



## Media Release

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### **DESPITE POPULARITY NOT ALL APPS WILL HELP YOU REACH YOUR GOALS**

Australians are being urged to exercise caution when downloading health and wellbeing apps with new research from VicHealth and Deakin University finding most apps don't have the features that will help you be healthier.

The [healthy living apps research](#) released today found only two out of the 348 health and wellbeing apps reviewed got a four-star rating for their ability to help people change their behaviour and no apps were rated five stars.

Three-quarters of the apps were rated 2.5 stars or below and according to the researchers, meaning that for most people, these are unlikely to help to change habits when it came to their health and wellbeing, despite some charging over \$15 for the initial download.

Despite the likely ineffectiveness of health apps, VicHealth has found apps are still incredibly popular with health-conscious Aussies, with over 30 per cent of people using apps to try to improve their health and wellbeing and 42 per cent of people trusting the health advice from their smartphone apps.

VicHealth Principal Advisor Dr Lyn Roberts cautioned people about spending big on apps, stating that on their own, smartphone apps were unlikely to be the holy grail in the quest for a healthier lifestyle.

"We know people are looking for a convenient fix when it comes to improving their health and wellbeing, and while some apps can be useful, most aren't going to do much to make you healthier," Dr Roberts said.

"Our research showed unfortunately most apps aren't based on evidence and are unlikely to help people create long-term healthy habits.

"Apps that were rated highest included those that allow people to set goals, track their behaviour, rewarded positive behaviour and send notifications and prompts. The great news is the apps that rated the highest in our research are free to download.

"But beware many apps might be free to download but have sneaky costs, like charging you to unlock features or make you pay for subscriptions.

"We encourage people wanting to use an app to improve their health to check out our healthy living apps guide to avoid downloading a complete lemon."

Apps that rated highly included Quit Genius – quit smoking, mindfulness training app Unwinding Anxiety, fitness tracker Fitbit and Hello Sunday Morning's Daybreak – drink less. Apps at the lower end

of the scale included Alcohol and Your Brain, fitness trackers 100 club and PUMPING WEIGHT, and workout tool Total Fitness – Gym & Workouts.

Lead researcher Dr Fiona McKay, from Deakin's School of Health and Social Development, said people needed to be careful in trusting apps for their health information.

"We looked for tools in apps that we know from the evidence have the best chance of helping people to achieve their goals," Dr McKay said.

"While there are some good apps out there, a lot of apps just don't have the features that will help people to be healthier. We want people to choose carefully, and find the app that is right for them. "If you're going to use an app, use the free trial period to check out all of the features, and choose one that's been developed by an organisation you trust.

"Most people have a phone in their pocket all day, we think that using an app on a phone is one way to improve health and wellbeing, we just want to help people to choose the right app."

**-ENDS-**

**VicHealth and Deakin University's Healthy Living Apps research is available at**

[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/apps](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/apps). The pages can be searched in a number of ways – by category, Apple or Android device, age group, price, and whether the app needs an add-on to work e.g., a fitness device. They can also be sorted by overall rating, name, highest price or lowest price.

**Note to Editors**

**Key research findings:**

**A VicHealth survey of 3000 Australians found:**

- 30 per cent of Australians use apps to try to improve their health and wellbeing
- Young people are more likely to use health apps than older Australians (More than 46% of people 18-34 years compared with 17% of those aged 55-64 years).
- 42 per cent of Australians believe health and wellbeing apps are trustworthy sources of health advice.
- Australians aged 25-34 years were significantly more likely than those aged 55-64 years of age to trust *health and wellbeing apps* (53% versus 29%).

**Healthy Living Apps research:**

- VicHealth and Deakin University's Healthy Living Apps Guide searched Apple iTunes and Google Play stores to identify apps that were focused on promoting healthy eating, encouraging physical activity, preventing tobacco use, preventing harm from alcohol and improving mental wellbeing.
- Identified apps underwent a six-step screening, review and rating process, and were rated from one to five stars.
- Three quarters of apps received a rating of 2.5 stars or less.
- Only two apps were rated four stars, no apps received the highest possible rating of 5 stars.

## VICHEALTH'S TOP 10 TIPS FOR CHOOSING A HEALTHY LIVING APP

1. **Make sure the app is enjoyable to use**

You will use an app more often if you find it enjoyable and engaging. It will also make it feel like less of a chore!

2. **Find an app that suits your needs**

There are many apps available so choose one that suits your needs. For instance, choose an app that's suitable for your age, fitness levels or accessibility needs.

3. **Choose an app supported by someone you trust**

Not all apps have the same quality of information. Choose an app that is made or supported by an organisation that you trust.

4. **Use an app that supports what you already have**

Find an app you can incorporate with equipment you already have access to.

5. **Make sure the app allows you to create and modify your own goals**

Setting yourself a goal will help you to build healthy habits and stick to them, such as doing more physical activity next week.

6. **Choose an app that lets you track your behaviour**

Keeping a record of your behaviour will help you change it! For example, you can choose an app that displays the times you go on walks, on what days and at what intensity.

7. **Choose an app that shows you how to do an activity**

If you don't know how to perform an activity, watching it being done will help you to get started.

8. **Use an app that allows you to share your progress with your friends, whether this is through social media or other users of the app community**

Having support from other people will help you achieve your goals.

9. **Find an app that has notifications**

Let the app remind you of when you had planned to go for a walk or eat a piece of fruit instead of that snack! This will help you build habits and stick to your plans.

10. **Choose an app that rewards you when you succeed**

Getting a reward for doing a specific activity will help reinforce it. This could be as simple as praise and encouragement or your name appearing on a leader board.