

# Comments of the Medical Library Association to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Regarding the Healthy People 2030 Objectives January 15, 2019

The Medical Library Association (MLA) strongly supports the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion's efforts to coordinate the national agenda for improving health and preventing disease through its Healthy People initiative. In accordance with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) [solicitation](https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/About-Healthy-People/Development-Healthy-People-2030/Public-Comment) (<https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/About-Healthy-People/Development-Healthy-People-2030/Public-Comment>) for written comments on the proposed objectives for Healthy People 2030, the Medical Library Association is providing feedback on objectives related to the creation, distribution, and accessibility of timely and evidence-based health information, designed for health care providers, their patients, and the general public.

According to the [Healthy People 2030 Framework](https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/About-Healthy-People/Development-Healthy-People-2030/Framework) (<https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/About-Healthy-People/Development-Healthy-People-2030/Framework>), "Healthy People priorities are those aspects of health that are the most critical to overall health and well-being and can be improved using our available knowledge." It is the position of the Medical Library Association (MLA) that reliable access to trustworthy and understandable health information is such an aspect. The Framework agrees, citing health literacy as a requirement for achieving health and well-being in its fourth Foundational Principle and listing the attainment of health literacy as one of its Overarching Goals. However, despite the stated importance of health literacy, the phrase "health literacy" never appears in the list of Healthy People 2030 objectives.

The Health Communication/Health Information Technology (HC/HIT) Core Objectives related to patient/provider communication (HC/HIT-2030-01/02), patient decision-making (HC/HIT-2030-03), and patient social support (HC/HIT-2030-07) are well-chosen, and track important factors related to the larger concept of health literacy. MLA fully supports their inclusion in Healthy People 2030. What these objectives do not measure is how well people understand the healthcare process and their role in it, a prerequisite for objectives like patient involvement in health care decision-making. MLA recommends expanding HC/HIT Core Objective 2030-02 to include a measure of a patient's understanding of their care using as their data source

- Medical Expenditure Panel Survey ([MEPS](https://meps.ahrq.gov/survey_comp/hc_survey/paper_quest/2016/2016_SAQ_ENG.pdf)) [items 13 & 16](https://meps.ahrq.gov/survey_comp/hc_survey/paper_quest/2016/2016_SAQ_ENG.pdf) ([https://meps.ahrq.gov/survey\\_comp/hc\\_survey/paper\\_quest/2016/2016\\_SAQ\\_ENG.pdf](https://meps.ahrq.gov/survey_comp/hc_survey/paper_quest/2016/2016_SAQ_ENG.pdf))
- the Health Information National Trends Survey ([HINTS](https://hints.cancer.gov/view-questions-topics/all-hints-questions.aspx)) [items](https://hints.cancer.gov/view-questions-topics/all-hints-questions.aspx) (<https://hints.cancer.gov/view-questions-topics/all-hints-questions.aspx>) related to understanding health information (found in the Food and Medical Products, Health Communication, Numeracy, and Patient-provider Communication sections), in addition to
- MEPS items 8, 9, 10, and 11, which appear to be the current data sources for this objective.

If this makes the objective too broad for the purposes of Healthy People, then MLA recommends creating a new objective for this purpose.

As mentioned above, reliable access to trustworthy and understandable health information is a critical aspect of overall health and well-being, and one that can be improved using the knowledge (and technology) that we have today. In light of this, the Medical Library Association also recommends that Developmental Objectives HC/HIT-2030-D01 and HC/HIT-2030-D07 be moved from Developmental to Core Objectives. These two objectives, focus on improving the proportion of patients and providers who have access to the health information they need when they need it, and meet all [5 criteria](#) (<https://www.healthypeople.gov/sites/default/files/ObjectiveSelectionCriteria508.pdf>) for the selection of Core Objectives. The Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS), currently used as a data source for several other HC/HIT Core Objectives, has several sections with items relevant to HC/HIT-2030-D01, including the Food and Medical Products Information, Health Communication, Internet Use, Medical Research and Medical Records, and Patient-provider sections. Data from these regularly-administered surveys could provide the baseline data and the measure for improvement for HC/HIT-2030-D01.

If the data sources listed here are not considered sufficient to meet the requirements for Core Objectives, Healthy People 2030 could create Core Objectives to “increase the number of nationally representative, population-based surveys that collect data on health literacy status/health information access”, similar to core objectives LGBT-2030-01 and LGBT-2030-02.

To summarize, the Medical Library Association recommends:

- Including language related to patients’ understanding of their care in HC/HIT Core Objective 2030-02 (or creating a separate Core Objective for this purpose).
- Promoting Objectives HC/HIT-2030-D01 and HC/HIT-2030-D07 from Developmental Objectives to Core Objectives.

The Healthy People initiative has been a consistent source of direction and inspiration for the members of the Medical Library Association for decades. From using and promoting the [Structured Evidence Queries](#) ([https://phpartners.org/ph\\_public/hp2020](https://phpartners.org/ph_public/hp2020)) created in partnership with the National Library of Medicine (NLM), to supporting our local area health education centers and public health departments, health science librarians have supported the pursuit of Healthy People objectives in a variety of ways, and look forward to continuing that support to 2030 and beyond.

References:

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