

How We're Really Doing

The State of Stigma US **2026**

What 2,000 Americans shared about anxiety, AI, stigma, and the platforms shaping their mental health. Based on a survey of U.S. adults, fielded March 6-19, 2026. Results have a margin of error of <2%.

*Any YoY notes are comparing this year's data to last year's [State of Stigma report](#).

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AI Opens Access But Not Acceptance

“Mental health needs are rising, but so is the hesitation to get help. In this year’s research, 85% of Americans say seeking support is wise, yet 74% say society still discourages it. That gap shows the real challenge: people believe in care, but too many still face stigma and friction when it comes to taking the first step.

At the same time, we’re in the midst of a once-in-a-generation technological shift with AI – one that is fundamentally challenging those barriers. AI is already making support more immediate and accessible with 15% of those surveyed saying they’re using it for mental health support. The question isn’t whether AI will play a role, but how responsibly it can be built and deployed to remove barriers to start and sustain care as part of a continuous care model. As a company committed to removing barriers to mental wellness, we have an obligation to ensure AI redefines how mental health care is accessed while upholding the clinical rigor, safety, and outcomes that matter.”

Fernando Madeira
President, BetterHelp



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The Stigma Persists

01



The contradiction continues.

In our first - ever State of Stigma report last year, we uncovered a real tension: people believe in support, but still hesitate to seek it. This year, we're seeing this contradiction continue in the United States – people overwhelmingly believe in the value of therapy, but most aren't taking advantage of it:

85%

of Americans agree seeking support is wise (+12pp YoY*)

74%

of Americans believe society discourages seeking help (+13pp YoY*)

**pp = percentage points*



The gap between belief and action is even wider among younger Americans:

85% of Millennials & Gen Z say mental health care is a basic necessity

Yet the majority of both groups

47% and **56%** respectively feel pressure to handle mental health issues on their own rather than seek professional help (vs. 39% of the general population)

Stigma isn't fading, and is actively reinforcing the gap between believing in care and actually seeking it.

We're feeling the strain.

The need for mental health support is growing. In fact, more than 3 in 4 Americans report experiencing some form of anxiety or depression in the past 2 weeks, trending slightly worse than last year.

Anxiety



+4pp for men YoY



+2pp for women YoY

Depression



+2pp for men YoY



+3pp for women YoY

Top Issues

66% **worry too much**

62% **have trouble falling asleep**

66% **feel tired or have little energy**

More than half (55%) of Americans say their financial situation is a major source of stress. They're feeling the financial squeeze, with -8pp fewer people able to afford spending like they used to.



Yet we treat our physical and mental health differently.

Americans seek help for physical health issues:

30% experience chronic pain

41% take medication for physical pain

But not for mental health:

31% experience anxiety, panic attacks or have phobias

78% say they are *not* accessing mental health care

This paints a clear picture:

Stigma about mental health persists. Especially among the working force, who fear retribution from employers for seeking mental help.



fear receiving/seeking mental health care might affect their job/career prospects

What's stopping us?

Real barriers stand in the way of thinking that mental health care is wise and acting on it. A major contributor to that tension is stigma. 74% of Americans believe society discourages seeking help – up +13pp since 2025.

“ Stigma hasn't gone away, it's just less visible. It's often what's behind the hesitation, the doubt, and fear of being judged that keeps people from reaching out. That's why more people are looking for support that's continuous and available in the moments they actually need it. ”

Courtney Cope,
LMFT, and Director of Clinical Operations at BetterHelp

52%

mention cost

32%

cite time constraints

33%

say they don't believe it will help

27%

say they fear judgement from therapists for their personal decisions



The Rise of AI Support

02



More people are turning to AI as a gateway to mental health

Whether it's turning to AI assistants for help managing anxious thoughts in the middle of the night, trying mental health apps, or using clinically integrated tools, one thing is clear: AI isn't just supporting mental health, it's beginning to reshape how and when people get care.

15% currently use AI for mental health support (+6pp YoY)

Their top three reasons for using AI:

Financial Worries/Stress

General Anxiety

Work Stress

By lowering barriers, AI is helping people start and stay engaged in their mental health care. For many, it's already making a difference: at least 50% report a positive impact on issues like grief, stress, and sleep.

