Creating health information that works: Best practice and key steps

Visit www.pifonline.org.uk/toolkit to view the best practice online and access practical resources and the evidence behind the project.

Produce accurate and reliable information

Create accurate and evidence based health information

- Use current, high quality research, guidelines and literature reviews.

- Where necessary, conduct a literature and evidence review, critically appraising any evidence you find.

- Keep a clear record of the evidence you have used during the entire production process to create your health information.

- Make sure your information includes all possible options, and covers all relevant risks, benefits and uncertainties.

- Communicate benefits, risks and uncertainties in a non-judgmental and unbiased way.

- Include clinical experts in the development of your health information.

- Have a system to enable people to feedback on potential inaccuracies in your content.

Be transparent about your evidence base

- Ensure your users can easily find the sources of evidence you have used.

- Clearly state who was involved in the production of your information, and include any conflicts of interest.

- Make a clear distinction between evidence-based information and other types of information, i.e. patient stories or care pathways.

Keep your health information up to date

- Stay up to date with developments in the evidence base.

- Review and update your health information regularly.

- Plan how the resource will be reviewed and have clear processes.

- Publish the date health information was created or last reviewed and when it is scheduled to be next reviewed.

- Link the updating of information to your dissemination activities.

- Withdraw or archive health information when it is out-of date, if you are not intending to update it.

Communicate risk clearly

- Be cautious about using verbal descriptors of risk (rare, common). If used, ensure they are accompanied by statistical information.

- Use absolute risk rather than relative risk.

- Use natural numbers rather than percentages.

- Consider using both positive and negative framing for risk.

- Communicate the uncertainty of data.

- Consider using a mix of numerical and pictorial formats to communicate risk.

- Make risks relevant to your audience.

💬 Communicate information clearly

Keep language clear and simple

- Use plain language and everyday words.

- Express numbers clearly: from one to nine as words; from 10 onwards, as numbers.

- Do not use jargon; explain medical, clinical or health service terms or words.

- Use short sentences and paragraphs, cut out unnecessary words.

- Use an active tone and talk directly to your reader.

- An imperative voice should be used for instructions.

- User test your health information to ensure the 'language' you have used is understood.

Break complex information down

- Present information in small chunks Try to explore only one area in each 'paragraph' and stick to one idea in a sentence.

- Include a summary of the most important points, right at the start of the information.

- Use visual representations where they can explain better than words, or where they aid understanding.

- Signpost to more in-depth information.

- Keep numerical information as simple as possible.

- When describing risk to health, use a combination of words and numbers, and make risks relevant to your audience.

Use layout and design to aid navigation

- Ensure the design is clear and visually engaging.

- Use headings, bullet points and colour to help users navigate your information.

- Include a contents list where appropriate.

- For written information: avoid italics and capital letters; use bold text for emphasis; left justify; use a clear font and at least 12 point text size.

- Use appropriate images in a meaningful way.

- Ensure web-based or digital information is in an accessible format.

- Involve experts from specialist non-clinical areas to inform the design of your resources.

Ensure you have met any communication needs your audience has

- Identify the communication needs of your audience.

- Ensure your information meets any required accessibility standards and follows guidelines for specific audiences.

🎯 Ensure information has impact and relevance

Create resources with a specific purpose or objective

- Plan well, with clear objectives - to create information that enables users to act.

- Ensure your health information adds value to what already exists.

- User test your health information to ensure it achieves its purpose and key messages are understood.

- Where appropriate, ensure your resource will be supported at the point of delivery to ensure key messages are understood.

- Measure and evaluate the impact of your health information.

Understand and meet the needs of your users

- Understand the key characteristics of your audience.

- Where appropriate, segment your audience into different target groups.

- Understand the journey of your users

- Tailor and/or personalise information to the specific needs and circumstances of the user.

- Provide health information in a choice of formats, informed by user involvement.

- Where appropriate, provide information at a range of detail and complexity levels.

Include non-clinical information and patient experiences

- Include issues that affect quality of life and day-to-day living, where appropriate.

- Include user generated content - quotes, tips and stories where appropriate.

Make information easy for users to find and access

- Map all potential dissemination routes at planning stage.

- Provide health information that can be accessed in a number of different ways, informed by user involvement.

- Dissemination plans should consider at what point in their journey patients may need your health information.

- Involve 'gatekeepers' - and any other stakeholders you will need to help disseminate - in the development of your health information.

- Link your health information with, and signpost to, other organisations and services that are connected with your target users.

- SEO (search engine optimisation) is important for online information: include common keywords; ensure web pages have metadata to allow search engines to find them.

👥 Involve users in creating information

Involve users at every stage of your information project

- Plan how users will be involved throughout the creation of your health information.

- Involve users throughout the production process, using co-production approaches where appropriate.

- Test how well the messages in your information are understood by your target audience - 'user testing'.

- Design your dissemination approach with users.

- Evaluate your resources with users.

Involve a range of representative users

- Engage meaningfully with 'real' users.

- Ensure involvement includes users from all relevant groups.

- Ensure your methods of engaging with users are appropriate for your target group.

- Include responses from an appropriate number of people.

Ensure clear communicate with the users you are involving

- Be clear with those you are involving on your requirements and expectations of their involvement.

- Enable participants to share their requirements and expectations of being involved.

- Where appropriate, keep the users you've worked with informed about the project as it develops.