and telehealth initiatives is vital to enhance acceptability and usability.

However, the study also advised that enhanced systems, policies and procedures are needed in order to prevent unethical use of health data across the health system.

According to the United Nations, the [global population](#) of over 65s is growing at a faster rate than any other age group. The population of older adults is expected to be at 1.5 billion by 2050.

Co-author Dr. Antonio Bonacaro, Senior Lecturer in Adult and Acute Care Nursing at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said:

"Chronic pain is a significant cause of disability. The current COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted normal healthcare delivery, making it harder for people to physically access services, and even in normal times, healthcare services are under increasing strain.

"Our research found there is considerable potential for apps to actively support older people with their pain management and also improve

communication with health professionals when physical services are unobtainable. They are cheap, informal, and popular.

"However, telehealth apps are mostly produced without getting users involved in the developmental process. The need for information sharing, education, and self-administration of pain relief is almost completely neglected.

"Data protection is a big concern for patients. The importance of data privacy and confidentiality should be acknowledged, and encryption and password-protected access to any data is important."

More information: Margaret Dunham et al, Smartphone Applications Designed to Improve Older People's Chronic Pain Management: An Integrated Systematic Review, *Geriatrics* (2021). [DOI: 10.3390/geriatrics6020040](https://doi.org/10.3390/geriatrics6020040)

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