



REPORT

# Togetherall Guardian Council Report 2022

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togetherall

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# Foreword



**Liam Black**  
Chair of Guardian Council  
& Togetherall Non-Exec Director

## **Trust is important for any business but in the business of caring and supporting people’s mental health, it is vital.**

People choosing to access Togetherall services must be able to trust the company and be convinced that their wellbeing is Togetherall’s number one priority; that their personal data is secure and will not be shared, that the house rules of the platform are upheld on all sides, that they can access the right level of support anytime, day or night, on any day of the year.

Commissioners need to trust that when they onboard Togetherall they are partnering with a service that is focused on delivering accessible, impactful and ongoing support for their populations rather than being distracted by shareholder returns.

The digital health market has experienced exponential growth in the last few years and commissioning bodies, as well as individuals, have a vast and confusing choice of platforms, apps and other digital offers.

In the last twelve months several high-profile health tech and digital mental health businesses have failed or have conducted themselves in ways that has shone a spotlight on the sustainability of their business model, the principles around their clinical practice, and the rigour around data security. Trust in

the sector, or businesses that have gained investment to enter the market, has been shaken and there may well be more high-profile headlines which will further undermine the trust of users, commissioners and policy makers.

In 2020 the Togetherall Board decided that in order to underpin confidence and trust in Togetherall for its members (the many thousands of people who access the platform), commissioning bodies and organizations, commercial partners, and also those who want to work for the company, an independent body of experts should be convened to hold the board and its leadership to account. This became the Guardian Council which was formerly constituted in 2021. We can’t claim ownership of this concept as we were inspired, and supported, by online privacy business Yoti which convened its first Guardian Council in 2016.

In place for a year, Togetherall’s independent Guardian Council submits this, its first annual report, covering fundamental aspects of the organization’s activity.

The draft report was seen by the Board of Directors before publication, but they have no editorial control over its content.

The report will be distributed across the networks in which Togetherall is active and made available to those using or considering using or commissioning the service.

Any comments or feedback should be sent GC Chair [liam.black@togetherall.com](mailto:liam.black@togetherall.com)

# Togetherall Guardian Council Report 2022

As a social impact organization guided by three core principles of inclusive access, measurable impact and financial self-sufficiency, the Togetherall Guardian Council has chosen, reviewed and evaluated a key area from each of these pillars to report on:

- Access: Peer to Peer Service
- Impact: Safety & Clinical Oversight
- Self-Sufficiency: Value at Scale



# Togetherall and its Charter

**Togetherall is the leading online peer to peer support service for adults over 16 years old, providing millions of people throughout North America and Europe with access to a safe community to support a broad spectrum of mental health concerns.**

Moderated by licensed clinicians, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, it harnesses the protective and therapeutic effects of connectedness and healthy social networks in its unique community where people share with, and support each other, alongside courses, resources, self-assessments and other self-help tools.

Togetherall has supported over 350,000 members with their mental health in partnership with organizations in the corporate, education, health and charity sectors as well as the Armed Forces in UK, US, Canada, New Zealand and has recently launched across the Republic of Ireland.

Togetherall is a private company with two primary owners; FPE Capital and global impact investor Lightrock. Since its foundation in 2007, Togetherall (until 2020 known as 'Big White Wall') has prioritized its purpose of expanding free access for end users and improved mental health and wellbeing of its members while ensuring financial rigor and responsibility to enable continual re-investment in the product and the service.

The mission and activities of the business are shaped by its Togetherall Charter, adopted by the Board of Directors in 2019.

## TOGETHERALL CHARTER

Everything we do is governed by our three core principles.



### Access for all

To offer a service that is available to everyone, regardless of background, belief or means, without risk of judgement or stigma.



### Real Impact

To provide measurable effectiveness, improving the mental wellbeing of members and delivering real, cost-effective benefit to commissioning Organizations.



### Self-sufficiency

To ensure we follow a financially self-reliant business model that allows us to attract investment while still meeting our ambitions in line with our values.

# The Guardian Council

In 2020, the Guardian Council was formed to help Togetherall stay focused on its mission while it continues to grow as a company. With the guidance of the Guardian Council – made up of impartial specialists with expertise in both mental health and business – company activity is constantly reviewed to maintain the highest standards, both clinically and commercially, while staying true to the Charter.

