Background and aim

Background

- Population ageing is increasing in Aotearoa and internationally.

- Later life can be a time of increased vulnerability for social isolation, poorer mental health.

- Digital health solutions are infrequently developed with older adults in mind. They may cause or exacerbate distress in their own right.

The aim of this PhD is to **co-create an evidence-based resource** to support the development of **age-friendly and equity-enhancing digital health tools** which support **older adults' mental and psychosocial wellbeing** in Aotearoa New Zealand.
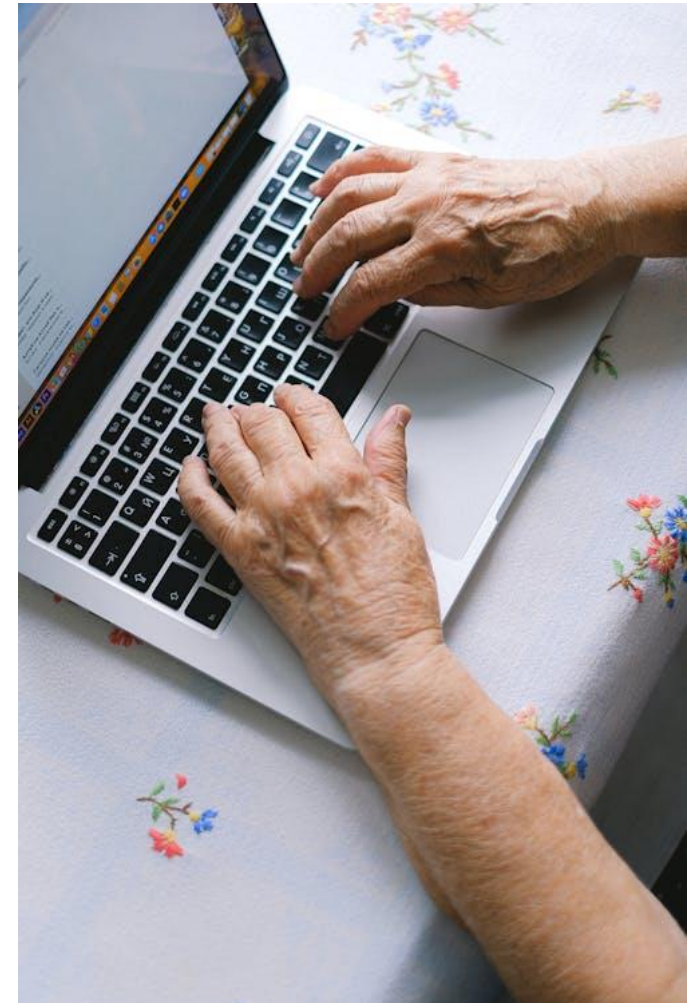
Photo: Pexels

Research questions

01

What are the enabling factors and barriers to older adults' engagement with digital health tools?
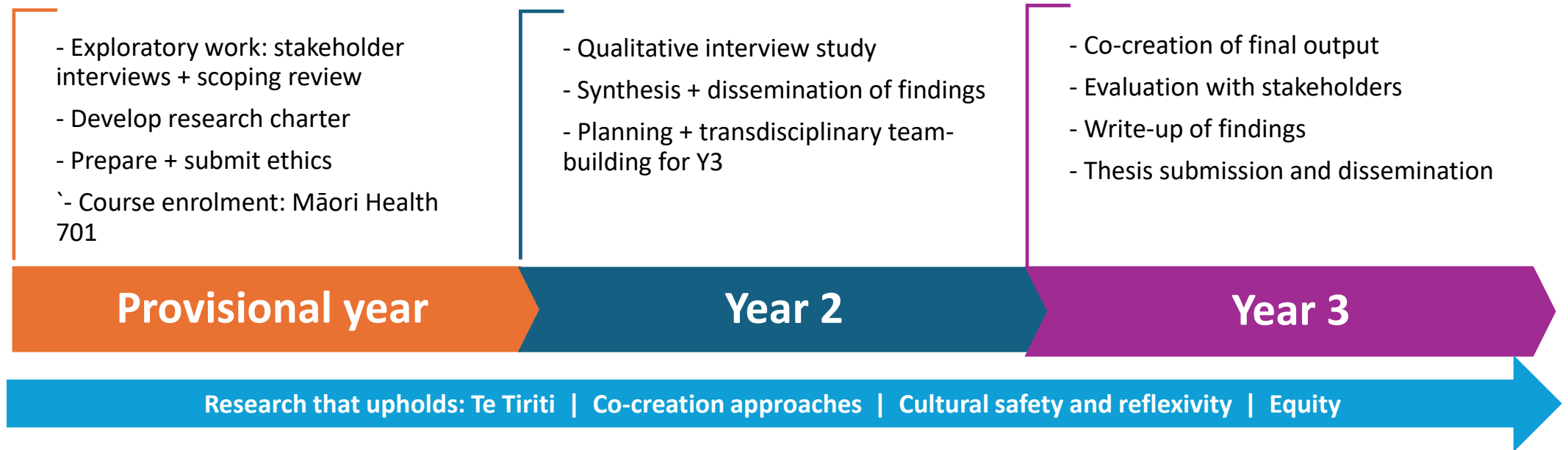
02

