

# Health inclusivity, agency and empowerment: Developing solutions to help pharmacists drive better health outcomes

Report from an international insight board

2023



FIP Development Goals



# Colophon

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## About this report

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good health and well-being) seeks to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”. Achieving this goal and universal health coverage cannot be achieved without equitable and inclusive access to health care, in our case, pharmaceutical care.

A symposium with the theme “Health inclusivity and the role of pharmacy” took place during FIP's 80th World Congress of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in Seville, Spain, in 2022. Equitable and inclusive access to health care is necessary if universal health coverage SDG3 are to be achieved. With the belief that pharmacists can meaningfully influence and improve health outcomes through inclusivity and inclusion, expert speakers from *The Economist*, leading pharmacists and academics discussed how pharmacy can play a leading role in driving health inclusivity.

Following this symposium, FIP hosted a roundtable to which experts from around the world were invited to delve deeper into the issues raised during the symposium. Together, they aimed to discuss and find solutions to help pharmacists continue to drive improved patient health outcomes through health inclusivity, agency and empowerment.

The main questions that were addressed during the roundtable were:

1. What can the health inclusivity index tell us about agency and empowerment?
2. What is the relationship between health inclusivity and self-care? How can the latter be enabled via the former in pharmacy?
3. How can inaccessibility, bias and prejudice hinder health inclusivity in pharmacy?
4. What tools and solutions can help pharmacists drive improved patient health outcomes?

This report summarises the key insights that were shared by roundtable participants in response to these questions.

## Roundtable participants

Participants		
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Observers (from Haleon)	
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It should be noted that the views expressed during the roundtable are the opinions of the participants based on their expertise and experience. They do not represent the views of member organisations or FIP policy or positions, although they may build on existing positions and statements.

# 1. The health inclusivity index, agency and empowerment

Health inclusivity is the process of removing the personal, social, cultural and political barriers that prevent individuals and communities from experiencing good physical and mental health, and a life fully realised. With a motive of driving health inclusivity, The Economist in partnership with Haleon developed a health inclusivity index which aimed to engage key opinion leaders, facilitate dialogue with policymakers and healthcare professionals, and ultimately spur action towards promoting health inclusivity.

The health inclusivity index assessed the level of health inclusivity in 40 countries by analysing data across three domains of indicators, namely:

- Health in the society — this domain focused on the strategies and policies put in place to explore the social and cultural determinants of health, and to understand the factors used by countries to address the inequalities.
- Inclusive health systems — this domain addressed the structures and infrastructural systems in place to ensure a country has adopted universal health coverage and makes service delivery more accessible and inclusive. It also investigates the efforts employed to expand access to health and care services.
- People and community empowerment — this domain focused on efforts to empower individuals and communities as navigators and agents of their own health. It considers concepts such as the availability of translation services and the incorporation of peer support or community companions in health care.

During the roundtable, participants discussed how the health inclusivity index can affect agency and empowerment, and how it can be utilised to enable self-care.

The discussion began with participants emphasising the need to understand the health inclusivity index better, but also to define what “agency” and “empowerment” mean in health care as they are two very broad concepts covering a variety of significant areas. “Agency” refers to the degree of autonomy and control that patients have over their own health and their ability to make informed decisions about their health. Therefore, when patients have agency, they are more likely to be empowered to make decisions and take actions to improve their health.

To better understand the health inclusivity index, participants also highlighted the importance of understanding how the index was designed, how its indicators were developed, and how inclusive it is in practice. For the index to be fully inclusive, it requires to be designed with input from experts from different levels and from different regions, countries, communities and sectors across health systems. It needs to take into consideration that while measuring health inclusivity, outliers can be as important to the results as the average data. Participants also expressed the need to have more time to explore the richness of the topic of health inclusivity but agreed that having the data that the index provides can be helpful, especially at a pharmacy level.

During the roundtable discussions, matters of health equity and access to health care were consistently raised and linked to health inclusivity and the index. Participants mentioned that although exclusion is often unintentional, it can have a negative effect on health equity. Even in countries that aim to be inclusive, some population groups are still left out and do not have equitable access to care. These disparities in equity were exacerbated with the COVID-19 pandemic. For that reason, the applicability of the index also differs and must be tailored to match the setting it is used in. It is therefore important to realise that not all countries, or parts within the same country, have the same aspects that need to be measured by the index, and that different countries have different types of inequities, especially those with highly



diverse populations. To ensure that inclusivity and, eventually, equity are achieved, it is crucial to tackle the issue not only at a national level, but also to include pharmacists because of their access to and knowledge of their local communities, as well as all other stakeholders involved.