Council members are fully independent, with no financial or familial stakes in the business. Council members are paid an annual fee of £12,000 (sterling) and serve for a term of three years. They are collectively and individually free to comment publicly as they feel necessary, with the exception of sharing any commercially (or market) sensitive data.

The Guardian Council meets six times a year to review the running of the business, to challenge and to advise the Board, Executive and leadership teams.

## The two questions they help Togetherall answer are:

- Is Togetherall fulfilling its purpose?
- How can the company improve to ensure its principles and actions align?



### Poppy Jaman MBE

Poppy is Global CEO of MindForward Alliance, the global chapter of City Mental Health Alliance. Poppy is an internationally respected mental health advocate, national policy advisor and social entrepreneur.



### Dr Ian McPherson OBE

Ian is the chair of Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and a nationally recognised leader in mental health with interests across all aspects of health and social care.



### Sapna Mahajan

Sapna is Director (Genomics and Society) at Genome Canada and was previously a Director at the Mental Health Commission of Canada.



### Laura Horne

Laura is Chief Program Officer at Active Minds, a US NGO engaging thousands of young people in conversations about mental health in schools and universities across the country.



### Liam Black (Chair)

Liam is non-executive director of Togetherall. He has no shares in the business.

# 1. Inclusive Access: Peer to Peer Model

**How effective is Togetherall's Peer to Peer model and is it doing all it can to reach those underserved by traditional mental health approaches?**

*By Poppy Jaman and Laura Horne*

**Now is the time to regard peer support as a first-rate mental health service – and not only because mental health issues are on the rise nor even simply because the more traditional mental health workforce has been limited in its capacity to meet the demand for services. Peer support deserves equal acknowledgment alongside clinical interventions due to its long history of effectiveness and roots in lived experience, equity, and community-based care.**

Consider the impact of COVID-19 on people globally – the isolation, loneliness, and lack of sense of belonging, which are so often overlooked as mental health problems. It has become absolutely vital – whether with friends, family, or with peers online – to have a safe space to share our experiences within a community. Clinical interventions cannot completely address loneliness and isolation on their own.

For decades, many countries and cultures have known this to be true, and thus, have invested in peer support models to advance mental health and recovery. Peer support is a natural human and community reaction; it's successful because it is a 'community' intervention that builds on innate skills most of us already have and want to use. It also feeds the supporters' wellbeing, because when we give, it has been scientifically proven that our own wellbeing is positively enhanced. We also know that community health workers and community developers have been critical to improving individual and community health through their ability to build trust and relationships and their effectiveness in improving health outcomes.

An essential part of recovery is connection. Being heard, understood, advised and 'held' by peers who have relevant lived experiences is often more valuable than 'experts' because the ability to relate is much higher. This peer relationship fosters connection and diminishes loneliness thus increasing mental wellbeing.

**“Peer support is a natural human and community reaction; it's successful because it is a 'community' intervention that builds on innate skills most of us already have and want to use.”**

In 2022 this has been the case among the nearly 34,000 active Togetherall users across all age groups above the age of 16, engaging with peers through the platform on a range of topics, including loneliness, recovery, sexuality, identity, disability, cultural identity, inequality, race, and religion, in addition to mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and self-harm.

Over the past 15 years, Togetherall has proven that peer support is effective and fills a gap in mental health support and recovery. Togetherall users are interacting with others both one-on-one and in groups. Engagement with key features and tools within Togetherall is high even among those entering for the first time. Those who return to use the platform again (60% of users) are often those who have greater severity of symptoms and rely on the support. Additionally, members consistently report that they have found the platform helpful. In particular, the presence of and interaction with Wall Guides, reading other people’s stories, helping others and being able to share their stories anonymously, sometimes for the first time – these interactions have all been found helpful to members.

**UK**

**70%** experienced at least one wellness gain since joining Togetherall

**77%** of people who used Togetherall following discharge from mental health treatment found it helped them

**1/4** A quarter of members said they have taken less time off work since joining Togetherall

**North America**

**93%** self-report an improvement in their well-being

**80%** felt less isolated after using Togetherall (Ontario study)

**64%** share on Togetherall because it’s anonymous

**35%** report that Togetherall is their only source of reliable mental health support

Equally striking is the power of peer support to share power and honor equality and acceptance. Embedded in peer support is the idea that lived experience is expertise and that a community can heal themselves and each other through mutual relationship, respect, and offering a complimentary offering to more traditional mental health services. Additionally, issues of identity, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, as well as experiences with discrimination and racism, can be addressed through community and peer-to-peer relationships in ways that clinical interventions cannot. Complex issues, such as identity, injustice, and discrimination, need deep understanding, which can only come from those who have experienced it.

