



# Creating health information that works: Best practice and key steps

Visit [www.pifonline.org.uk/toolkit](http://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- Withdraw or archive health information when it is out-of date, if you are not intending to update it.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.

### 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 user.
- 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.

**The Patient Information Forum (PIF) is the UK membership organisation and network for people working in, and involved with, health and care information and support.**

#### Quality

We raise standards and best practice in the production and provision of health information and support

#### Integration

We campaign for high quality health information and support to be an integral part of the healthcare journey

#### Expertise

We champion and enhance the expertise of people working in the field of health information and support

#### Impact

We evidence the importance and impact of high quality health information and support



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*For everyone involved in health information and support*  
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