SIMPLE AUDIENCE RESEARCH:
a guide

The Health Foundation

Understanding who your audiences are, and their perspective on your project, could be vital to your project's communications.

You may consider doing some research to understand more about the audiences you are targeting in your communications. The following kinds of research may be relevant to your communications:

Demographic

Demographics define population characteristics, such as age, gender, race and income. For example, demographic research may be available via sources such as the Office for National Statistics that tells you the age, gender and race groups of the majority of people with a certain condition, or within a certain role in the health sector.

Attitudinal/behavioural

This kind of research seeks insight into target audiences' attitudes towards, and behaviours around, a given subject. It is often conducted using methods such as 'focus groups' (groups of people invited to discuss a given topic, with the results and key themes recorded) or even one-to-one interviews.

Proposition or message testing

A means of testing whether communications materials in development are eliciting the required reaction and response from a target audience. Instructions on how to conduct this kind of research are included in this briefing.

Free sources and tools

Do not let a lack of budget deter you from research. Listed below are some established free-to-use sources and tools for gaining audience insight.

Sources of information about the UK population:

- **ONS** – Office for National Statistics. A wealth of data on the UK population with a dedicated section on health and social care.

- **Data.gov.uk** – Brings together data from central government departments and a number of public bodies and local authorities in one searchable website.

- **Neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk** – The locally focused part of the ONS.

- **Natcen.ac.uk** – A research agency that offers open access to a wide range of data, including the British Social Attitudes Report.

See the full Communications in health care improvement toolkit at www.health.org.uk/commskit

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Research services and sources of guidance/advice:

- [Survey Monkey](#) – Free, online research survey service. Helps you to create questionnaires, format them in professional templates, send them out and then analyse the results.

- [A DIY guide for the non-expert researcher](#) from the ICG (Independent Consultants' Group). Includes topics like how to write a questionnaire and when to use online surveys.

Methodology for testing messages:

1 Recruit a small number of people (at least two from each target audience) to help. Ask them for 30 minutes of their time.

2 Ensure you have the correct contact details and set a time/date for a 30 minute phone call.

3 Put your test messages on a PowerPoint document, one message per slide (maximum of 10 messages).

4 Send the PowerPoint document with test messages to your research subjects by email, with a note asking them not to look at it until you call them.

5 At the appointed call time ask them to open the PowerPoint document and to pause on the first test message.

6 Taking one message/slide at a time, ask them to:

    a) take a minute to read it (allow them time and silence to do this)
    b) give you their immediate reaction to what is written
    c) tell you if there are any phrases/words or ideas in it that they like
    d) tell you if there are any phrases/words or ideas they do not like.

7 Collate the results of each call. Note common themes emerging on what works/does not work.

8 Adapt your messages accordingly.