To that end, Togetherall has created versions of the platform in both English and Canadian French to best serve users in Europe (58%), Canada (28%), the United States (13%), and New Zealand (1%). Through partnerships with organizations like Movember, **Togetherall has increased engagement with populations typically underrepresented among clients of mental health services, including people of color (35%), men (23%) and people with non-binary gender identities (7%).**

Togetherall has also intentionally engaged other partners to help ensure the platform is accessible to different populations. These international partners include the AMOSSHE, the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors, Citizens Advice Wandsworth, Combat Stress, Enable, the Ethnicity & Mental Health Improvement Project, HealthWatch, Movember, NASPA, One Housing, OpCourage, Phoenix Heros, Sound Minds, The Soldiers Charity, and Wandsworth Care Alliance, and many others.

Through this work and more, Togetherall has seen a widening and growing recognition of peer support as a valid and effective part of the support that should be available to address societal challenges with wellbeing and mental health. The dominance and overreliance on treatment in the Western healthcare systems is now changing. Given the sheer scale of the demand for support, there remains a large gap in support provision, and it is recognized that more scalable solutions, such as peer support, are needed.

**“Over the past 15 years, Togetherall has proven that peer support is effective and fills a gap in mental health support and recovery.”**

Mental health is increasingly seen as a commercial opportunity with the corporate wellness market estimated to be worth \$66 billion. But too many digital so-called ‘solutions’ are over claiming outcomes, producing misleading advertising and unregulated products flood the market. **Togetherall is the only peer support platform that comes with the history, clinical governance (as its first customers were the National Health Service) that we would confidently back as a provider with credibility.**

The Guardian Council is committed to supporting the team as they work to increase their reach into new markets, increase utilization among even more diverse populations, and influence the “regulation” conversation globally to ensure that other mental health technology platforms meet standards as high as their own.

**As members of the Guardian Council, we stand behind Togetherall as one of the originating peer support technology platforms, leading the way in expanding the power of peer support and crucial community-based care at scale globally.**



## 2. Real Impact: Clinical Management

**Is Togetherall’s platform safe and how robust are its clinical risk management and escalation processes?**

*By Dr Ian McPherson and Sapna Mahajan*

**With the rapid growth in digital mental health services – accelerated by COVID – comes the need to ensure that what is being offered is of high quality, efficacy, and safety.**

Togetherall’s approach to clinical excellence and risk management sets the company apart from other similar organizations and service agencies in this space, leading to positive outcomes for those in need.

Togetherall takes a population approach to helping those in need, providing a global, digital, mobile-first technological platform and 24/7 clinical oversight and intervention for health, guidance and safety. This has created a global peer community for those in need which complements traditional health systems.

Concerted effort and focus has been put on making support open to all, breaking down barriers people face when needing support (e.g., self-referral, immediate access, anonymous, online, reaching hard to reach) and providing more inclusive services. Additionally, efforts and resources have been put to ensure the online spaces at Togetherall provide accurate information (e.g., approved assessments and courses, house rules), that positive behaviors

are encouraged, difficult content is moderated and clinically moderated, and there are safeguards in place for those in crisis (crisis management that includes partnership with protocol for escalation where applicable). The “no wrong door” approach has also helped to ensure there is access for all – by joining together the systems of support, and integrating peer support with promotion, prevention and treatment approaches, this has ensured that people get the help they need when they need it.

**When looking at achieving impact in more detail, it is obvious how Togetherall’s charter comes to life:**

- With more than 20 million people having access to Togetherall, it creates a large, diverse and active community where members can quickly and easily find peers with shared lived experience.
- Members engage with Togetherall anonymously, eliminating stigma, reducing barriers to help-seeking, and enabling open discussions of difficult and sensitive topics.
- Members have access to a myriad of tools, which are clinically designed and evidence informed, to support their mental health.
- Content that is created by members is systematically reviewed using technology and clinical staff, which includes eliminating problematic behavior associated with traditional and unmoderated social media.

