



May 27, 2022

Elizabeth Wilder, Ph.D.  
Office of Strategic Coordination – The Common Fund  
National Institutes of Health  
9000 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20892

**RE: Challenges and Opportunities in Health and Science Communication Research**

Dear Dr. Wilder:

AcademyHealth welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Office of Strategic Coordination (OSC) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) regarding opportunities and challenges in health and science communication research. We are the professional home of health services researchers, policy experts, and practitioners. As the leading organization for a field devoted to improving health and health care for all, we strongly support the production, dissemination, and use of evidence to inform policy and practice.

AcademyHealth is pleased that NIH is exploring the development of a research program to examine innovative approaches for effectively communicating health and science information to varied audiences. We fully support the need to better understand effective communication strategies, particularly in today's fragmented and decentralized information systems.

**Communication research to enhance access to, equitable uptake of, and meaningful use of evidence-based health information**

The need to ensure access to and use of evidence-based health information is critical to improving health care delivery and health outcomes. AcademyHealth encourages the development of research on health and science communication to better understand: (1) how the research community can most effectively share their findings with those who implement evidence in a range of settings (e.g. communities, clinical, health systems, policy); (2) how health care organizations and other relevant entities can most effectively convey accurate health information to patients, providers, communities, and the public at large; and (3) issues that people in communities who support evidenced based healthcare believe need to be prioritized for better communications to improve the health of those communities. Specifically, AcademyHealth proposes research in the following areas where greater understanding is needed:

- Develop and test new ways of communicating to leaders in health systems and in state and federal government about complex population and system challenges, including equity and distributive justice. This may include research on such strategies as data visualization, storytelling, and deliberation approaches, and how communities that have organized themselves around health issues effectively communicate.
- Explore why different population groups in the public may or may not have access to or use evidence-based health information. This would entail understanding both barriers and facilitators, e.g., do people know where to find accurate information, do they have the time to look for the information, is the information freely and readily available, are they able to understand the information, do they trust the information, does the information resonate with or feel relevant to them? Even if they do have access to and trust the information, are there other barriers to care and



prevention that hinder use of the information? Where evidence-based health information has been effectively communicated, what are the hallmarks of that can be replicated?

- In an example of AcademyHealth’s work on health care value, we have learned about opportunities to raise the visibility of the issue of health care value in a way that may have greater resonance with and relevance to communities. Rather than focusing on the issue of low-value care as we had previously done, AcademyHealth is transitioning our efforts to focus on increasing access to high-value, equitable care. The impetus for this transition is discussed in greater detail in this Health Affairs blog: [Time To Set Aside The Term ‘Low-Value Care’—Focus On Achieving High-Value Care For All](#).

AcademyHealth echoes NIH’s emphasis on the need to involve and consider community needs. Importantly, we encourage engaging diverse communities throughout the research process, from identification of critical research questions to communication and dissemination. By inviting community engagement into the research process, the evidence being generated is more likely to be applicable, relevant, trusted, culturally appropriate, and meaningful to end users. Similarly, the communication process itself, should be deemed as a bidirectional exchange—be it health communication messaging in a community setting, or a health care visit between a provider and patient, or how peer support groups that effectively use evidence-based information do so. Ensuring sufficient opportunities for the respective communities and patients to share comments, questions, or concerns, including building capacity for trusted community partners to interpret and communicate research findings, is crucial to addressing their health care needs.

### **Understanding and reducing the spread and impact of health misinformation**

The importance of addressing the growing epidemic of misinformation cannot be overstated, as accurate information and evidence are critical, not only for health and health care, but for a well-functioning society. AcademyHealth encourages a deep exploration into understanding how misinformation is accepted at the individual level as well as how it permeates society.

Specifically, AcademyHealth proposes research to understand: (1) who has been susceptible to misinformation and why; (2) what are the challenges of discerning misinformation from evidence, as well as uncertainty related to conflicting or lack of evidence; and (3) how to convey evidence and information in a way that will resonate with patients, communities, and the broader public, e.g., tailoring the content and format to specific groups, drawing on community insiders to co-develop and then communicate the messaging, and identifying effective past strategies that can be replicated. AcademyHealth encourages NIH to build upon the existing knowledge base and evidence around communications and trust, including science communication, public relations research, behavioral science, and political science research.

AcademyHealth recently launched a new project focused on advancing research on trust, funded by the ABIM Foundation. The project aims to highlight the importance of building trust for an effective health care system and strengthening the evidence base on trust and trust-related issues in health care. The project will explore opportunities for improving trust within health care organizations, the equity dimensions of trust, and how misinformation negatively impacts trust. Our early efforts in this area have resulted in initial ideas for a trust research agenda in collaboration with leading scholars in this domain and healthcare more broadly, which are presented in this AcademyHealth meeting report: [Developing a Trust Research Agenda](#). Examples of proposed research questions included:

- What can organizations do to address influential structural determinants of distrust, such as partisanship and politicization, structural racism, and systems of privilege in order to improve trust with patients and within their systems?

- What are longitudinal trends in trust at the population level, and what factors affect change in trust?
- What are the frames (e.g., patients, communities, institutions, or policies) for advancing trust that would have the biggest impact on health equity?

AcademyHealth also conducted a review of trust research in progress to understand the current research landscape as it relates to exploring issues of trust in health care, as discussed in this Health Affairs blog: [Trust In Health Care: Insights From Ongoing Research](#). The research review revealed an emphasis on community engagement and community-based solutions to address trust challenges. Many of the research projects that focused on gaining patient trust built upon patients' relationships with parties that were already trusted in the community, such as community health workers, church leaders, or social networks. Leveraging such relationships with trusted parties presents a promising strategy for achieving patient trust, and lessons from these nonmedical relationships may be informative for building greater trust within the medical establishment and beyond.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspectives on research for health and science communication. For further comment, clarification, or inquiry, please email Josh Caplan at [Josh.Caplan@AcademyHealth.org](mailto:Josh.Caplan@AcademyHealth.org).