

Strategies for Improving Public Understanding of FDA-Regulated Products...Why Should We Care, and What Might We Do?

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Rethinking Clinical Trials Grand Rounds

NIH Pragmatic Trials Collaboratory

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The *Strategies* Report: Development Process

Commissioner Califf asked the Reagan-Udall Foundation for the FDA to conduct research and consult with experts to better understand how consumers find, consume, and perceive health information—especially regarding FDA-regulated products¹

From January to September 2023, the Foundation conducted an in-depth research process, including:



Literature review



Polling



Listening sessions



Individual interviews



**Roundtable
conversations**

This research yielded our report that provides a set of 5 observations, 16 potential strategies, and > 40 potential tactics for the FDA to consider

¹ The Reagan-Udall Foundation for the FDA is an independent 501(c)(3) organization created by Congress to advance the mission of the Agency.

Why Should We Care?

The digital health information environment and limited public trust in government institutions represent pressing challenges for the FDA

The spread of misinformation has accelerated, in part because more people than ever are accessing health information on the internet and via social media¹

FDA Commissioner Dr. Robert Califf has highlighted that the growing problem of misinformation undermines confidence in science and public health institutions²

8 in 10

Americans seek health-related information each year³

73%

Find this information on the internet and social media⁴

¹ Romeo, John. "[Opinion] Disinformation Is a Rising Tide. Here's How to Address It." World Economic Forum, Oliver Wyman, <https://bit.ly/3Kae47G>.

² FDA Commissioner Robert M. Califf, M.D., M.A.C.C. "Remarks by Commissioner Robert Califf to the 2023 Food and Drug Law Institute (FDLI) Annual Conference," May 17, 2023. <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/speeches-fda-officials/remarks-commissioner-robert-califf-2023-food-and-drug-law-institute-fdli-annual-conference-05172023>.

³ Pasquetto, Irene V, et al. Misinfo Rx, A Toolkit for Healthcare Providers, https://misinfoRx.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/hghi_Misinfo_Rx_NEW_v22-003.pdf. Accessed 26 Sept. 2023.

⁴ Ibid.

Findings

Clear, consistent communication, both to consumers directly and via media channels, is critical to the FDA's mission to protect and promote public health

Consumers trust policy—and the scientific evidence on which it is based—if communicated to them properly

Sound science, sound policy, and sound communication are each fundamental to the Agency's success

Executing many of the strategies outlined in this report will require additional investment of resources and time by the FDA and its partners



Key Themes

“Prebunk” health misinformation

The FDA has an opportunity to take a more proactive approach to anticipating, listening for, spotting, and defusing health misconceptions before they escalate

Deliver credible information to consumers

The FDA can leverage more communications channels, messengers, and mediums to reach the public

Tone matters

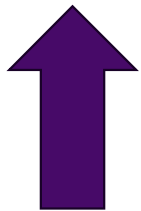
To build trust, the FDA must approach communications with an emphasis on clarity and humility

Everyone at the FDA—not just professional communicators—has a role to play in improving public understanding of FDA-regulated products

Observation 1: What is that FDA does?

There is a **lack of understanding**, particularly among consumers, about the FDA's mission, responsibilities, and authority. Misconceptions abound about the FDA's regulatory role and processes in food, drugs and biologics, cosmetics, devices, veterinary products, and tobacco product oversight. Most consumers only think about the FDA in the context of **responding to a crisis**, rather than ensuring the safety, efficacy and security of products they use on a regular basis. There is a need for clear, simple communications explaining the FDA's role for consumers, patients, and other audiences.

Potential Strategies



- Increase direct-to-consumer education, emphasizing the scientific rigor behind, and the reasons for, FDA's regulatory processes
- Collect, analyze, and use information about consumer use of FDA's website
- Increase interaction with media

Observation 2: Information vacuums breed misunderstanding

Health rumors or misconceptions can **spread rapidly** in the **absence of credible information**. In addition to more deliberate initial communication, the FDA should be more proactive in listening for, spotting, and addressing misconceptions before they escalate.

