# Stronger together – online mental health support network FAQs

Alberta Health Services has partnered with **Togetherall** to provide Albertans with a free, online peer-to-peer mental health support network. The Togetherall platform provide all Albertans aged 16+ the opportunity to share, connect and support one another through a safe online community, in addition to accessing clinically validated tools, assessments, curated courses and other self-help resources.

**General Overview**

**Who is Togetherall?**

Togetherall is a digital mental health and wellbeing company that partners with 150+ organizations across the public health care, post-secondary, and employer sectors. Founded in 2007, Togetherall now supports over 30 million individuals world-wide through its virtual peer-to-peer community support platform and online resources.

**What is meant by peer-to-peer support?**

In this context, peers refer to members of the general (eligible) public that choose to contribute to the platform, as opposed to trained peer supporters. This community of peers is made up of millions of individuals from all walks of life who are able to share their experiences and support others struggling with similar issues.

**What kinds of support does Togetherall offer members?**

Togetherall provides a safe and anonymous place for members to express their thoughts, concerns and triumphs, without fear of judgement. Trained mental health professionals (i.e., clinical moderators) monitor the online community to ensure members’ safety and anonymity. Members can interact with the virtual peer community at large or form their own smaller groups or one-to-one chats. In additional to the community platform which facilitates both written and visual expression, members have access to a variety of clinically validated, self-guided resources, including assessments, courses, self-help journaling, goal setting tools, and a full catalogue of well-being articles. Members can also join group courses to learn alongside others interested in the same topics.

**Who is eligible to access services?**

The Togetherall platform and resources are available 24/7/365 and are free for all Albertans aged 16+ to use. When registering for the service, new members will be asked to confirm their Albertan postal code to verify their eligibility. See below for more information on how to register.

**How does Togetherall differ from other online services?**

Togetherall is unique in that it combines elements of a virtual peer community and overlays it with 24/7 clinical moderation to ensure members have a safe place to express themselves. Similar supports typically offer one or the other of these elements, but rarely both. The well-established global network base also allows for a richer member experience and broader scalability, with all new eligible populations adding to the wealth of lived experience.

**Clinical Moderation**

**Is Togetherall a clinical or crisis intervention tool?**

##### No. The supports on offer are best suited to those with mild to moderate mental health issues who have a lower level of risk and need for professional intervention. The platform can be used as an additional tool to support individuals struggling with mental health concerns, however it is not intended to be a crisis channel. While there is a clinical moderation layer to the service, Togetherall does not offer its members 1:1 counselling or direct therapy.

**Who is providing the clinical moderation?**

Overseeing the virtual platform are Bachelor’s and Master’s level mental health professionals, typically clinical counsellors or social workers, that are registered with their relevant professional body and licensed to practice. Note that given service provider’s global presence, these clinical moderators are not necessarily licensed where the member is located, but rather where they themselves are located. A number of Albertan clinicians have already been hired and added to Togetherall’s clinical network. More will be added across Canada as the need grows.

##### **What role do these clinical moderators play in supporting members?**

The moderators do not provide 1:1 therapy or counselling, they are monitoring the online community for indications of those that may require additional support or further intervention. They help keep members safe, signpost other available resources, and help maintain anonymity. Moderators are required to be proactive in responding to members who are in distress and provide them with support, which may involve helping them to seek local assistance from their doctor or therapist. All comments and interactions within the platform are monitored to ensure that they conform to the [House Rules](https://www.bigwhitewall.com/house-rules/). Moderators are also required to model the behaviour encouraged on the site for members to adopt within the community. This includes being welcoming towards new members, providing comments that are non-judgmental and respectful while encouraging others to express their troubles, and ensuring that the platform remains a safe space for all.

##### **What safety measures are in place to protect members?**

Ensuring the protection of members is a core component of the service. In addition to the general monitoring for safety/risk as per standard protocols and escalation procedures, including connections to the relevant 24/7 Albertan hotlines, Togetherall ensures the following:

* **Member anonymity:** Any potentially identifiable information, such as names, cities, email addresses, phone numbers, etc. is flagged with the moderators who then have the ability to remove/edit the information to ensure anonymity is maintained throughout the entire digital community. A member is notified of any edits and the reason behind them.
* **Member safety:** Moderators continually monitor the community for trigger words/phrases that may indicate potential risk or inappropriate use of the platform. A robust database of trigger words/phrases has been developed over the last 13 years. Other members within the community also have the ability to report inappropriate behaviour or use of the platform.
* **Ongoing Support:** Moderators are able to track the activities of either those members identified as potentially vulnerable or those identified as having engaging in behaviours which may breach platform rules. In this way, the moderators are able to see how these members interact with the supports and reach out to offer further support if needed.

