



How financial technology can support people experiencing mental health problems

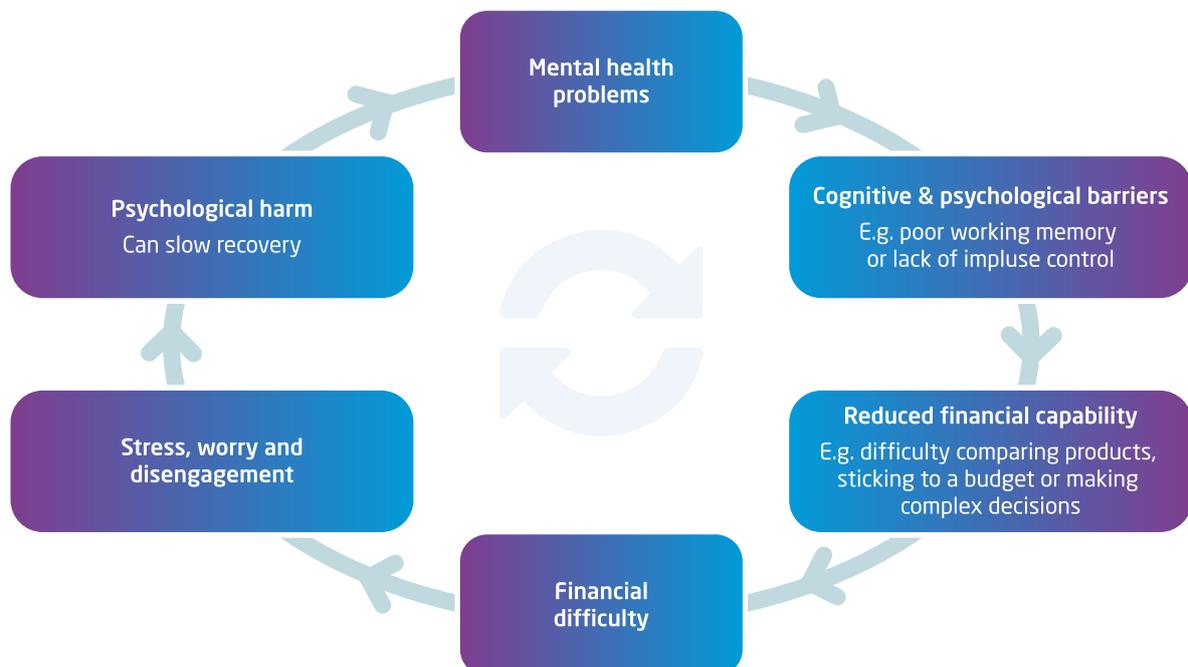
Mental health problems can make managing money and controlling spending much harder, as well as affecting our ability to earn. As a result, people experiencing mental health problems are three times as likely to be in financial difficulties.

“Fintech” – new tools, settings and processes made possible by technological innovation in financial services – offer the opportunity to break this cycle, by supporting financial management during periods of poor mental health, reducing stress and worry, and lowering the incidence of financial difficulty. Some innovations will be consumer facing - like improved online banking tools or

mobile apps, others will improve the technology behind the scenes to help financial services providers better meet the needs of their customers.

However, there's no guarantee that fintech will develop in a direction that supports mental health. Without careful consideration it could be discriminatory, disempowering, stigmatising or reinforce the digital divide. These risks are real, but should not prevent progress. Instead, they should frame our thinking, guiding us to develop tools and processes which are fair, safe and level the playing field.

Figure 1: The cycle of money and mental health problems



Source: Money and Mental Health Policy Institute

Principles for developing fintech for mental health

1 Personalisation

Tools should be optional and provide consumers with the ability to personalise their financial services to suit their needs.

2 No discrimination

Customers who choose to use this additional support should be viewed as being financially responsible.

Use of fintech for mental health should not be used to discriminate against consumers.

3 Empowerment

These solutions should offer protection to those who need it, but should not undermine their autonomy. Ultimately, they should be about enabling people to better manage their own money, rather than taking away this freedom.

4 Consumer voice

Every solution offered by the financial services industry must be based on the experiences of people with mental health problems, and ideally co-produced with them, to ensure they cater for diverse needs and avoid stigmatisation.

Table 1: Five ways fintech can help

Many tools that could support people with mental health problems to manage their finances through periods of ill health are already technically possible, but they're not yet widely available.

What?	How could it help?	Is it available yet ?	
1. Money management	Make it easier to keep track of spending and financial obligations, give time & space to reconsider decisions	Most of these tools are technologically possible but not yet offered to customers through major banks and credit card providers	
2. High-control products and self-exclusion	Allow people to protect themselves from problematic behaviours during periods of poor mental health by putting blocks on certain account features	Some tools are offered to corporate card holders, or offered by fintech firms, but they're not yet available to most customers	
3. Checking understanding online	Use behaviour online to identify people who might need further support, and check understanding through credit applications processes	Not yet offered, though some analysis of customer behaviour is being undertaken with the aim of developing these tools	
4. Support from friends and family members	The ability to share financial transactions data and decision-making with a trusted friend so they can offer support when needed	Some tools are already offered by fintech specialists, or on corporate accounts, but not yet offered to personal customers	
5. Spotting the problem early	Analyse data streams to predict behaviour which might identify a person experiencing poor mental health, so they can be offered tailored support in a timely way	Data analysis is widely used for fraud prevention, and in some cases being offered to support personal financial management, but is not widely available to customers yet	

Four recommendations to support fintech for mental health

1 Invest in the adaptations needed

Financial services providers should ensure they are providing reasonable adaptations to support customers experiencing mental health problems which impact their financial management.

2 Update regulatory guidance on mental capacity

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) should update their guidance on mental capacity in credit agreements to better reflect the online lending environment.

3 Normalise shared control

Financial services providers, the Office of the Public Guardian and government should work together to provide flexible ways to share decision-making and offer support for people with fluctuating mental health problems who do not find traditional Power of Attorney structures appealing.

4 Develop a detailed understanding

Government should organise a large-scale study of financial transactions data to help us understand the signs of poor mental health and financial difficulty, so we can offer timely support.