

2023

# *Closing the gap with compelling healthcare communication*

*Healthcare communication is failing to fulfil its purpose. Without change, the gap between people's actual health and their healthiest possible self will continue to grow.*

*Ahead of our upcoming whitepaper, this summary takes a first look into how healthcare communications must evolve in order to improve health outcomes for all.*

# What is the healthcare gap?

The distance between a person's current self and their healthiest possible self.

Despite an increase in average life expectancy, the gap may be bigger than ever, with research showing more of those extra years are spent in poor health. The reasons behind people not living their healthiest lives are vast, nuanced and complex.

As healthcare communicators in an ever-evolving world, we must be mindful of the impact that our communication has. We have a significant responsibility to inform through ethical, accurate and up-to-date information. When told through compelling communication, we have the opportunity to positively influence healthcare decisions.

**An increase in life expectancy should be seen as a positive; but what does it mean for us if those added years are spent in poor health?**

## Why the gap exists

### Imperfect decision making

**By assuming our audiences will understand our message and make lasting behaviour changes as a result of us simply communicating the latest health information and providing access to the right treatments, we fail to acknowledge the imperfect nature of human decision making.**

In an ideal world, we may all look to exercise more, reduce our alcohol intake and eat better, but our personal preferences, biases and individual lifestyles often form a barrier to us being our healthiest selves. Altering people's behaviours without restricting their choices or changing their economic incentives is known amongst behavioural scientists as 'nudging', and can significantly influence the behaviour and decision making of both individuals and groups.<sup>2</sup>

**“The belief that you can communicate without influencing people through some level of unconscious bias, is an illusion.”<sup>1</sup>**

Richard Thaler

Information

# overload



*As healthcare communicators, we have a collective responsibility to overcome barriers to effective decision making with communication that cuts through our individual biases and the noise of the information overload we are all subject to each day.*

*As helpful as 'nudging' is in positively altering our behaviour, if the information being shared with us is inaccurate or overwhelming in its frequency, detail, tone, or channel, our ability to make clear decisions can become clouded.*

*The World Health Organization (WHO) has labelled our era of health misinformation as an 'infodemic', and the Office of the US Surgeon General declared it as a significant public health challenge.<sup>3,4</sup>*

*Our ability to sift through this information is affected by health literacy. Defined by the CDC as the degree to which individuals are able to find, understand and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others, organisations have an equal responsibility to equitably enable individuals to do just that.<sup>5</sup>*

*In a world where a wealth of advisory and educational information is just the click of a button away, how can we ensure equality of access and understanding?*

The role of pharma as

# healthcare communicators



*Significant accountability sits with the pharmaceutical industry when it comes to optimising healthcare decision making through communication. It was estimated in 2016 that medical marketers spent approximately:*

**\$20 billion**  
*speaking directly to physicians*

**80% of physicians**  
*have a direct industry relationship<sup>6,7</sup>*

*Our role as healthcare communicators is not just to inform, but to positively influence.*

*Keep an eye out for our upcoming **whitepaper** to learn more about how we can help to **close the gap**.*

*Explore more of our thought leadership by visiting the [media lab](#).*



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