



MCH Innovations Database
Practice Summary & Implementation
Guidance

Enhearten Recovery App

Enhearten is a mobile app that supports pregnant and postpartum women (PPW) with substance use disorder (SUD), focused especially on reducing internalized stigma. Enhearten is working to make recovery more accessible and effective for PPW with SUD, as well as the broader community affected by substance use disorders.



Location

N/A



Topic Area

Mental Health & Substance Use;
Safe and Connected Communities;
Birth Outcomes



Setting

Virtual



Population Focus

Women & Maternal Health



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Spring 2025

Contact Information

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Section 1: Practice Summary

PRACTICE DESCRIPTION

Enhearten addresses critical challenges in supporting pregnant and postpartum women (PPW) with substance use disorder (SUD), a population facing rising overdose rates and significant health risks. For example, maternal mortality among women with SUD is four times higher than the general population, with the postpartum period being particularly high-risk for drug-related deaths. Despite the existence of important recovery supports, such as therapy, hospitals, and treatment programs, there are many gaps in between, leaving individuals without consistent support throughout their journey. Enhearten was created to fill those gaps, providing a continuous, technology-driven supplement to in-person support systems, rather than replacing them.

A major challenge to recovery for PPW with SUD is stigma, which negatively impacts mental health, increases relapse risk, and creates obstacles to seeking care. Stigma is especially harmful during pregnancy and early parenthood. For example, parents with substance use disorders are 49% more likely to experience stigma than non-parents, further isolating them from critical resources. Enhearten recognized the need to address stigma as a core focus and focused on PPW as the population that would benefit most from targeted, stigma-reducing interventions.

The Enhearten recovery app helps people by checking in with them regularly, identifying how stigma is affecting them in the moment, and providing tailored resources to address those feelings. It also offers a private, supportive peer community, and educational content, ensuring individuals have continuous access to encouragement and guidance. By reducing self-stigma, the app can help improve overall recovery outcomes, making it easier for PPW with SUD to stay engaged in their recovery.

Beyond individual support, Enhearten facilitates the work of behavioral health partners, including healthcare providers, addiction treatment centers, recovery community organizations, and local governments.

CORE COMPONENTS & PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

The goal of Enhearten is to better meet the needs of pregnant and postpartum women (PPW) with substance use disorder (SUD) and to reduce how stigma negatively impacts their recovery process. The mobile app checks in with PPW, identifying how stigma is affecting them in the moment, and providing tailored resources to help them process those feelings and in-the-moment needs. The core components of this program are daily check-ins on the app, connecting users to resources, community support, and optional stigma-specific questions.



Core Components & Practice Activities

Core Component	Activities	Operational Details
Daily check-in (general)	App users complete a daily check-in.	Based on user feedback, the daily check-in was expanded to be more general – what’s going well, what’s challenging, and general reflections.
Connecting to resources (educational)	Educational resources are shown based on check-in responses, and app users can also access them on-demand outside of the check-ins.	Based on how a user answers the questions, they are connected to educational resources that meet their current needs (e.g., pregnancy/parenting, recovery, mental health)
Community support	Private peer community within the app.	The app has a private, supportive peer community where users can ask questions and communicate with each other anonymously. This allows them to make connections with other parents. There are protections around who can join the peer community, as well as other safety mechanisms.
Optional stigma-specific questions	App users can choose to complete stigma-specific questions.	This stigma-focused ecological momentary intervention (EMI) aims to reduce self-stigma among PPW with SUD. It uses validated questions from self-stigma scales to assess symptoms of stigma and then show content and features tailored to their responses, specifically addressing how they’re feeling. It was iteratively adapted using the Discover, Design/Build, and Test (DBDT) framework. Feedback from 20 participants increased the fit of Enhearten to the context of reducing stigma among PPW with SUD. These questions allow users to explore their symptoms of self-stigma further.



COMMUNITY WELLNESS

Enhearten is working to improve health outcomes addressing challenges in access to care, stigma, and gaps in support that disproportionately affect PPW with SUD.

Addressing Challenges to Care

PPW with SUD often face challenges accessing necessary treatment. As a result, associated complications of SUD among PPW cost over \$1.5 billion annually in related hospital expenses. Enhearten works to bridge these gaps by providing an accessible digital intervention that does not require users to navigate complex healthcare systems to receive support. The app is accessible regardless of geographic location, financial status, or engagement with formal healthcare services.

Reducing Stigma

Many people with SUD don't access basic healthcare because of stigma. Enhearten directly addresses self-stigma by providing a nonjudgmental, supportive space for PPW with SUD to process their experiences, connect with others, and receive targeted interventions to counter stigma's harmful effects. By helping individuals recognize and challenge stigma, Enhearten empowers them to seek care, advocate for themselves, and persist in their recovery despite challenges.