How can emerging digital health tools and services be developed to uphold the preferences and needs of older adults?

03

How can we ensure that emerging digital health tools are developed to minimise potential unintended mental or psychosocial harm to older adults?

Study timeline

- Exploratory work: stakeholder interviews + scoping review
- Develop research charter
- Prepare + submit ethics
`- Course enrolment: Māori Health 701

- Qualitative interview study
- Synthesis + dissemination of findings
- Planning + transdisciplinary team-building for Y3

- Co-creation of final output
- Evaluation with stakeholders
- Write-up of findings
- Thesis submission and dissemination

Provisional year

Year 2

Year 3

Research that upholds: Te Tiriti | Co-creation approaches | Cultural safety and reflexivity | Equity

Findings to date

Exploratory stakeholder interviews, Jan-Feb 2024

- Interviews with stakeholders (n=3) involved in the care of / delivery of services to older people who may experience anxiety

Findings:

- **Participants endorsed:** simple, tailored, in-the-moment messaging to support self-management
- **Participants cautioned:** potential for tech interventions to exacerbate symptoms
- **Participants recommended**: participatory design and ongoing, in-person support

Photo: Pexels

Findings to date

Scoping umbrella review, Mar-Aug 2024

Aim and methods

Aim: To clarify our understanding of the components involved in existing digital tools to promote mental health and how these have been tailored to meet older adults' needs and preferences

- ✓ Scoping 'review of reviews' approach

- ✓ Searches conducted in 5 databases

- ✓ Quality assessment + check for primary study overlaps

- ✓ Evidence extracted + summarized in narrative synthesis

Results

- 18 systematic reviews included
- Range of digital modalities
- 83% rated good quality; 1/3 cited overlapping evidence
- Overall: **digital tools have potential** to improve common mental + psychosocial health symptoms, **with caveats**

Discussion

- Important quality + reporting issues within primary studies
- Minimal information about participatory design, usability, acceptability outcomes
- Lack of cultural considerations and real-world implementation
- 1 review reported worsening symptoms

Findings to date

Qualitative study: The potential for digital tools to support the mental health of older adults

Research question: What role may digital tools play in supporting older adults' mental health concerns and needs?

Specific objectives include:

1. To understand mental health concerns and needs in later life, from the perspectives of older adults.

2. To understand perceptions of / experiences with technology among older adults and how digital tools may play a role in their mental wellbeing.

3. To understand potential barriers and enablers to older adults' engagement with / benefit from digital tools.

- **Study period:** Jan – April 2025
- **Study design and methodology:** One-time, semi-structured qualitative interviews
- **Population:** Community-dwelling adults aged 65+.
- **Sample size:** 10+ pending data sufficiency

Photo: Pexels

Findings to date

Qualitative study: emerging themes

Photo: Pexels

Discussion

Aim for Stage 3: How can we make technology part of the solution, and not part of the problem, regarding older people's mental wellbeing?

1) What do you think about the interview findings? What's missing?

2) What can I/we develop as a team in the next phase of this PhD?

   Some examples based on learnings:
   - Age-friendly framework to support tech developers
   - Improved signposting to existing services in community
   - Innovative ways to educate older people about tech

3) Who needs to be part of a future transdisciplinary team?

Photo: Pexels

Ngā mihi | Thank you

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