



# Anxiety, Insomnia, & Other Symptoms of Stress During COVID 19:

Putting the Pandemic in Perspective +  
Self-Care Tips for VA Staff

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# Objectives and Goals

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- ❖ **Discuss the global uptick in anxiety, stress and insomnia during COVID 19.**
- ❖ **Share the results of our needs assessment survey** on how the HSR & D research and CDA community is experiencing changes in psychosocial functioning (anxiety and stress management) during COVID 19.
- ❖ **Offer Practical Perspectives** from HSR & D research psychologists on coping with work, life and work-life balance right now.
- ❖ **Encourage connection (or re-connection) with the Career Development Award Enhancement Initiative (CDAei) Program**
  - ❖ Individually tailored support/mentoring and career development for early career researchers (CDAs) within VA.



# Some Recent Data on COVID 19 and Psychological Distress

Front line health care workers (Wuhan China)

Depression

Anxiety

Insomnia

Distress



# Some Recent Civilian Sector Data on COVID 19 and Psychological Distress



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> 3-fold increase in serious psychological distress among US adults in past year

- Most impacted:
  - Young adults (under 29 years)
  - Low income
  - Hispanic

Loneliness

- 13.8% of US adults reported always/often felt lonely
  - Highest among youngest adults

Adults with children under 18 in the home were also highly impacted



# What does the HSR &D and HSR & D CDA community report?

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- ❖ 90% of HSR & D community, including current CDAs who responded to our needs-assessment survey (Weitlauf et al., 2020), report increased need for support around anxiety and stress management due to COVID 19.
  - ❖ Research & Work Productivity
  - ❖ Equity and Social Justice
  - ❖ Parenting and Family Life
  - ❖ Altruism & Supporting our Front-Line Colleagues
- ❖ 60% report concerns about disrupted sleep/insomnia during COVID 19.



# Long Term/Down Stream Consequences

- Acute and Chronic Mental Health Conditions
- Insomnia
- Burnout
- Physical Health Problems

Family Discord



# Poll Question

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Are you having difficulty falling and/or staying asleep 1+ nights per week now?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_







Poll Question:

How significantly has your anxiety/stress level changed with recent events surrounding racial injustice in our country?

NOT AT ALL

A LITTLE

SOMEWHAT

A LOT

VERY MUCH

# An Appropriate Framework

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## **We are in uncharted waters**

Global pandemic

Major social unrest

Limited clarity about what we can/should be doing

Heightened fear and anxiety about economy / jobs

Limited social resources: health care, childcare, recreation, access to social network and support

**This is not a personal or a professional problem, it is a global crisis**

**This is a marathon, not a sprint....**



# Creating Margin, Supports, and Spheres of Control

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- **Know your own limits**
  - Self-awareness & monitoring
  - Stopping before burnout (Self assessment and awareness)
  - Awareness of symptoms and triggers
  - Building in extra time for rest and respite (Do I need a break?)
- **Set Limits**
- **Reclaiming Autonomy and Control**
- **Connect with Others**

# Go for Flow

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## **What is a flow experience?**

- Immersion (lost in time) in an activity that is pleasantly challenging, intrinsically interesting and rewarding.

## **Why are flow experiences important for stress management and burnout prevention?**

- They create pleasant, meaningful and sustaining experiences in the workplace.

## **Why don't I have any flow right now?**

- Constant stress, interruptions, loss of resources and autonomy, inability to work on cherished projects.

## **What can I do about this right now?**

- Hobbies: Piano, sewing, crafting, running, high level dialogue: keep up with research colleagues

# Poll Question

IN YOUR ESTIMATION, HAS ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION CHANGED (IN SOCIETY) DURING THE CURRENT PANDEMIC?