Filling Gaps in Traditional Support Systems

Traditional recovery and maternal health systems are often fragmented, leaving individuals without consistent support, particularly in rural areas and communities with limited behavioral health resources. This inconsistency disproportionately impacts populations already facing challenging community health factors, including those with lower incomes, those involved in the criminal justice system, and those navigating child welfare involvement. Enhearten supplements human supports rather than replacing them, ensuring that individuals have continuous access to recovery resources, even when formal healthcare is unavailable or inaccessible.

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

Initial evidence of effectiveness includes:

1. Measurable Reduction in Self-Stigma

Enhearten's impact on self-stigma was assessed using the Brief Opioid Stigma Scale (BOSS). The benchmark for success was a reduction in self-stigma scores from $M=3.1$ to $M=2.8$ (Cohen's $d=0.22$, a small but clinically meaningful effect). However, after two months of use, Enhearten surpassed this benchmark, reducing BOSS scores from $M=2.67$ to $M=2.27$ (Cohen's $d=0.609$), indicating a moderate-to-large effect size. This suggests that Enhearten significantly reduces internalized stigma.

2. High User Engagement and Acceptance

User feedback highlights strong engagement and perceived usefulness of the app. In the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) assessment, Enhearten aimed for an average rating of at least 5.3 (on a 7-point scale) to indicate a high intention to continue using the app. The results exceeded expectations, with an average TAM score of 6.59, showing strong user adoption and satisfaction.



3. Positive User Testimonials

Participants have reported that Enhearten is making a meaningful difference in their recovery journey. Users have praised:

- The ability to connect with others facing similar experiences in HIPAA-compliant peer discussion groups.
- Personalized, stigma-focused check-ins that help them recognize and address their feelings in real time.
- The fact that it serves as a consistent, supportive resource they can turn to at any time, helping fill gaps between traditional services.

One participant commented, *“I don’t even use or like apps, but I have been devoted to this one.”*

4. User-Driven Improvements & Adaptations

Enhearten has iteratively refined its features based on direct user feedback, ensuring it remains relevant and effective. Updates include:

- Customizable reminders to make the app feel more inviting.
- Community support groups tailored to specific needs and interests.
- A more positive framing that acknowledges successes and strengths, rather than focusing only on challenges.

Section 2: Implementation Guidance

COLLABORATORS AND PARTNERS

Enhearten was built because existing digital health tools for SUD weren’t designed to reflect the winding path that recovery often takes. Many factors come together to make recovery more difficult. To identify which of those factors technology can make a meaningful difference on, the team worked with stakeholders with as many perspectives as possible: people with SUD, peer supporters, treatment providers, therapists, physicians, researchers, nonprofit leaders, public health officials, and more. It eventually became clear that a population facing heightened, compounding challenges during recovery is PPW. The Enhearten team then started meeting regularly with partners working with PPW, so that they could update the app based on their feedback and make Enhearten as helpful as possible for them.

Practice Collaborators and Partners

Partner/ Collaborator	How are they involved in decision-making throughout practice processes?	How are you partnering with this group?	Does this stakeholder come from a community impacted by the practice?
App users	Hearing about their experiences and the most important problems	Scheduling one-on-one and group calls to hear	Yes, app users are the direct



	they face, getting feedback on the app, making changes based on that feedback, getting feedback on those changes, and repeating	their input, then designing Enhearten based on that input	population impacted by the practice
City, county, and state public health workers		Aligning Enhearten with other initiatives focused on SUD; disseminating Enhearten to relevant people and programs; scheduling calls to hear their input, then designing Enhearten based on that input	No
Healthcare providers/hospitals			No
Nonprofits (including recovery housing nonprofit)			No
Recovery community organizations (RCOs)			Yes, these organizations are peer-led by people with SUD

REPLICATION

Enhearten has not yet been replicated in other settings.

INTERNAL CAPACITY

Please email contact@enhearten.com for more information.

PRACTICE TIMELINE

Please email contact@enhearten.com for more information.

PRACTICE COST

Please email contact@enhearten.com for more information.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Sometimes stigma is not on a user’s mind because they are worried about basic needs like housing, childcare, etc. Therefore, stigma is only one part of overall emotional safety. Practical help sometimes provides more emotional relief than resources directly related to stigma.



- The questions in the daily check-in shifted from being stigma-focused to more open-ended, based on user feedback. App users have the option to complete the stigma-specific questions as well.
- Stigma poses a challenge to accessing SUD treatment, but it also poses a challenge to accessing basic healthcare in general (including perinatal care).
- Recovery status varies widely across PPW, and that status impacts their relationship with stigma as well as what support is most needed.
- The app should show positivity instead of suggesting that participants are only in a negative state of mind.
- Uptake of the app depends on the individuals at different organizations who have the bandwidth to tell clients about app.
- Obtaining IRB approval facilitated the process of getting feedback directly from PPW via focus groups and individual interviews. There may be future challenges to hearing the same level of feedback outside of IRB approval.

NEXT STEPS

Enhearten will be adding location-based resources, so that people can more easily access real-world support that addresses their most pressing needs. There will also be more ways for people to connect with and support each other through the app.

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