

Abstract

Increasing Peer Support for Opioid Use Disorder Recovery During COVID-19 Through Digital Health: Protocol for a National Randomized Controlled Trial

Megan Ranney^{1,2,3*}, MD, MPH; Brandon D L Marshall^{4*}, PhD; Kirsten Langdon^{5,6*}, PhD; Sarah Wiehe⁷, MD, MPH; Matthew Aalsma⁷, PhD; Brendan Jacka⁴, PhD; Alyssa Peachey⁴, MHA; Francesca Beaudoin^{1,4}, MD, PhD

¹Department of Emergency Medicine, Warren Alpert School Medical School of Brown University, Providence, RI, United States

²Department of Health Services, Policy, and Practice, Brown University School of Public Health, Providence, RI, United States

³Brown-Lifespan Center for Digital Health, Providence, RI, United States

⁴Department of Epidemiology, Brown University School of Public Health, Providence, RI, United States

⁵Department of Psychiatry, Rhode Island Hospital, Providence, RI, United States

⁶Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, Warren Alpert School Medical School of Brown University, Providence, RI, United States

⁷Department of Pediatrics, Indiana University School of Medicine, Indianapolis, IN, United States

*these authors contributed equally

Corresponding Author:

Megan Ranney, MD, MPH

Department of Emergency Medicine

Warren Alpert School Medical School of Brown University

222 Richmond St

Providence, RI, 02903

United States

Phone: 1 401 863 3330

Email: megan_ranney@brown.edu

Abstract

Background: Increasing numbers of opioid overdoses have been observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, likely reflecting the pandemic's multiple effects on this already vulnerable population. People in recovery from opioid use disorder (OUD) have reported disproportionate psychosocial distress and isolation, as well as significant disruptions in access to treatment, including peer support, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Peer support is a key component of many evidence-based OUD recovery programs; it improves recovery capital, treatment engagement, and perceived social support and reduces psychosocial distress, particularly when used in conjunction with other evidence-based treatments, such as medication for OUD.

Objective: This study aims to evaluate a novel mobile peer support app platform among a national sample of individuals in recovery from OUD as an adjunct to usual care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods: Individuals residing in the United States who are aged ≥ 18 years; own a smartphone; and self-report being in recovery for an OUD, being in treatment for an OUD (ie, in the past 30 days received prescribed methadone, naltrexone, or buprenorphine), or currently receiving some form of assisted recovery support ($n=1300$) will be recruited through online, targeted social media advertisements. Eligible participants will be randomly assigned (1:1) to a mobile peer recovery support intervention utilizing a novel smartphone-based app or to a control. Participants will complete 1 baseline survey and then a follow-up survey 1, 3, and 6 months after randomization. The primary aim of recovery capital will be determined by the change in recovery capital between study groups over the 6-month study period. We will also examine treatment engagement by using administrative data from a subset of individuals ($n=650$) residing in Rhode Island and Indiana.

Results: As of June 2022, we enrolled 43 participants.

Conclusions: If this mobile app demonstrates efficacy among a large national sample of patients, it has the potential to augment existing treatment programs, improve recovery capital, and reduce the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on this vulnerable population.

Conflicts of Interest: None declared.

Trial Registration: ClinicalTrials.gov NCT05405712; <https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT05405712>

(*iproc* 2023;9:e39424) doi: [10.2196/39424](https://doi.org/10.2196/39424)

KEYWORDS

opioid use disorder; mobile application; peer recovery

Edited by S Pagoto; this is a non-peer-reviewed article. Submitted 09.05.22; accepted 21.12.22; published 31.01.23.

Please cite as:

Ranney M, Marshall BDL, Langdon K, Wiehe S, Aalsma M, Jacka B, Peachey A, Beaudoin F

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iproc 2023;9:e39424

URL: <https://www.iproc.org/2023/1/e39424>

doi: [10.2196/39424](https://doi.org/10.2196/39424)

PMID:

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