INCREASED

DECREASED

NO CHANGE

UNSURE



# Risk for substance abuse during COVID-19

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- Alcohol sales and rates of consumption have soared:
  - 1 in 3 US adults drinking while working from home
- Stress, anxiety, boredom, and loneliness while social distancing.
- Preferred coping strategies for negative affect may be restricted.
- Long periods of time at home (easy access, “under the radar”).
- Short-term coping solution with consequences:
  - Sleep problems
  - Weakened immune system
  - Worsened anxiety and depression over time



# Strategies for managing substance use

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- Set a realistic goal and document it (How many drinks per day? How many drinking days per week?)
- Track and monitor progress towards goals
- Share goal with supportive others
- Schedule other activities during high-risk times
- Seek help if can't cut down:
  - SAMHSA National Helpline (1-800-662-HELP)
  - <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

# Mobile technologies for self-management of alcohol use

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- Web-based interventions:
  - Assessment and personalized feedback; monitoring and tracking use.
  - e.g., Drinker's Check-up (Hester et al., 2005)
- Smartphone applications:
  - Addiction-Comprehensive Health Enhancement Support System (A-CHESS)
  - Step Away





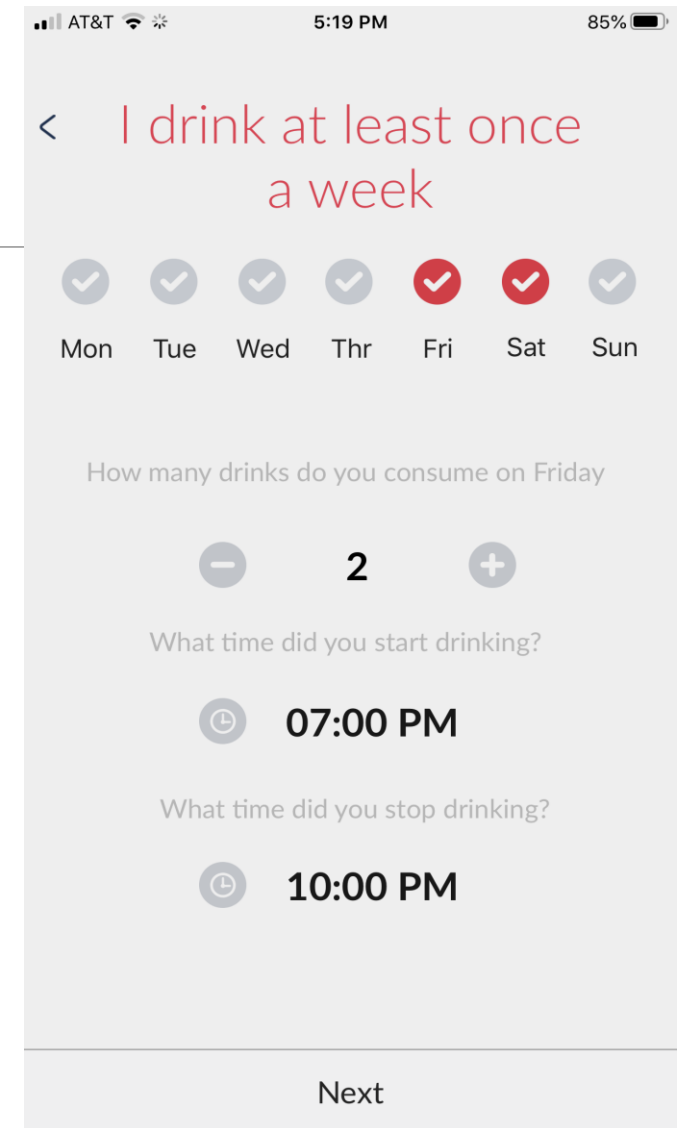
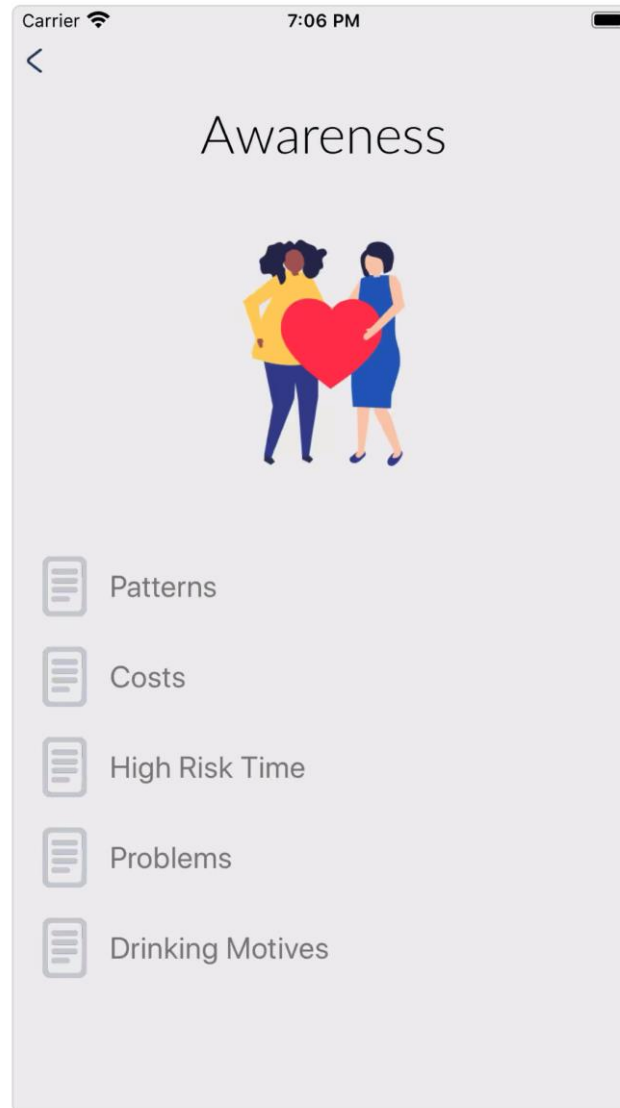
# Step Away mobile app