## 2. Enablers of health inclusivity and self-care

During discussions on the relationship between health inclusivity and self-care, participants drew attention to the importance of self-care and the positive impact it can have on patient health outcomes, particularly regarding minor ailments. Self-care empowers patients to make better decisions about their health and to stay informed about the best plans and methods for a healthier lifestyle.

Various factors that could enable self-care were identified, particularly in pharmacy. However, an important concept was highlighted: despite the apparent simplicity of these factors, self-care is not a standardised solution that can be applied in all situations, and differences must be considered.

These factors, expanded upon below, are health literacy, trust in the pharmacy workforce and healthcare professionals' awareness of their role.

Health literacy, which is an important element in health inclusivity, was identified as the main enabler of self-care. Providing health information, knowledge, and skills to use that information is crucial to improving health literacy and, therefore, self-care. This is particularly important in the case of minor ailments and the use of over-the-counter medicines, where pharmacists are key players in improving health literacy.

Trust in the pharmacy profession was identified as a critical factor that enables self-care. When patients have trust in their pharmacists, they are more likely to communicate their health needs and seek advice on health matters. Better trust and communication between pharmacists and patients are key to delivering clear information and instructions about medicines usage, ultimately promoting better medication adherence, informed decision-making and improved self-care practices. Through effective communication with their patients, pharmacists, therefore, play a pivotal role not only in improving the health literacy of their patients but also in empowering them to take an active role in self-care.

The awareness of all healthcare professionals, including pharmacists, of their role in improving self-care and equity was another key enabler identified. If their awareness of the impact they can have on health equity is raised and they are provided with the skills and knowledge needed to effect change, healthcare professionals can better understand their roles in improving health equity. This can be achieved through professional education and training on equity-related matters, collaboration with organisations to promote health equity, and involvement in policy-making decisions related to equity. Empowering healthcare professionals can have a positive ripple effect, as they can, in turn, empower their patients and communities.

It was emphasised that all these factors, along with others that were identified, can be addressed together and not necessarily as separate enablers of health inclusivity, self-care and health equity.

## 3. Barriers to health inclusivity: inaccessibility, bias and prejudice

During the roundtable discussion, barriers to health inclusivity were identified at different levels, including the whole system level, healthcare providers (including pharmacists) level and the individual level.

### 3.1 Whole system level

Participants highlighted that, at the whole system level, health inclusivity is not always given priority by governments and is often seen as solely the responsibility of healthcare providers. In addition, the people who are most impacted by policies and decisions are rarely involved in informing the policy-making process. More so, most of the health issues are lived outside the formal healthcare system, which brings to the fore the huge economic cost of ignoring health inclusivity. For that reason, addressing health inclusivity requires the involvement of all stakeholders, including governments, healthcare providers and society. To achieve this, a whole-system approach is necessary, ensuring that all stakeholders participate in setting policies, monitoring progress, and making improvements to promote health inclusivity. For example, policies that increase access to healthcare services and support the healthcare workforce to be more available to patients were mentioned.

### 3.2 Healthcare providers level

At the healthcare providers level, participants noted that healthcare providers may sometimes assume that their patients have sufficient knowledge about their health conditions and needs, which can hinder efforts to achieve health inclusivity. Healthcare providers, including pharmacists, should take the initiative to assess whether patients fully understand their conditions and how to use their medicines, and whether they have all the necessary health information they need.

The lack of equitable access to education on addressing health equity and inclusivity for healthcare providers was also identified as a barrier. It is crucial to ensure that all health professionals have access to country-level education and training to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to improve health inclusivity.

### 3.3 Individual level

At the individual, or patient level, participants emphasised the importance of patient-centred approaches that consider the unique requirements of each patient. Different patients have different needs. This is particularly true for diverse populations in which people have different experiences, perspectives and needs as well as different cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, races, genders, sexual orientations, abilities and socioeconomic statuses. Vulnerability goes beyond putting a label on people: it involves realising that at different times and due to several complex factors, an individual can become vulnerable. For this reason, understanding people's life situations is vital for devising ways of dealing with these issues. These barriers often prevent people from taking responsibility for their everyday health. Sometimes, these barriers are exacerbated by labels and stigma put on these people and how they are treated. Therefore, to effectively serve and support diverse populations, it is important to recognise and understand their unique differences and tailor our approaches accordingly. Addressing the specific needs of different groups and providing culturally appropriate and linguistically accessible healthcare services can help overcome this challenge. The example

of vulnerable refugee populations who may speak the same language as others but have different cultures, values and health practices that require consideration was highlighted during the discussion.

## 4. Tools and solutions

What tools and solutions can help pharmacists drive improved patient health outcomes?

