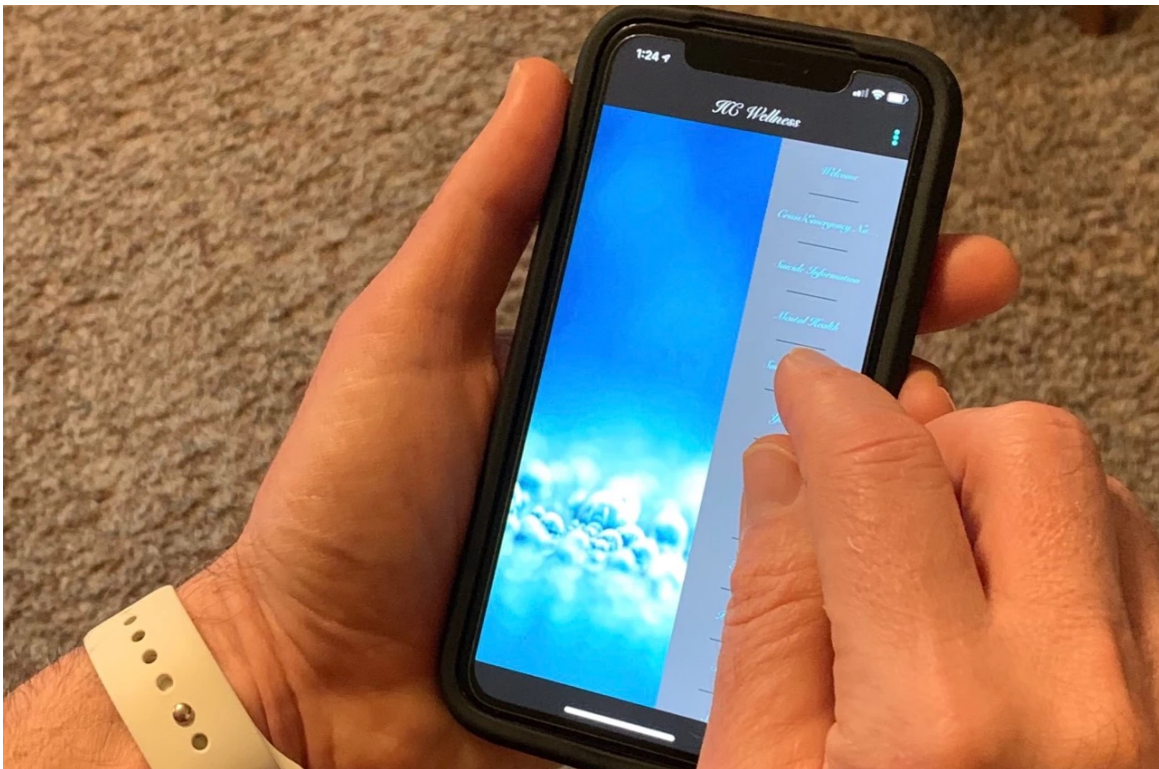


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Norwalk Ohio News staff 34 minutes ago



Huron County Wellness App connects local residents with services and supports



An app has been created to help local residents with mental and physical health issues.

The Huron County Wellness App is designed to serve as a one-stop shop for local mental health, substance use and wellness resources.

This free app is being provided by the Huron County Board of Mental Health and Addiction Services (MHAS).

"One of our greatest struggles at the start of the pandemic was figuring out how to reach people, especially youth, to make sure they were aware of the available services and supports as the traditional outreach methods were not permitted or safe," said Kristen Cardone, who serves as MHAS executive director.



Kristen Cardone

"We also wanted to find a way to get resources in front of people when they need them, offering access regardless of the time of day or location. We started discussing the creation of an app, since the majority of people have cell phones with them most of the time, making it one of the best ways to share information and reach people," she said.

MHAS officials started discussing the creation of an app in late summer, and it took about four months from concept to roll out.

"It was easier than expected to create an app and it was actually a very enjoyable experience," Cardone said.

That doesn't mean there weren't challenges.

"The greatest challenges were the short time frame — not having time to find someone who could create something with more bells and whistles for a reasonable price — and having to utilize a template for the creation of the app, which greatly limited the options of what the app can do and how it looks," Cardone said.

Researching options was the most time-consuming part of the process, she added.

"We had hoped to find an app developer locally that would be willing to create it for us at a reasonable price and we most likely could have found one if we had more time," Cardone said. "However, having the app published and ready prior to the holidays took precedence because we knew people were struggling and we didn't have time for an extensive search."