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- 7 modules organized around 4 overarching goals:
  - Enhance awareness of drinking and drinking-related problems
  - Establish and monitor progress toward a drinking goal.
  - Manage triggers and other problems using in-the-moment tools.
  - Connect users with other types of support.
- Content grounded in evidence-based treatments for alcohol use disorders:
  - Motivational Enhancement Therapy
  - Relapse Prevention
  - Community Reinforcement
- Available on iOS and Android platforms.

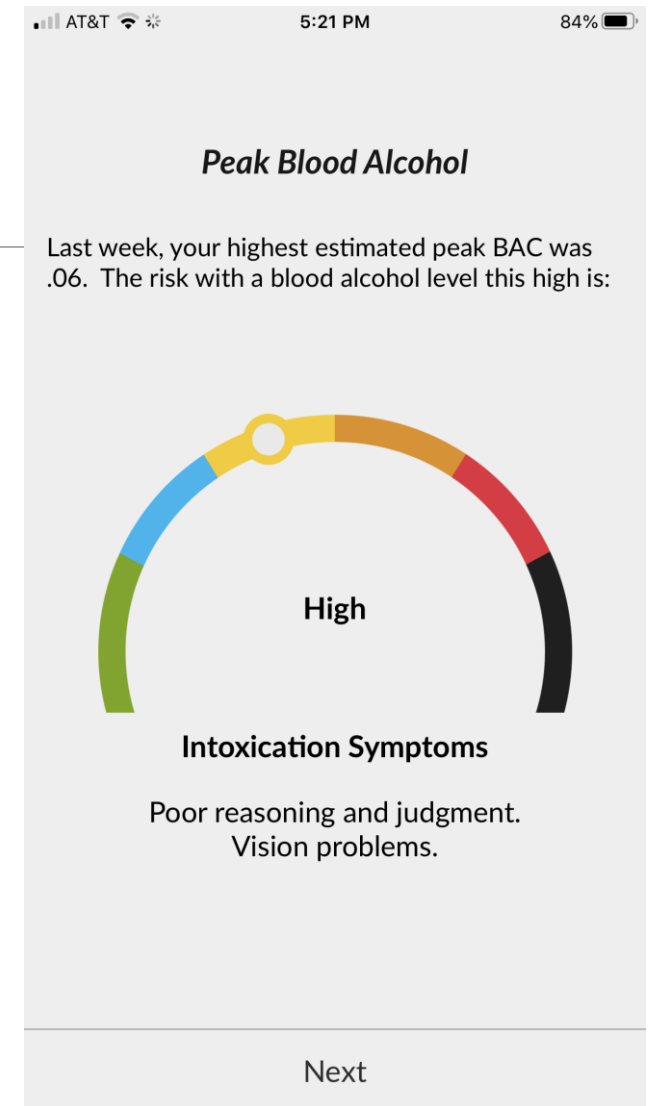
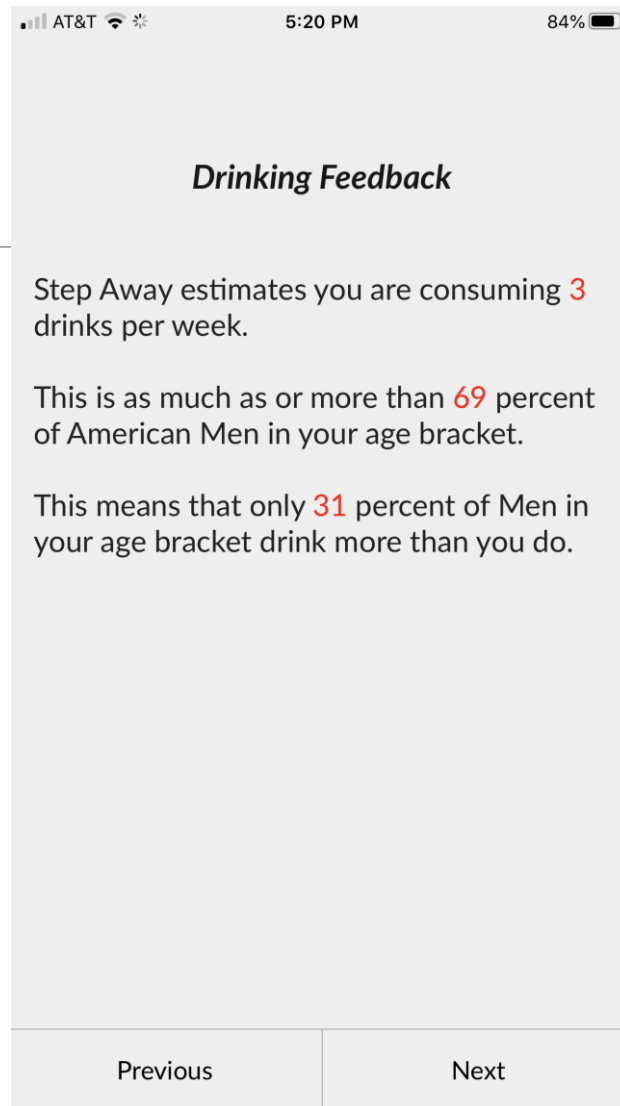
## *Step Away key feature:*

- Comprehensive assessment of drinking patterns and problems.
- Personalized feedback (e.g., norm-based; financial and health costs).