Potential Strategies



- “Prebunk” health misinformation
- Collaborate with other organizations (within and beyond government)
- Monitor and respond to misunderstandings

Observation 3: Communication clarity, and consistency, matters

From consumers to clinicians to media, key audiences have identified **a need for the FDA to communicate more clearly**. Stakeholders saw an opportunity for every component of the Agency to align around a more **understandable and consistent tone of voice**. Addressing this challenge will help the FDA—and the media covering the Agency—to communicate more effectively about health topics.

Potential Strategies



- Adopt a consistent, fact-based tone
- Use concise, digestible, plain-language approaches
- Use story-telling and personal narratives

Observation 4: Health care professionals are trusted messengers, but they need information

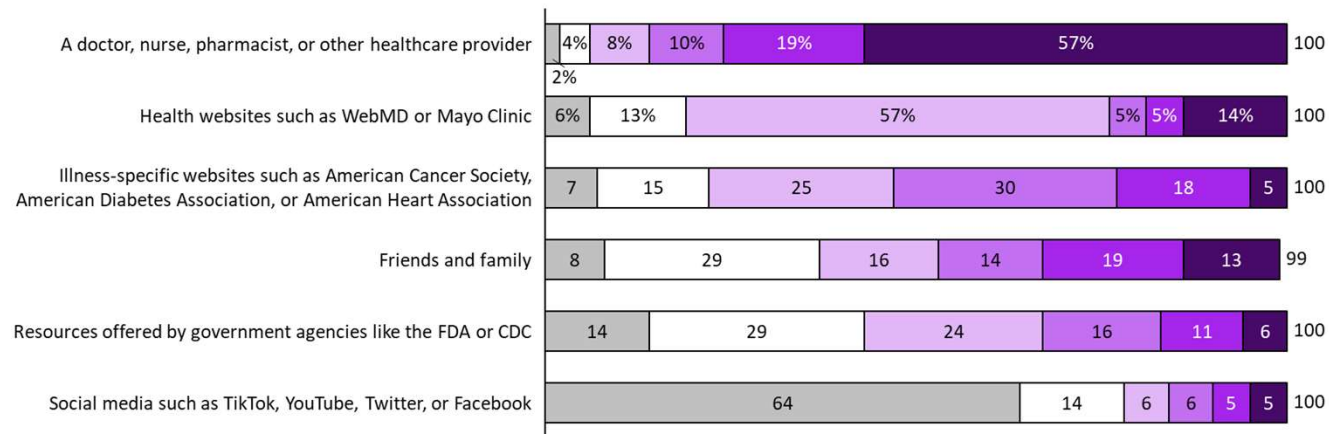
Health care professionals are important messengers, because consumers are more likely to trust them and rate them as useful sources of information³¹ than they are other health messengers, including government agencies. Likewise, local health officials and organizations can be effective health messengers. Yet these messengers report **not having easy access to necessary information and resources from the FDA** to play this role well.

Among those surveyed, 57% ranked healthcare providers as the most useful source of health information, far more than any other source.

Most useful 2 3 4 5 6 – Least useful

Potential Strategy

- Increase regular communication with health care professionals



N = 1,007 Voters in the 2024 Likely Electorate nationwide, fielded March 27-29, 2023
Source: Echelon Insights March 2023 Omnibus Poll

Observation 5: Consistent, multi-channel messages resonate

Consumers have an easier time **trusting and understanding** health information if they hear it **consistently from multiple sources**. The FDA can do more to support consistent messaging across stakeholder groups.

Potential Strategies



- Collaborate with many partners (across and outside government)
- Leverage communications expertise across FDA
- Communicate creatively (not just with words...)
- Align multi-channel source material before announcements

Key Themes (Reminder!)

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Tone matters

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Thank you