

App to beat the blues seeking test users in Edinburgh

The long, dark nights of December, January and February have long been associated with the 'winter blues' but depression is a year round issue in Scotland. Hundreds of thousands – perhaps millions – of people all over the country suffer from mental health issues of varying degrees of severity. More than 778,000 people, or around 15% of the total population, were prescribed antidepressants in Scotland between 2013 and 2014.

But many more suffer from low level issues – stress, anxiety, loneliness, poor self esteem – that gradually chip away at their emotional wellbeing over time. For these people, existing mental health treatments like drug or talking therapies may be too drastic an intervention and a softer approach may be helpful. That's where Ginsberg comes in.

Ginsberg is a new online tool and smartphone app developed by an Edinburgh-based team to help people better understand and improve their mental health. The project, a joint initiative between the Scottish Government, NHS 24 and New Media Scotland, is currently in an open beta phase and is seeking people from around Scotland to help test out the tool and provide feedback that will shape its future development. It is the first app of its type in the world and a genuinely innovative consumer-first approach to developing public health software.

Ginsberg is for anyone who wants to become more self-aware and understand and improve their mental wellbeing. Users log how they are feeling every day, choosing 3 different aspects of their emotional health to concentrate on, and then enter information about their physical activity – how much and how well they sleep, how much alcohol they drink, how often they exercise and more. The tool looks for patterns in this

emotional and physical data and provides users with insights about why they feel the way they do.

The Ginsberg team is based in the Scottish Government's Victoria Quay office in Leith. Although they work within the public sector, the team is structured, run and staffed like a start-up and its members have been recruited mainly from Edinburgh tech startups and digital agencies.

The lean startup methodology the team uses gives Ginsberg's developers the flexibility to iterate very quickly in response to user feedback and fix bugs and add new features in relatively short-time frames. This means that suggestions and feedback from actual users directly influences how Ginsberg evolves; it can change to meet the needs of its userbase.

Ginsberg is currently in public open beta, which means that anyone can sign up to test the tool through its website. Like other beta version products, it's not perfect and may be buggy from time to time but all feedback received during this period is invaluable and will be used to add new features that reflect the needs of the people of Scotland..

To sign up for Ginsberg and become a tester please visit <https://www.ginsberg.io/>

Submitted by [Jodi Mullen](#)

