

SURGEON GENERAL'S SUPPORT TO ADDRESS HEALTH MISINFORMATION

The documents published by the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General – the *Advisory on Building a Healthy Information Environment* and the *Community Toolkit for Addressing Health Misinformation* – help healthcare professionals, educators and civil society actors combat the spread of false and misleading information. Together, these documents aim to curb the dissemination of health-related misinformation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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- **Theme**
Strengthening societal resilience
- **Keyword**
Strategic communication | Media literacy | Co-operation with non-governmental organizations
- **Country**
United States

Challenge

The COVID-19 pandemic was accompanied by the rapid and global spread of health-related mis- and disinformation. Such misleading information can cause confusion, sow mistrust, and undermine public health efforts, for example by reducing peoples' willingness to be vaccinated.

Government action

In 2021, in response to the increasing spread of online health mis- and disinformation, the US Surgeon General released two publications calling attention to misinformation as a public health issue and providing recommendations for how to address the challenge.

First, the [Confronting Health Misinformation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Building a Healthy Information Environment](#) provides background information on the spread of mis- and

disinformation on health, and outlines how community leaders can address the spread of false and misleading information. It outlines action that individuals, educators, health professionals, journalists, technology platforms, researchers, foundations and governments can take to help combat the spread of health misinformation. The advisory emphasises that a whole-of-society effort is needed to maintain a healthy information environment.

For example, it promotes the provision of skills to the public to identify misinformation, the expansion of research to understand the threat, and investment in long-term efforts to build resilience against health misinformation. Advisories are typically reserved for significant public health challenges that require immediate awareness, highlighting the importance and urgency of this issue.

The Surgeon General's office also published the [Community Toolkit for Addressing Health Misinformation](#) in 2021. This toolkit focuses on helping healthcare professionals, educators, faith leaders, and civil society actors engage and better communicate with the public around health misinformation. The toolkit explains what is meant by health misinformation and provides concrete examples, activities and strategies to help individuals understand, identify and stop its spread.

Relevance for policymakers

- Together, these two documents seek to inform the public about the risks of health misinformation generally and provide examples of how to identify and slow the spread of mis- and disinformation narratives.
- The documents stress the importance of working across society and ensuring that messages and messengers are appropriate for intended audiences. By providing background and guidance, the government seeks to empower trusted messengers within communities to help ensure that accurate and relevant information is amplified and reaches all segments of society.

Further information

[Health Misinformation — Current Priorities of the U.S. Surgeon General \(hhs.gov\)](#)