



PIF Health and Digital Literacy Survey

Executive summary

2025
/26

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**Patient
Information
Forum**

Introduction

This report outlines the results of our 2025/6 survey of health organisations. It sets out progress on the crucial areas of health literacy and digital inclusion since our last survey in 2022/3.

The results give some cause for optimism but equal cause for concern. They also evidence a growing sector divide.

Four in 10 organisations now have a health literacy policy in place or in development. This compares to 3 in 10 in 2023. But only 7 in 10 organisations are assessing the equalities impact of digital services. This is a drop from 8 in 10 in 2022/23.

Our last survey identified susceptibility to misinformation as a key challenge for people with lower health literacy. This concern was amplified in 2025/6, with new artificial intelligence (AI) tools and social media algorithms fueling the spread of misinformation, particularly in relation to medicines.

This increases the challenges for everyone trying to use information to manage their health and take part in shared decision making. But the risks are greater for people with lower health literacy who already have a reduced trust in health services and regulated sources of information.

This report makes the case for a renewed focus on health literacy, digital inclusion and trusted information signposting to avoid widening pre-existing health inequity in the midst of an infodemic.

Sue Farrington, Chair, PIF

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Findings and survey data can be found in the full report at pifonline.org.uk	

Expert panel

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Executive summary

The 2025/6 survey is the fourth periodic survey carried out by PIF on action by health organisations on health and digital literacy.

Survey respondents



93% produce information in house

44% have information teams of up to 5 people

Health literacy

41% have a health literacy policy in place or in development

up from 33% in 2023

The number of organisations with a health literacy policy in place stood at 26% with 15% in development – 41% in total compared to a total of 33% in 2022/23.

This is significant progress since 2019 when the number of organisations with a policy stood at just 13%. However, progress is slower in the NHS where the total stands at 30% compared to 47% in the charity sector.

Digital inequalities

The number of organisations assessing equalities impact of digital services was 68%, down from 80% in 2022/3.

80% of charities considered the equalities impact of digital services compared to 48% of NHS organisations. This is very disappointing given the emphasis in the NHS plan on a 'digital by default NHS'.

Health policy

Health inequalities and the shift to a digital-first NHS were seen as the policy areas most impacted by low health and digital literacy.

Confidence in a digital-first NHS as a force for inclusion is low, with only 1 in 3 expressing confidence. Confidence was higher among charities – 35% compared to 22% of respondents from NHS organisations.

Top success factors for a digital-first NHS were:

- Improving media literacy and digital skills.
- Providing integrated digital services for users across health and social care.
- Signposting trusted information.

The majority of respondents in both sectors agreed that the ability to access digital health information and services should be considered a 'health vital sign' – NHS 74%, charity 60%.

The impact of standards

PIF TICK-certified organisations performed well across sectors, with information production processes designed to meet people's health literacy needs and promote digital inclusion.



Recommendations

Our recommendations for 2026 focus on making the creation of health and digital literacy-friendly organisations "business as usual". They focus on taking what works and sharing it across the four national systems of the UK. They align with the Health Inclusivity Index [expert statement on health literacy](#).

1. Implement national health literacy policies 1.

The governments of the four nations must put health literacy at the heart of health policy. This will ensure the development of a health literacy-friendly NHS people can navigate with confidence.

A national framework for measuring the impact of interventions should be developed in partnership with patients.

Key outcomes measured should be:

- Reductions in health inequity.
- Greater equity in access to screening and vaccination.
- Better patient experience.
- Reduced costs to the system.



2. Enshrine the right to health information 2.

Health information must be delivered as a core part of patient care.

- The NHS Content Standard and Accessible Information Standard should be mandatory for NHS services.
- Signposting to information and support provided by PIF TICK-certified organisation should be embedded across NHS services as an expansion of Diagnosis Connect.
- The PIF TICK should be promoted to organisations as a tool to make the creation of health and digital literacy-friendly information "business as usual".