- 24/7 clinical oversight by licensed/registered clinicians – which is multidisciplinary and includes social workers, counselors, nurses, psychologists, and psychiatrists, who all have been rigorously recruited, evaluated, and trained; they receive months of hands-on guidance and supervision to ensure consistent and high-quality practice.
- During each shift, the following roles in place to support Togetherall’s goals and charter
  - Wall Guides who interact with members anonymously, routine low-risk community management, monitoring, and signposting to customized resources.
  - Lead Wall Guides who are responsible for delegating work and reviewing/actioning potential risk on the platform.
  - Senior Clinical Team who provide overall leadership per shift, guidance to LWG/ WG’s, and responsible for handling external communications related to member safety and crisis management.

These components really help bring to life the idea that Togetherall is “people helping people, scaled by technology, monitored by clinicians”.

Togetherall offers services to thousands of people with anxiety depression and other common mental health issues, and the services is commissioned by over 300 organizations globally. Though it is not a crisis service, there are small numbers of people who are high risk and are in crisis. Specifically, the service has at least 1 or 2 members of the online community in crisis every day. This presentation rate has increased and in part as a result of the pandemic, it seems likely to continue the upward trend. This is why effective risk escalation is a central component of Togetherall’s approach and ensures a high quality and responsive service.

The organization has been thoughtful and proactive to set up structures, processes and policies to ensure effective internal and external de-escalation responses – for example having risk agreements with all Commissioning bodies (partner organizations providing Togetherall access), using smart technology (such as automated identification of posts containing risk related language) to continually monitor risk, and having trained professional active and moderating 24/7 (who are supervised and receive guidance from a multi-disciplinary team that includes service managers, senior clinicians, and a psychiatrist). Generally, escalations will be handled online, transferred to a local provider or escalated to emergency services, and is all done in a collaborative way, ensuring autonomy of the member.

**“Effective risk escalation is a central component of Togetherall’s approach and ensures a high quality and responsive service.”**

The numbers highlight the impact - 64% share on Togetherall because its anonymous, 70% of students join because of the immediate access, 55% shared something about their mental health for the first time on Togetherall, 48% indicate they have no other form of support outside Togetherall.

In addition to Togetherall having its own robust procedures to ensure that there is effective risk management in all that it offers, the company has attempted to engage other digital mental health providers, commissioners and policy makers in a wider debate about this by commissioning a discussion paper “Promoting a safer digital experience in mental health services” (2021)

<https://togetherall.com/en-gb/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/08/Risk-Escalation-Discussion-Paper.pdf>