**How are members supported if there is an emergency situation?**

Members always remain anonymous on the platform, both to other members and to the moderators. During the registration process, the platform captures registration data (including postal code, email address and date of birth) which is stored in a way that is walled off from everyone but the Senior Clinician team who is responsible for escalations. When a member is identified as potentially being in distress, they are encouraged to de-anonymize and provide the clinical moderator team with additional details such as their name and home address. If the situation warrants immediate intervention and the member has not voluntarily de-anonymized, the moderators loop in their Senior Clinicians who are then able to access the additional registration data as well as IP address to provide to emergency services to facilitate an intervention. If the member is not in immediate distress, self-management, including encouraging the Member to access local resources in encouraged.

**How familiar are the clinical moderators with Alberta and local resources?**

AHS Provincial Addiction & Mental Health continues to work with Togetherall to ensure their clinical moderators are equipped to understand and support the needs of Albertans. Alberta-specific resources have been included in the platform, and specific escalation scenarios were provided by AHS for additional training purposes. The four province-wide resources signposted to Alberta members are:

* [Health Link 811](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/findhealth/service.aspx?Id=1001957)
* [Mental Health Helpline](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/findhealth/Service.aspx?id=6810&serviceAtFacilityID=1047134)
* [Addictions Helpline](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/findhealth/Service.aspx?id=1008399&serviceAtFacilityID=1047128)
* [211](http://www.ab.211.ca/)

**Accessibility**

**In what languages is the platform and related resources available?**

Right now, the services and resources are available in English only. Additional languages are being looked into as part of a future enhancement to the offerings.

**Does the platform conform to accessibility standards?**

The platform follows [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)](https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/) which defines requirements for designers and developers to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. For more information, please refer to the platform’s [Accessibility](https://www.bigwhitewall.com/accessibility/?lang=en-ca) standards.

**Are there any provisions to provide service to children and youth under the age of 16?**

Given its global operations, the different legislations that exist region to region around what age constitutes as ‘minor’, and the regulations around the appropriate age for informed consent, the platform access is restricted to those that are 16 years or older. While the platform is monitored for inappropriate content, some discussions may also be inappropriate for minors. For these reasons, the Togetherall platform is not suitable for children and youth. Instead, consider recommending other dedicated helplines such as Canada-wide [Kids Help Phone](https://kidshelpphone.ca/).

**How to Register & Refer**

**How do I register as a new member?** To register with Togetherall, visit [www.togetherall.com](http://www.togetherall.com) and click on ‘register’ button in the header. From there you will need to provide some basic information, including your Albertan postal code for eligibility, before you are sent an email to activate your account. This is the same registration process for all new members. Once registered, use your unique username and password to view the platform and related resources. Review the [FAQs](http://www.bigwhitewall.com/faqs/) for more information.

**How can I help refer individuals directly to the platform?** Clinicians, physicians, other health service providers and those working with vulnerable populations in need of additional support are encouraged to register themselves in order to become familiar with the user experience. Once comfortable to do so, describe the supports on offer and help refer others to the site. Togetherall is a great supplementary resource that can be used as a wait list and discharge management tool to complement existing care plans. It can be introduced before, between, and/or after traditional treatments sessions. In Ontario, 147+ healthcare hospitals and community agencies are actively referring patients and clients to the platform. To date this has resulted in 30% (~13,000) of Ontario members having been referred directly to the platform by their healthcare provider.

**Confidentiality**

**How is member data and confidentiality protected?**

As part of the contracting process, a full Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) was conducted by AHS and submitted to the Privacy Commissioners office to ensure compliance with Alberta privacy legislation. Individually identifying health information may be collected, used and disclosed only under the limited and specific circumstances outlined in the PIA to ensure safety of members. When registering with the platform, individuals adopt a pseudonym as their community username, ensuring front-facing anonymity. Any additional information collected during registration, including an individual’s postal code, email address, date of birth and country of residence – is accessible only to Senior Clinicians for the purposes of risk escalation. All personal data related to Albertans will reside in Canada. For more information, please refer to the platform’s Privacy Policy.

**Contact Us**

**Still have questions?**

For more information, please visit [www.togetherall.com](http://www.togetherall.com) with general inquires.