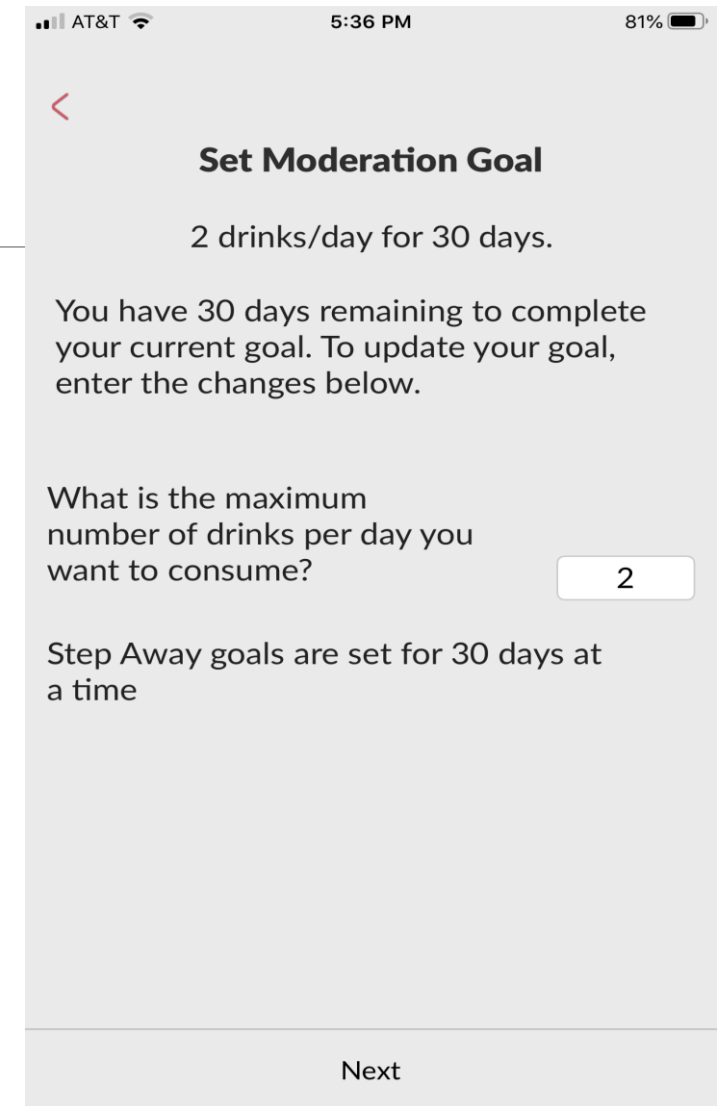
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