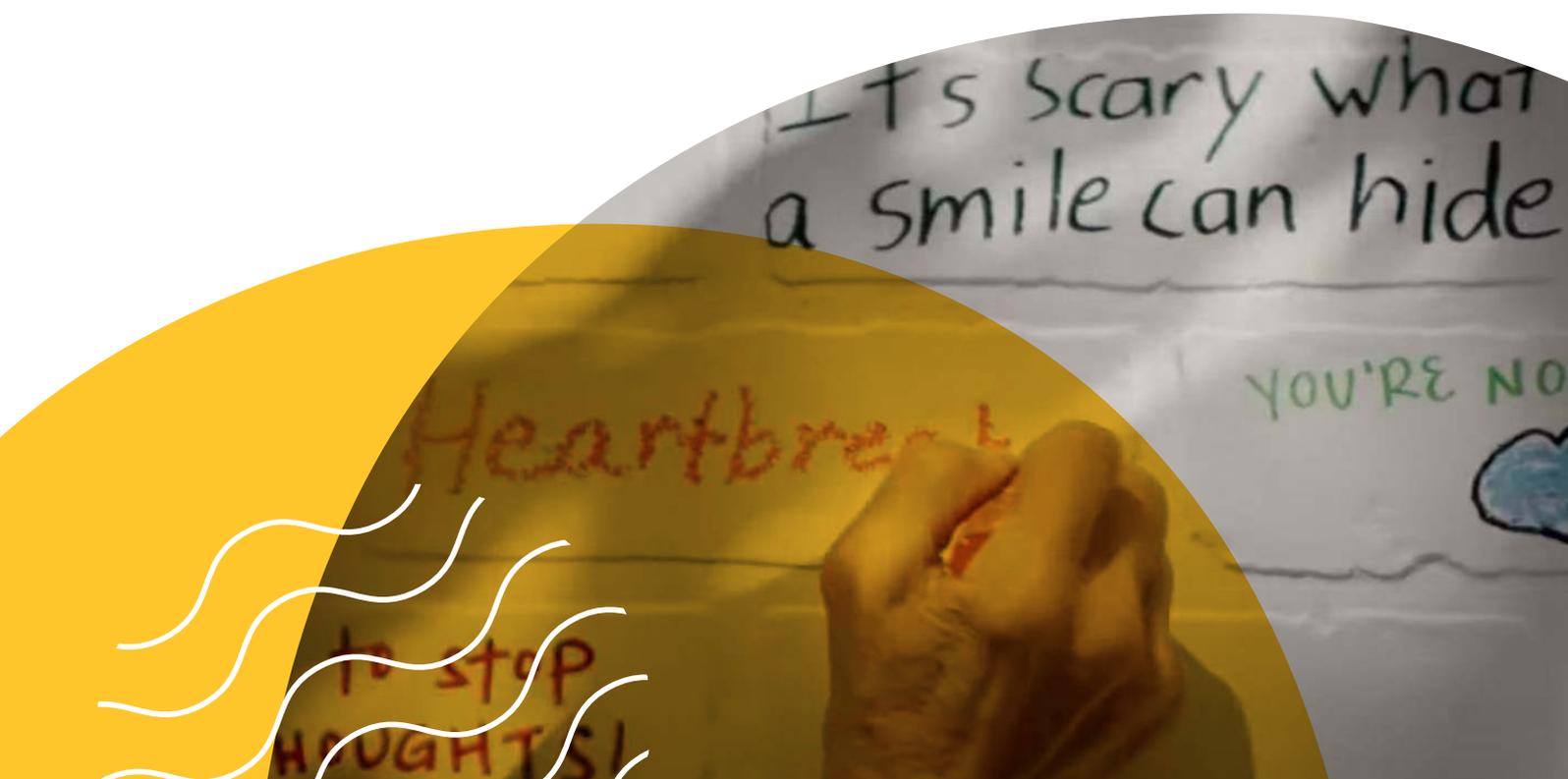
This paper undertook an exploration of the issues and highlighted emerging practice internationally in putting in place processes and policies to deal with risk and crisis. This publication is intended to stimulate discussion and encourage a collaborative, sector wide focus on the legal, quality, risk and moral drivers of having risk escalation policies and processes in place for digital mental health services which will be explored at a roundtable later this year. This indicates Togetherall's commitment to improving the understanding of the importance of risk management across the digital mental health sector.

Another important aspect of risk relates to data privacy and security. This has been highlighted by a recent US Senate investigation into multiple reports that personal data from mental health platforms is being shared with large technology platforms such as Google and Facebook and other online actors, potentially leaving individuals vulnerable to breaches of confidentiality or even exploitation.

**In the context of an unregulated market it is essential that providers obtain independent evaluations of their platforms and Togetherall in 2021 submitted itself to the Organization for the Review of Care and Health Apps (ORCHA) for an in-depth review. ORCHA acts as a global leader in assessing digital products and providing access to trusted and safe healthcare technologies through its libraries. ORCHA's review measured Togetherall in the three primary areas of Professional Assurance, Data and Privacy, and Usability and Accessibility.**

**Togetherall exceeded in all three with a rating of 87%, against the 65% threshold required to meet quality standards and regulations.**

<https://togetherall.com/en-gb/news/togetherall-now-available-via-orcha-digital-health-libraries/>



### 3. Self-Sufficiency: Value at Scale

**Has Togetherall created a sustainable business model which offers affordable scalable value to partners and users?**

*By Liam Black*

Since its creation 15 years ago Togetherall has endeavored to achieve a complex mission.

How is it to create a financially sustainable business model which enables it to offer a free at the point of use service which is appropriately risk managed and which can scale to a population level and thus achieve maximum social impact?

Togetherall's B2B2C model – organizations paying the business to enable their constituencies (soldiers, students, citizens, patients) free access to the platform all day, every day – must not only provide an excellent service to members but provide value for money to commissioning partners with tight budgets in a crowded marketplace of digital mental health offerings. To scale up the business Togetherall must also be an attractive proposition for investors. The balancing of these different demands lies at the heart of purpose/profit challenge.

Based upon our interactions with the executive leadership, investors and Board Directors, the Guardian Council has been impressed and reassured with the transparency, honesty and rigor with which Togetherall addresses this challenge and keeps it under close review.