“ What people are navigating day to day doesn't wait for a therapy session. That's where AI, when deployed responsibly, can step in to provide timely, in-the-moment support, helping people manage everyday stressors when they arise. ”

Dr. Mona Barman

Director of Care Transformation at BetterHelp



When do people turn to AI, therapy, or both?

Among those who have used AI for mental health support, it stands out for affordability, convenience, and always-on access.

54% say AI is more affordable

47% value AI's ability to provide immediate support

Still, people currently prefer therapists for the discretion, communication, and emotional nuance that drive meaningful care and better outcomes.

“This is the opportunity ahead: a new model of care where AI expands access and drives better outcomes, all within a clinically governed experience.”

Dr. Russell DuBois

VP of Clinical Quality, Operations & Innovation at BetterHelp

Which of the following do you believe would be better coming from AI vs. a hybrid (therapist + AI)?

	AI	Hybrid (AI + Therapist)
Reaction Management Concern of how others would respond to your mental health discussions		✓
Privacy/Anonymity Confidentiality around your mental health discussions		✓
Comfort Level Level of comfort when discussing mental health concerns		✓
Communication Preference Preference for written responses or spoken responses		✓
Convenience/Availability Ability to connect instantly when you need help	✓	
Affordabilty / Cost	✓	



A new clinically governed model, powered by AI

People want the right care, and they want support that's accessible and affordable – revealing an appetite for a hybrid approach of AI and human therapy, and a new model that can drive outsized outcomes.



As AI continues to evolve in mental health care, it can help lower barriers to getting started and help shift support from episodic to continuous. When paired with clinical oversight, it can ensure care remains safe, trusted, and effective over time while increasing access and reducing traditional barriers to care.





The Ways We Seek Support

03

Millennials: The AI Pragmatists

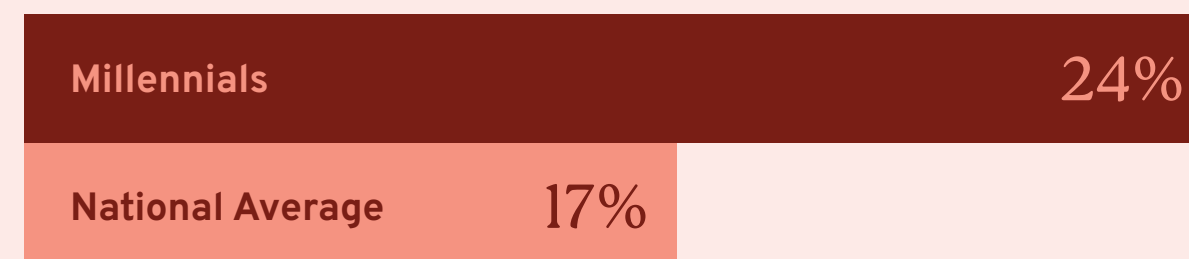
Millennials came of age as therapy started to become more mainstream. And while the stigma persists, they are more open to therapy, especially support that fits seamlessly into their lives. AI is becoming part of how they start and continue to manage their mental health care.



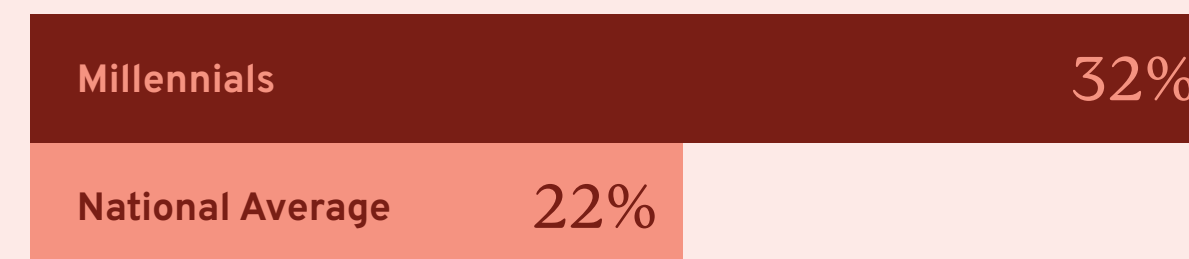
For those who have tried therapy, they see its value as ongoing:

40% have returned to therapy after taking a break

They believe in AI, and act on it:



have used AI for mental health support



say AI has improved aspects of their personal or professional life

They see AI as part of an ongoing mental health journey:

42% view AI as a gateway or supplement to human care (highest of any generation)

Gen Z: On Edge and Divided

Gen Z is +40pp more likely than others to feel nervous, anxious, on edge, or to worry too much almost every day.

