

CONNECTING CARE: DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY-BASED DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE FOR SENIORS IN SINGAPORE



LIM Pei Chan, Charmaine Yun Lin CHENG, Shanon LIM, Serene GOH, NG Chong Chee Dan

01. INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of **poor mental health** has increased over the past decade, particularly among **older adults**. Ministry of Health (2024) reported growing mental health concerns in Singapore, while Seifert et al. (2019) highlighted that older adults often face **digital divide and lower help-seeking tendencies**, which may reduce access to timely support.

Lee and Fung (2025) further emphasised the important role of **community partners** in delivering preventive care, early intervention, and low-intensity support. In addition, Boucher et al. (2022) noted that **digital mental health initiatives (DMHI)** offer a promising avenue to extend care access and provide timely emotional support for older adults.

Since 2020, **Lions Befrienders Service Association (Singapore)** has been championing the integration of technological solutions to elevate our **Ecosystem of Care**, which aims to address service gaps and enable seniors to age meaningfully in place.

02. GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Lions Befrienders’ **Digital Counselling** aims to:

- 1. Improve the **timeliness** of mental health support
- 2. Streamline and promote triage **consistency**
- 3. Reduce counsellors’ triage **workload**;

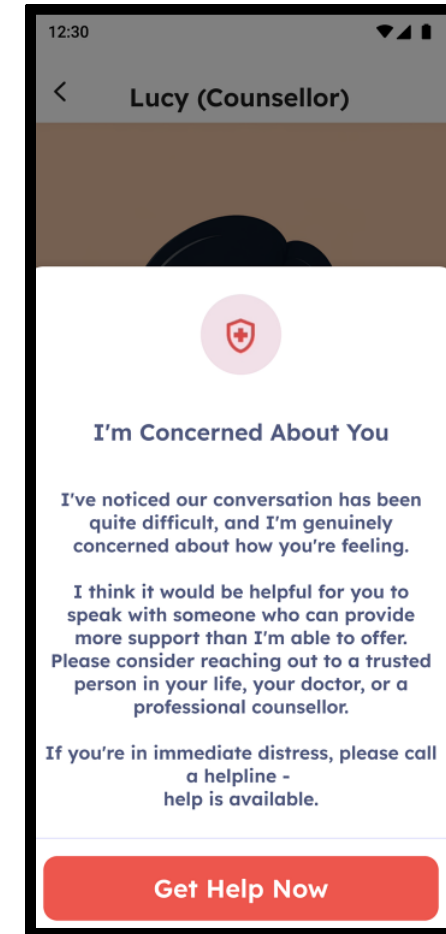
Overall, the goal is to **enhance service capacity and efficiency**, thereby lending to **scalable solutions** for older adults with growing mental health needs.

03. KEY FEATURES OF DMHI



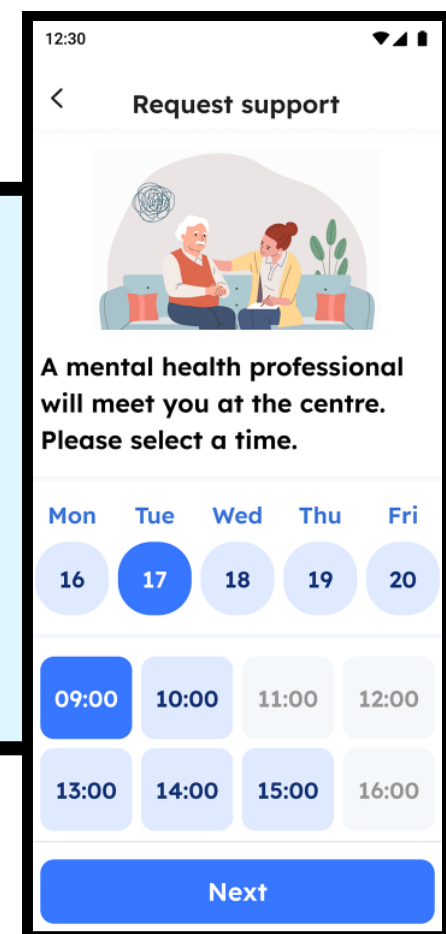
The **Digital Counselling** feature is embedded within **Our Kampung App**, a tech-enabled ecosystem of care in Lions Befrienders for older adults and their caregivers.

Bridging technology and therapeutic care, an **Emotion AI Avatar** serves to augment existing services with continuous, consistent, and accessible support.

