

What's in an App?

Incorporating an automated consent procedure to recruit those who use methamphetamine to a harm reduction and early intervention smartphone-based application clinical trial

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Introduction

The use of mobile health (mHealth) applications for providing health information and care has increased over the past decade¹. The number of mHealth applications related to the use of alcohol and other drugs is expanding, including those for methamphetamine use².

Technological features have contributed to increasing popularity of mHealth applications for a range of conditions³ including:

- Confidentiality,
- Timely access to information, and
- Flexibility.

However, the evidence base for quality, acceptability, and effectiveness in behaviour change is limited⁴.

An important challenge for testing smart phone applications is the need to gain informed consent to participate in a research study.

Approach

We hypothesised that it would be feasible to embed an **automated anonymous consent process** into a trial of a new smartphone application, the Scheck App, to recruit an anonymous online sample of people who use methamphetamine.

- The S-Check App, developed in 2017, is a harm reduction information and early intervention application.
- Acceptability, ease of use and navigation was piloted among people who use methamphetamine (n=10)⁵ using the uMARs questionnaire⁶.
- To test effectiveness in motivating help seeking and behaviour change, a research version of the App has been developed including:
 - Automated consent (eConsent),
 - Randomisation to immediate access or a 28-day waitlist control period (ACTRN12619000534189),
 - Free-of-charge downloading (from Google[®] or Apple[®] store),
 - In-built Participant Sheet/Informed Consent Form (PISCF), study details and an eligibility assessment
 - Randomisation, reimbursement and reminders (eliminating need to collect personal information), and
 - Optional link to telephone feedback or support.

Key findings

An automated system to recruit participants embedded in the App:

- Incorporates participant information and consent processes,
- Fulfils ethics approval obligations,
- Maintains participant anonymity,
- Eliminates need for direct contact, and
- Automates tasks associated with the recruitment process.

Visit the S-Check App Trial:
www.scheckapp.org.au

Management of recruitment issues

Issues	Conventional Recruitment Procedure	App Based Recruitment
Maintain anonymity	The participant needs to identify themselves in order for the PISCF to be sent to them (e.g. by mail, email, etc.)	The PISCF is provided electronically and the consent procedure is conducted anonymously via the App
Recruitment time	Takes considerable time for the PISCF to be sent and returned before the participant can be enrolled	The selection criteria and the consent procedure are conducted within the App, avoids recruitment delays
Face-to-Face recruitment	S-Check App trial is an Australian wide study, therefore not feasible to conduct face-to-face recruitment	There are checks built into the App to ensure that only those meeting the selection criteria who are able to give consent can participate
Reimbursement for participating	The participant needs to provide contact details in order receive reimbursements	Reimbursements are provided through the App via an e-gift card for the purchase of groceries

Discussion

- This study provides valuable insight into mHealth application-based self-administered remote informed consent processes with no researcher-participant in-person contact.
- eConsent provides new opportunities for accelerated and scaled-up research involvement, engaging hard to reach or marginalised people⁷.
- Emerging privacy and validation concerns require further investigation³.

Conclusion

The study will document experience of remote in-app consent among a planned sample of 1050 Australians. If successful, intervention and survey-based studies may adopt this approach to improve the efficacy and timeliness of recruitment and participation.



PLEASE OPEN AND READ THE FOLLOWING PARTICIPANT SHEET AND CONSENT FORM (PISCF)

[VIEW PISCF](#)

DO YOU AGREE WITH THE CONSENT FORM?

[I DO NOT WISH TO PARTICIPATE](#)

[I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE](#)

An electronic version of this Participant Information Sheet and Consent form will be available on the S-Check App for you to download

SVH HREC Approval No:
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S-Check Advisory Committee

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The authors express no conflict of interest