What feeds their distress?

Financial worries:

74%

say their personal finances are a key source of stress (vs. 66% Millennials, 55% Gen X, 32% Boomers+).

Their phones:

Ironic, because social media is where they learn about mental health—almost +30pp more so than average. But a reported 32% using social media 4+ hours a day disrupts their sleep and feeds into their anxiety.

How they cope:

33%

of Gen Z say AI has improved aspects of their personal or professional life.



The Gen Z paradox continues.

Much like last year, Gen Z reports being highly aware of their mental health, but not always able to act on it. They report more pressure than any other generation, yet still face barriers when trying to turn that awareness into support.

Trauma and feeling overwhelmed are pushing Gen Z toward care.

Nearly **1/2** say trauma led them to consider therapy, and over **1/3** cite feeling overwhelmed at work or school.

But stigma is still a powerful barrier:

48%

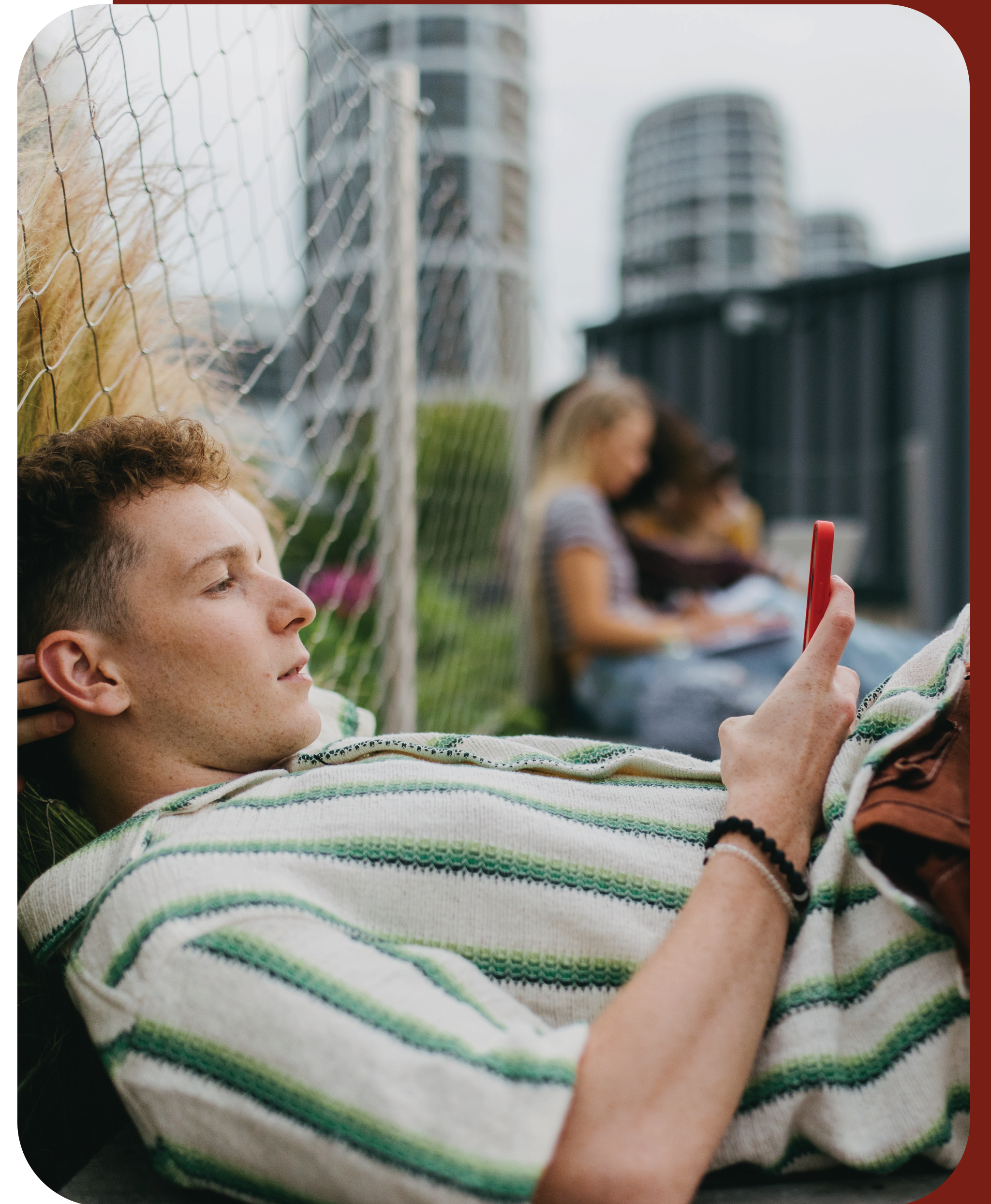
fear stigma around discussing mental health vs. 34% nationally