Togetherall has always sought investors who share the core social purpose of the business – ending stigma and creating a long term scaled platform open to people from as diverse a range

of backgrounds and experiences as possible. One of its early key investors was Impact Ventures UK, a pioneering impact fund managed by Lightrock. Kevin Bone is a partner at Lightrock and sits on the Togetherall board: **“Togetherall’s underlying commercial model enables it to deliver a scalable and affordable population proposition that delivers a leading contribution margin which means it can continue to invest in growth and build out its ambitious product development roadmap.”**

**“To scale up the business Togetherall must also be an attractive proposition for investors. The balancing of these different demands lies at the heart of purpose/profit challenge.”**

In assessing Togetherall’s performance in achieving value at scale it is critical to understand where Togetherall sits in the wide variety of mental health propositions on offer to potential buyers.

In the words of Togetherall’s Chief Clinical Officer, Dr Ben Locke, **“A traditional patient/treatment lens will tend to focus attention on patient-level adoption expectations and lose sight of the cost-benefit ratio of a population health framework. With a population framework, key information, resources, and scalable mental health supports are promoted to the entire population with the goal of supporting a large number of people at less intensive levels (who are often harder to reach) at their time of need rather than routing them through a treatment system under stress.”**

So, in its pricing structure how does Togetherall provide affordability for its partners and clients at a population level and scale? Togetherall works hand-in-hand with traditional treatment systems as well as signposting users to those services when needed at the same time as serving a much larger group of people for a lower cost per user, reaching them early or out of hours, and therefore reducing the overall demand for more intensive and costly treatments.

Although we have no verified data, it is reasonable to assume that significant sums of money are saved for our commissioning partners by members who, having joined the community, do not move on to more costly mental health interventions and medication. This might be a valuable area for the Guardian Council to investigate in future reports.

Analyzing the data of some of the populations served by Togetherall shows a cost as low as \$15 per supported user. This is forty (40) times less than the typical costs of support provided by a counselor.

We are not suggesting that Togetherall provides the same support as a one to one counseling does. But it is clear that it is highly cost effective to offer key resources and baseline mental-health support to the population rather than seek to route routine distress through expensive and scarce professional services. Moreover, many traditional or treatment-based interventions are not available outside normal office hours and are simply not accessible because of geography (for example in rural areas). Togetherall's data demonstrates that its 24/7 and anonymous digital access appeals to some segments of the population who are not otherwise served.

#### CLIENT CASE DATA - Alberta

- 2+** Togetherall has supported Albertans for over 2 years
- 1 in 120** of their population has signed up for the service.
- 30%** are from traditionally low adoption rural areas
- 33%** identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous or a Person of Colour)
- 6300** Albertans self-reported being unemployed or too sick to work.

#### SECTOR CASE DATA - Students, North America

- 150+** institutes supported in North America
- 49%** students registered identify as BIPOC
- 5%** of student users identify as transgender or non-binary
- 64%** of student users access Togetherall outside of 9-5 working hours
- 70%** of students join Togetherall because of its immediate access



It is very fashionable for companies to claim that a social purpose is lies at the heart of their business model and that profit maximizing is not the sole priority driving the business.

Our exposure as a Guardian Council to the work of Togetherall leads us to the conclusion that the company genuinely seeks to embed their core purpose in their commercial model and so provide value to its range of commissioning partners and ensure that the business is viable so it can continue to support more and more people.

The Guardian Council is confident in asserting that Togetherall does have a viable and sustainable business model which is providing value for money, affordable mental-health community support at a population level that is safe and clinically managed.

The challenges to Togetherall in an increasingly crowded and noisy market with fast changing demands from commissioning partners looking for full spectrum services which offer value for money and ease of use and implementation are not to be underestimated.

**Moving into 2023 the Guardian Council will continue to monitor the business and report on how the company responds to these demands and continues to work out how is blends purpose, profit and impact.**

**It is the considered opinion of the Guardian Council that Togetherall is making every effort in its polices, procedures and governance to set the highest standards as it seeks to provide access for all and make a real impact.**

**RESOURCES FROM TOGETHERALL:**

- <https://togetherall.com/en-us/blog/how-peer-to-peer-support-is-a-catalyst-for-continued-mental-health-success/>
- <https://togetherall.com/en-us/blog/peer-to-peer-digital-communities-exploring-how-risk-management-is-crucial-to-facilitating-positive-mental-health/>
- <https://togetherall.com/en-gb/blog/ics-development-the-digital-opportunity-to-improve-population-mental-health/>
- <https://togetherall.com/en-gb/news/togetherall-now-available-via-orchard-digital-health-libraries/>



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