HOW TO GET AND USE APP

The app can be downloaded on Google Play (search "huron_county") and the App Store (search "HCWellness").

"We have had a couple of people say they were unable to find it in the app stores," Cardone said. "According to Google Play and the App Store, the app only works on iOS 12 and up and Android 5 and up, which may limit accessibility for some."

On the main page, there are 15 categories on the right side of the screen. The first is "Welcome," and it contains instructions

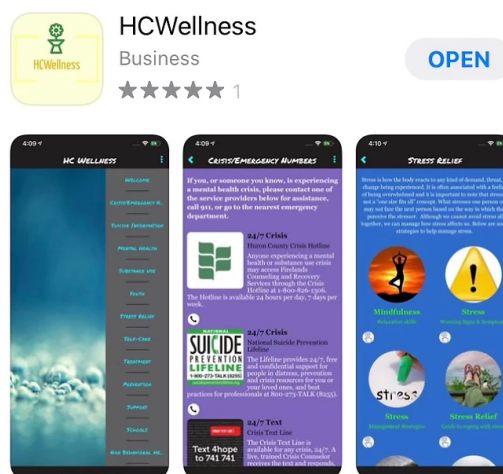


"treatment," as well "physical health" and "mental health."

Categories geared for parents and children include "youth" and "schools."

The "non behavioral health resources" category can connect the user with resources provided by the county Department of Job and Family Services, the Board of Developmental Disabilities, Veterans Service Office, Enrichment Centers for Huron County and Norwalk Area United Fund. It also has links for resources related to employment, food, housing, seniors, and child and family needs.

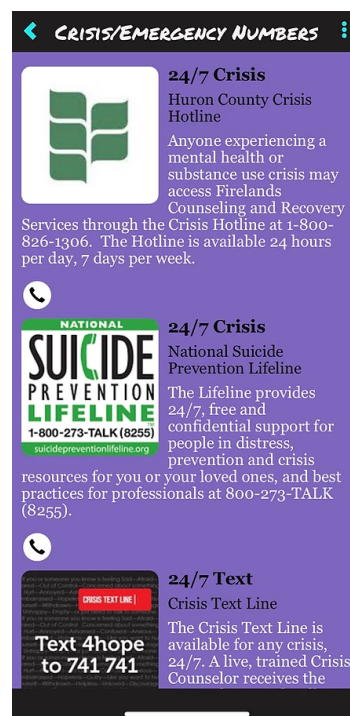
To visit an organization's website or see additional information, the user taps or clicks on the "touch here" image below the description. To call an organization, the user taps or clicks on the phone image that also is located below the description.



on how to use the site and disclaimers. The last is contact information for MHAS.

The 13 categories in between feature resources and contact information grouped by the type of services provided. These categories include "crisis/emergencies," "suicide information" and "substance use."

Other categories include "prevention," "self-care," "stress relief," "support" and





"Allowing notifications permits users to click the links to websites and to click on the phone icon to call the providers without having to type in the phone number, increasing the functionality of the app," Cardone said.

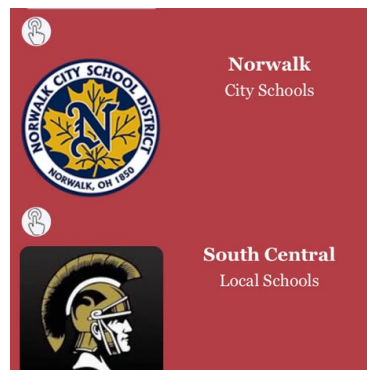
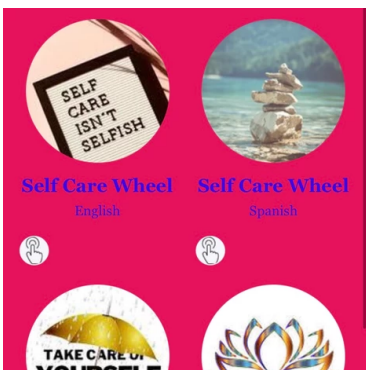
Users are not required to share any personal information to use the app.

"We are not able to see who downloads the app or what they use it for, so use of the app is completely confidential," Cardone said.

Cardone said the app offers advantages over a website.

"It is readily accessible on a mobile phone and doesn't require people to remember a website address. Additionally, the younger generations are more likely to use apps over websites," she said.

Although it only became available recently, Cardone said MHAS officials already have heard from people who say the app is a useful resource.



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