42%

worry they'll be judged for seeking care vs. 30% nationally

37%

worry it could impact their job or career vs. 25% nationally



Men: Willing to Talk, Just Not Traditionally

Men and women show similar levels of stress and anxiety, but men are less likely to seek help with traditional therapy. Instead, they turn to AI tools and social media.

They believe in AI, and act on it:

18%

of men report turning to AI for mental health support

14%

of men report using AI for substance abuse or addiction (vs. 6% of women)

And interestingly, they show an openness to group therapy:

31%

say group therapy could be beneficial (vs. 20% of women)

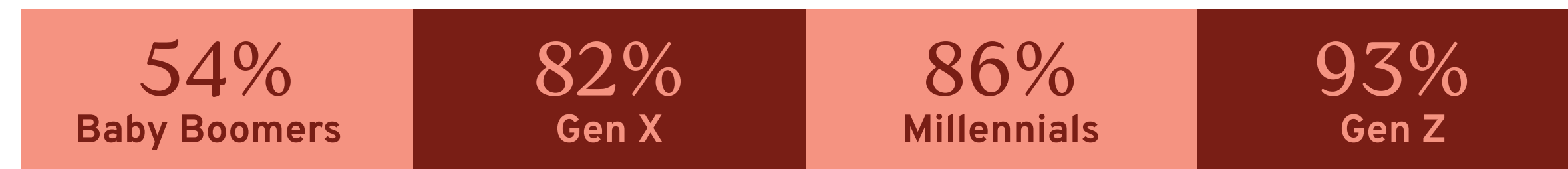


“ There’s a level of safety in shared experience: being around other men, hearing from those they respect and see as capable, and realizing they’re not alone in struggling. That kind of environment can make it easier to open up and take the first step. ”

Dr. Russell DuBois

VP of Clinical Quality, Operations & Innovation at BetterHelp

Across generations, men report anxiety symptoms – with younger men citing much higher levels of distress:



The Path Forward

04



What's Next

The opportunity ahead is not just to expand access, but to fundamentally rethink how mental health support is delivered. This year's State of Stigma report makes one thing clear: people still need help getting help, and the way they seek support is rapidly evolving with AI. The next chapter isn't episodic care – it's continuous care, where support is available not just in sessions, but in the moments people actually need it.

AI has the potential to open that door as evident in how it's reducing friction, helping people get started sooner, and keeping them engaged over time. Expanding access is only part of the equation, and how care is delivered matters just as much, which is why this model must be grounded in clinical governance, ethical oversight, and trust.



About BetterHelp

Whether it's teaming up with [Billboard](#) or [Lewis Capaldi](#) to help Gen Z and Millennials overcome stigma, creating space for open conversations through our podcast [Mind If We Talk?](#) or partnering with [AARP](#) to support the 50+ community, BetterHelp continues to find new ways to introduce people to therapy.

Here's the impact we've made with BetterHelp users worldwide:

72% saw a reduction in symptoms

62% reached remission

69% showed meaningful improvement in anxiety and depression

82% would recommend their therapist to someone else

BetterHelp has an opportunity to define this next standard for global mental health care, using AI to expand access and make support more continuous. The goal isn't just to reach more people, but to do so in a way that improves outcomes and amplifies the impact of every clinician. Done right, AI can strengthen trust, expand access, and make the system work better for everyone.

*Individual experiences may vary



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