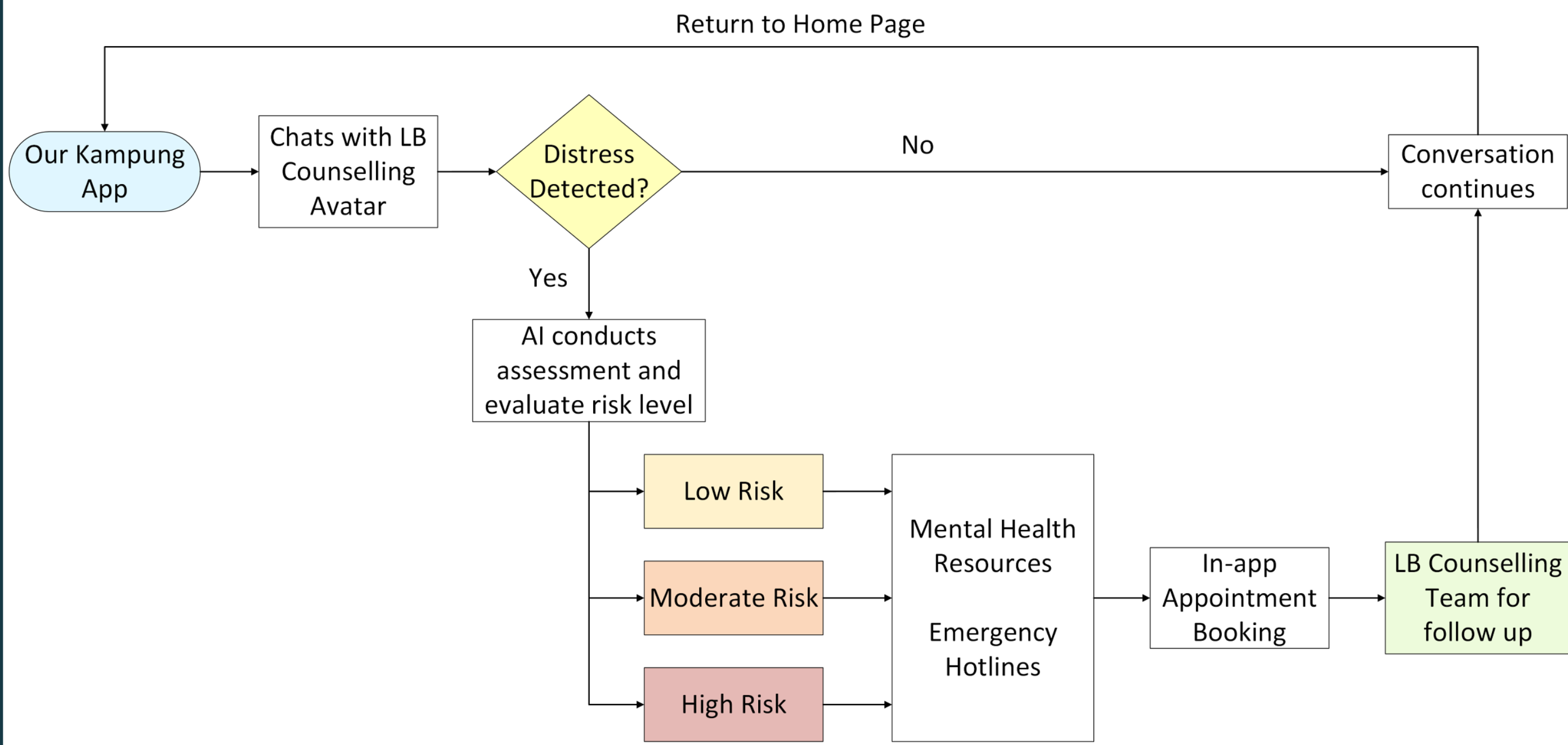


24/7 companionship and early detection of emotional distress through keywords matching, rendering timely emotional support and interventions.

Facilitate **seamless referrals to in-house counsellors**, improving triage and care continuity for clients.



04. DMHI TRIAGE WORKFLOW



05. RESULTS

Since Q3 2025, Our Kampung App has achieved **1,378 downloads** among **older adults (≥60 years old)**, reflecting a **growing level of digital adoption** and **encouraging receptiveness** within this group.

A **focus group discussion** was held among 4 counsellors to gather their feedback during the development of the DMHI:

- requires ongoing input from subject matter experts to ensure **clinical relevance and effectiveness**
- (the framework) must be carefully **localised and culturally adapted** to minimise inaccuracies
- Substantial **time and effort** needed to develop and refine the technological framework
- Need for **strong alignment (with) technology vendors** to ensure practical applicability

06. CONCLUSION

Leong et al. (2024) and Visaria et al. (2023) highlighted the role of **community social networks** in supporting older adults’ uptake and sustained usage of DMHI over time. Merrill et al. (2025) further emphasised **the potential of AI-driven chatbots** in delivering person-centered care and support, while underscoring **the need for continuous refinement and evaluation**.

Building on the encouraging adoption of Our Kampung App and feedback gathered, Lions Befrienders will pilot its Digital Counselling features from Q3 2026 onwards to **evaluate user engagement, acceptance, and practical applicability** among older adults.

Overall, the initiative reflects Lions Befrienders’ ongoing commitment to **strengthening community-based mental health support through technology** by improving the timeliness and consistency of care, reducing counsellors’ triage workload, and enhancing service capacity and efficiency for an ageing population.

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