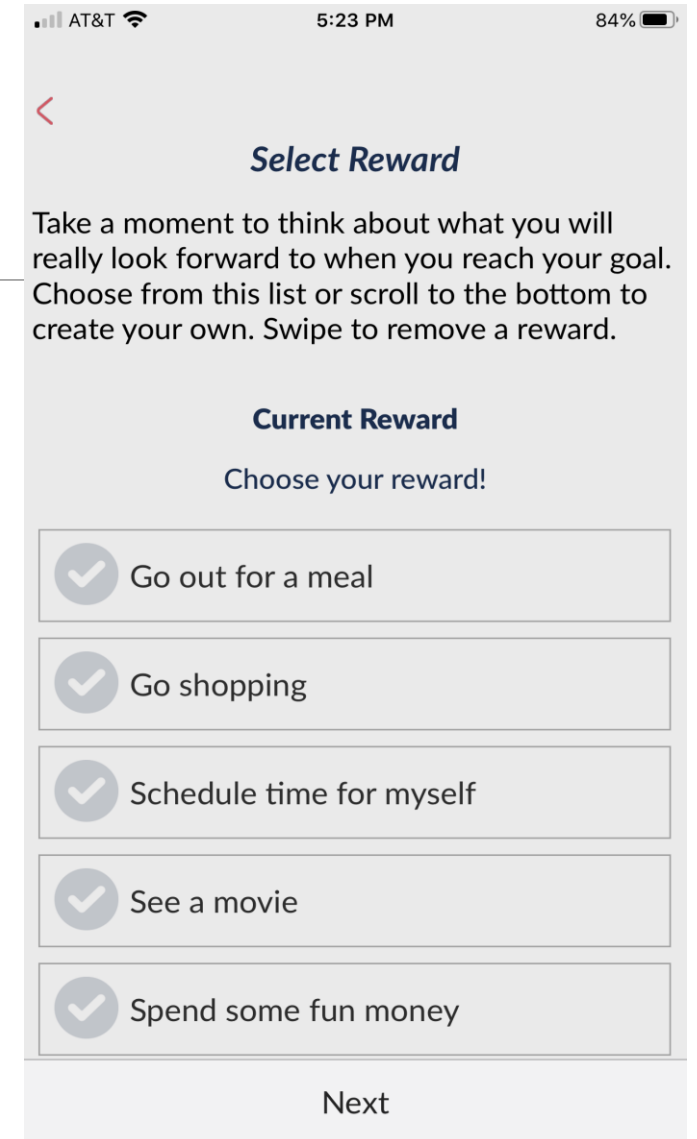
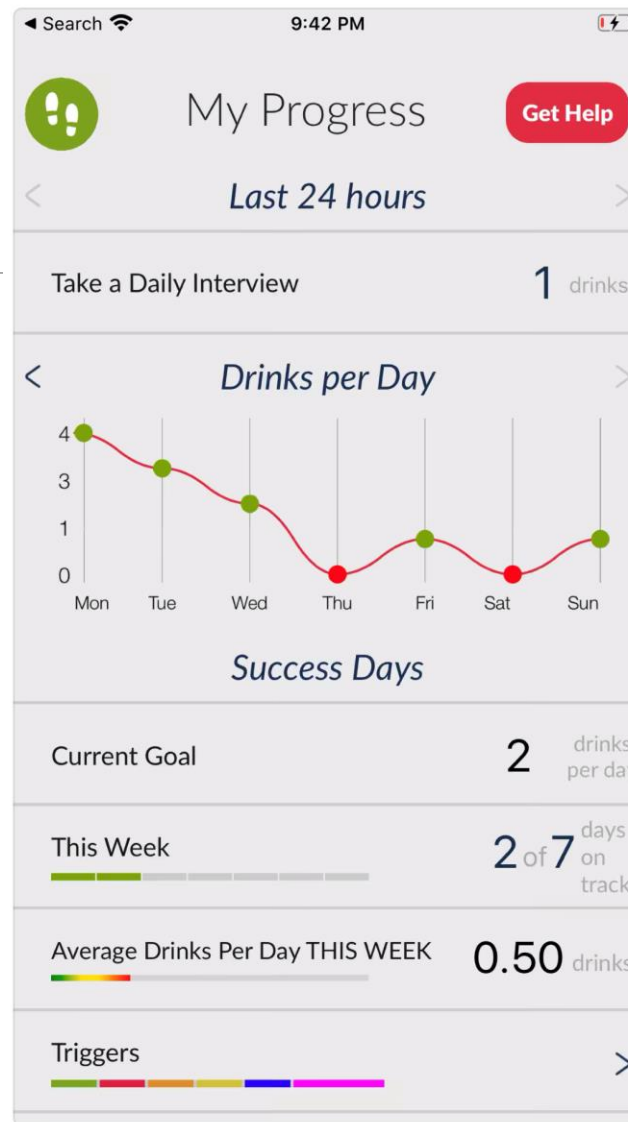
## *Step Away key feature:*