3. Dedicated leadership at board level 3.

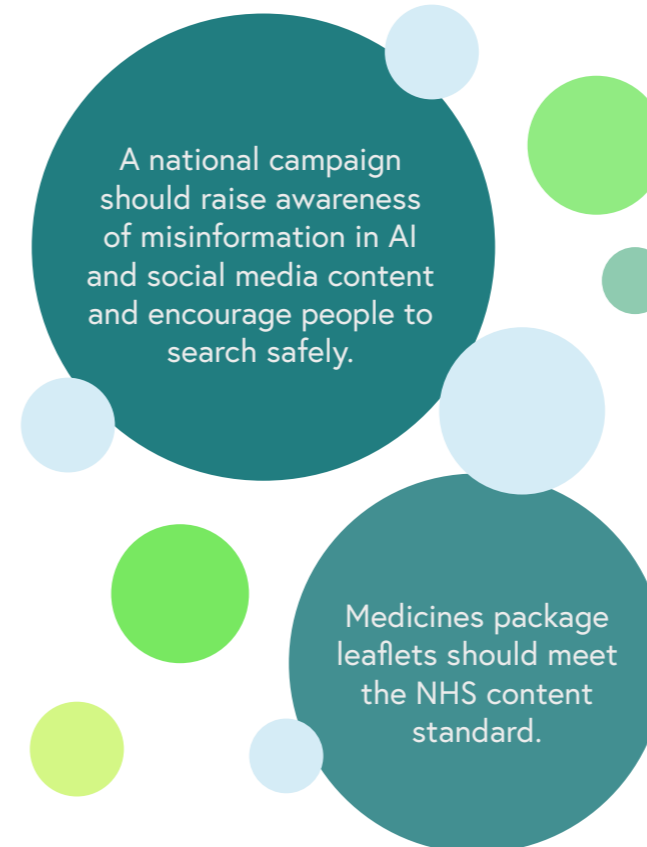
Every NHS organisation should have a board level lead for health and digital literacy. This responsibility should sit alongside diversity and inclusion and health inequality. The lead should be responsible for:

- Delivering the right to health information and creating a health and digital literacy-friendly service.
- Ensuring national standards for information are implemented throughout the NHS.
- Ensuring people have a consistent experience of care.
- Ensuring decision support tools are provided as part of consent processes.
- Providing training to staff to deliver information and support as a core part of care.

4. Tackle health misinformation 4.

A cross-sector approach is required to tackle medicines misinformation.

- A national campaign should raise awareness of misinformation in AI and social media content and encourage people to search safely.
- Medicines package leaflets should meet the NHS content standard, and this review should be completed alongside the MHRA's consultation on e-PIL (electronic patient information leaflet).
- A central portal should contain lay summaries of the Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC) for all medicines so people can understand more easily the treatment options available to them.
- Regulations on the promotion of medicines should not prevent health charities, health professionals and manufacturers from challenging medicines misinformation with evidence-based content.



5. Equalities impact of digital tools 5.

A requirement for a digital-by-default NHS must include a safety net. All NHS organisations should:

- Have a legal responsibility to consider the equality impact of digital tools and provide a safety net for people who are digitally excluded.
- Record the inability to access digital services independently, safely and confidently as a health 'vital sign' in health and care records.
- Support the development of digital skills and information literacy through cross sector partnerships with public libraries, schools and other services.

44% of organisations have signed PIF's Health and Digital Literacy Charter, which calls on organisations to become health literacy-friendly.

Join us

PIF is the independent UK membership body for people working in health information and support. We also run the only UK-wide quality mark for health information – the PIF TICK.

PIF represents more than 300 organisations across the NHS, voluntary, academic, freelance and commercial sectors. Our expert guidance on the production of high-quality health information supports an improved healthcare experience for patients and the public.

I think your organisation is brilliant and you are doing a great job. You really care about what you do.

PIF member

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