Smartphone Applications for Community Supervision

The Criminal Justice Testing and Evaluation Consortium, a program of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), released a four-part brief series on technologies that support agencies tasked with monitoring individuals released to community supervision. This document summarizes the brief, _Smartphone Applications for Community Supervision_.

Key Takeaways

The key findings of the consortium's smartphone app research include:

- The growing use of community supervision apps is driven by the desire to support individuals on community supervision, improvements in technology, the ubiquity of smartphones in society, the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., the need to manage individuals remotely), and the desire to offer fewer stigmatizing methods of location tracking.

- Apps may include features such as remote reporting and supervision, treatment delivery, location tracking, calendar management and reminders, goal setting, and substance testing, all of which enable accountability, facilitate behavioral change, and support agency objectives to effectively manage cases.

- When implementing an app, agencies need to identify the app's target population and determine the agency's goals. Some agencies may wish to leverage apps as a support tool for individuals on community supervision, while other agencies may want to leverage apps to ensure individuals are complying with their conditions of release. The purpose will ultimately determine which functionalities are needed and which app is right for the agency.

This brief describes what smartphone apps are and how they are used in community supervision. It describes how agencies are using them with individuals being supervised to support accountability objectives and highlights key features of smartphone apps agencies are using, including:

- Remote reporting and check-ins
- Goal setting and reward features
- Multimodal communication
- Resource directory
- Calendars and reminders
- Substance use monitoring and management
- Improved service delivery, such as when video is used
- Location monitoring
- Data analytics

The brief also, in detail, covers the advantages and limitations of smartphone app use in community supervision environments. It discusses how smartphone apps can support case management for supervising officers by helping meet core agency objectives, such as connecting individuals to resources, setting goals and monitoring progress, reporting data to officers, and monitoring overall conditions of release.

The brief takes an in-depth look at agency considerations when implementing smartphone apps as part of its supervision toolkit. These considerations include priorities, criminal risk, legal precedents, and ethical issues. Finally, the brief offers six insights into trends for smartphone apps in community supervision:

- Smartphone capabilities are evolving and enabling more supervision features at a lower cost.

- Consumer markets are driving innovation, enabling more widespread use of apps for community supervision.

- Ubiquitous mobile connections to the internet are improving accessibility and performance.

- The increased use of cloud-based software platforms is driving costs down.

- Policies enabling integration and interoperability of new smartphone app platforms with legacy content management systems (CMS) will increase usability and operational efficiency.

- Advances in sensor technology coupled with advanced analytics and AI may offer new ways to support successful reentry and reduce recidivism.

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Smartphone Applications & Technology

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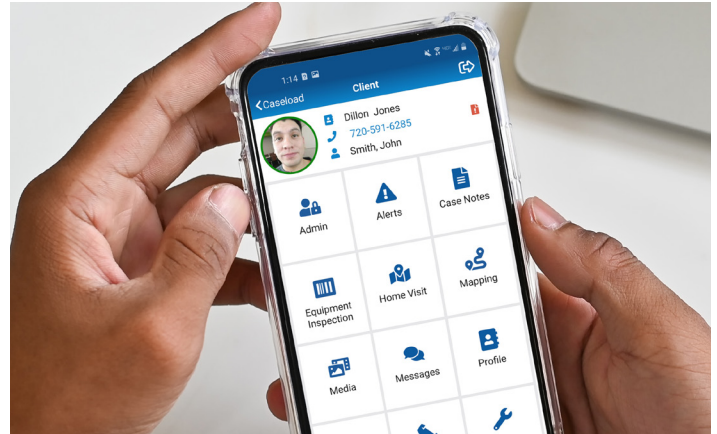
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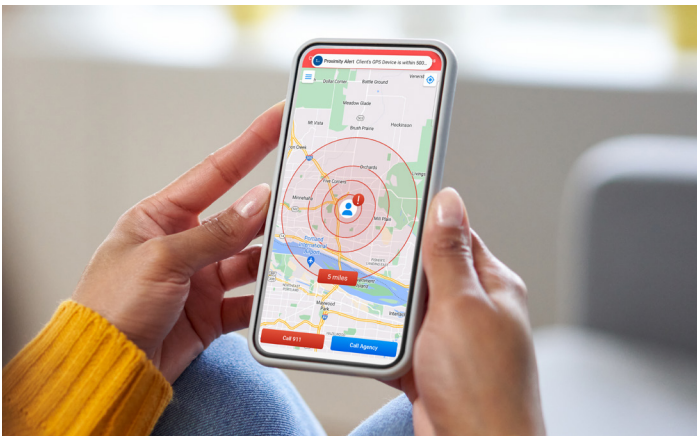
BI Notifi®, an iOS and Android compatible mobile app, offers agencies a solution for individuals who are involved in a domestic violence situation. The mobile app continuously measures the proximity between the BI Notifi app user and a GPS-supervised client.

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