- Users select drinking goal (moderation or abstinence).
- Daily Interview monitors progress towards drinking goal.
- Choose rewards when goals are met.



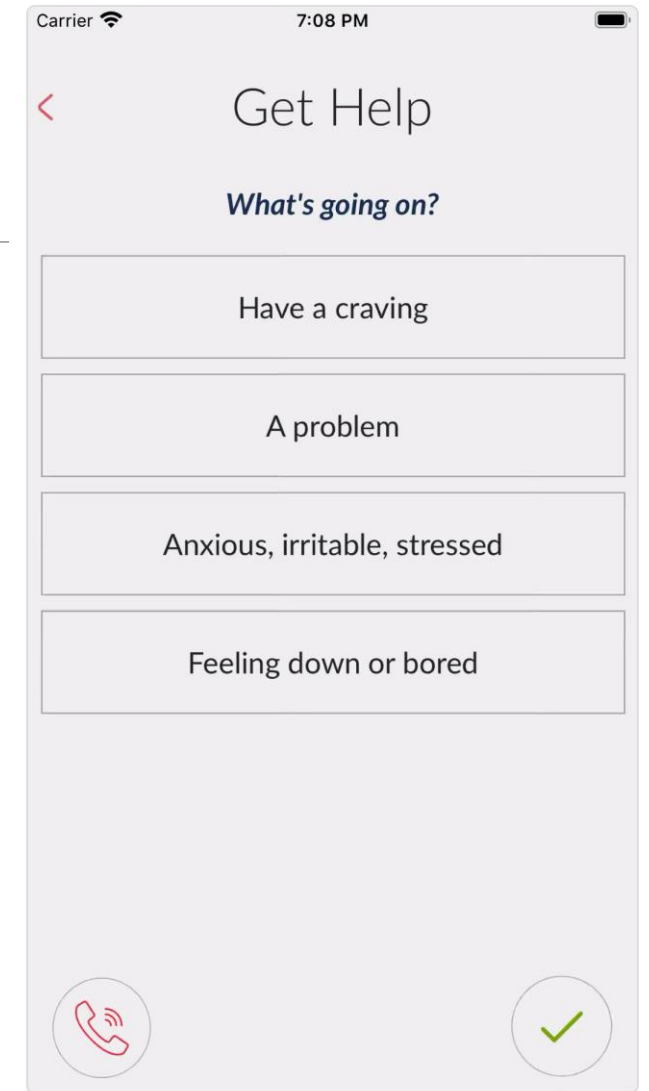
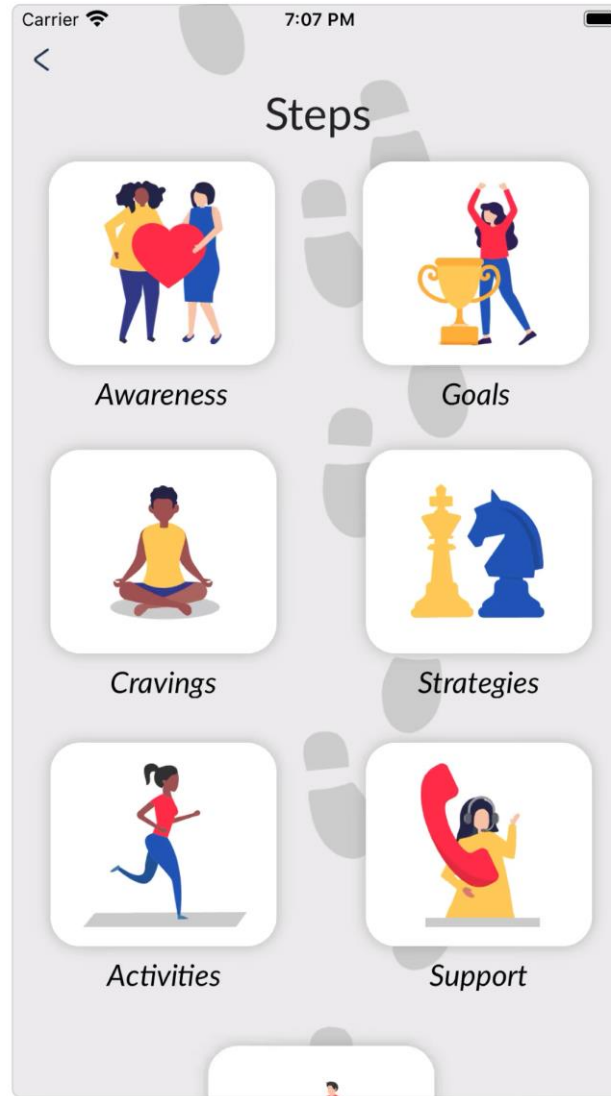
## Step Away key feature:

- Users select drinking goal (moderation or abstinence).
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## *Step Away key feature:*

- Manage cravings and other problems using in-the-moment tools.
- Connect users with other types of support.



# Disclosures and Conflicts of Interest

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## **Disclosures:**

The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of VA.

**COI:** None

# Resources

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COVID Coach

[https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/COVID\\_coach\\_app.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/COVID_coach_app.asp)



# Resources

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## NCPTSD Provider Self-Care Toolkit



- ❖ Path to Better Sleep
- ❖ Mindfulness Coach- with a focus on Loving Kindness Meditation and Building Compassion
- ❖ COVID Coach- with a focus on self-assessment and tools for managing stress
- ❖ Mood Coach- to aide with work/life balance
- ❖ Parenting 2 Go App

[\(https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/care/toolkits/provider/\)](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/care/toolkits/provider/)

# Resources

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## **SAMHSA's National Helpline – [1-800-662-HELP \(4357\)](tel:18006624357)**

SAMHSA's National Helpline is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

## **Alcoholics Anonymous**

[https://www.aa.org/pages/en\\_US/options-for-meeting-online](https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/options-for-meeting-online)

# Got ???

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