### 4.1 Utilising existing tools and evidence

Prior to discussing the development and utilisation of tools to enhance patient health outcomes, participants emphasised the significance of avoiding reinventing the wheel and leveraging existing tools. Using best practices as a guide for determining which tools can be utilised to improve health outcomes for individual patients is crucial. Numerous studies have already been conducted and efforts made to develop various types of tools, and evaluating the impact of these interventions on health outcomes could yield valuable insights into which tools are effective and which are not.

### 4.2 Designing new tools and interventions

When developing new interventions and tools for improving patient health outcomes and inclusivity, it is crucial to adopt a whole-system approach and engage all stakeholders. Through obtaining input from various stakeholders, it is possible to gain valuable perspectives and identify critical areas that could have been missed. Co-designing these tools with patients' input, for example, can provide insight into what is significant to them and how their health outcomes could be improved. At the national level, on the other hand, it is essential to evaluate how inclusive these tools are and whether these tools or interventions could be made accessible to healthcare providers across the country or not.

During the roundtable discussion, an example was brought up regarding the Australian National Disability Insurance Scheme. One expert noted that, despite being educated and literate, they found the scheme to be challenging to comprehend and access. This expert mentioned that individuals with lower health literacy were provided with guidance from a navigator to understand the scheme, while those who believed they had literacy levels sufficient for them not to require assistance often struggled to access the scheme. This example emphasises the significance of designing solutions for better inclusivity that are accessible and understandable not only for individuals with low health literacy but also for those with higher literacy levels.

### 4.3 Measuring health inclusivity and literacy

To improve health inclusivity, it is crucial for healthcare providers, including pharmacists, to evaluate the health literacy and inclusivity levels of their patients before implementing interventions and tools. Along with developing tools to improve health inclusivity and outcomes, it is vital also to create tools that measure and evaluate these areas. This approach enables better decision-making on which interventions and tools would be most effective in various circumstances and tracks the effectiveness of the interventions used, allowing for further improvement.

An example of such a tool was mentioned whereby a set of questions is provided to patients to help them determine what health information they know or do not know and what information they need to be asking their healthcare providers for. This allows pharmacist to have a better understanding of their patients' health literacy levels and to tailor their services to match the needs of their patients.

## 4.4 Communicating with patients

Many participants highlighted communication as a crucial solution. They suggested taking the time to individually listen to each patient to gauge their level of health literacy and comprehend their concerns and requirements. This is pivotal to promoting health inclusivity. Patient feedback can provide invaluable insights into their comprehension of their conditions and treatments. Tailoring the questions patients are asked helps pharmacists understand a patient's needs and customise the services provided to them. Moreover, it can make patients feel at ease while discussing their health problems and reinforce their trust in the pharmacist. This is particularly relevant for patients from different backgrounds who can have difficulties understanding medical terminology or expressing their health concerns due to cultural or linguistic barriers. Therefore, acknowledging the cultural barriers and effective communication can bridge this gap and facilitate better understanding and trust between the patient and healthcare provider.

Through effective communication with patients, pharmacists can acquire precise information on whether they are using the proper medicines at the correct dosages and following their treatment plan. This enables pharmacists to provide necessary guidance, potentially resulting in improved health outcomes for the patient.

One of the examples of effective communication tools mentioned was the use of pictograms or graphics to help convey information to patients with different health literacy levels. Using simple images or graphics to represent health information can help communicate the right information to patients who speak a different language or struggle to understand or remember written or verbal health information. Pictograms are therefore easy tools that can support community pharmacists in their role as educators and help them spread information to their communities, thereby advancing towards a more inclusive health system.

## 4.5 Utilising technology and digital platforms

Taking advantage of the advances in technology can support integrating health systems to provide a coordinated and comprehensive approach to healthcare delivery. For instance, IT systems can collect patient data, and enabling different healthcare providers to access it facilitates the provision of more inclusive and better patient-centred health services. Enabling the sharing of patient records among healthcare providers can save pharmacists time in comprehending a patient's condition and customising services to their needs.

Participants also mentioned that digital platforms can facilitate the spread of health information to individuals who face barriers in accessing healthcare services, especially vulnerable communities and those living in remote areas or with limited mobility. Digital platforms can also offer language options, making it easier for individuals who speak a different language to access health information. Additionally, using different social media platforms can help target different age groups within a population.

## 4.6 Educating and training pharmacists

Lastly, participants highlighted that providing educational and training programmes to pharmacists is crucial for promoting health inclusivity. Such programmes include those that equip pharmacists with the knowledge and skills to effectively use the various tools and technologies mentioned above to provide patient-centred care and empower patients to self-care for their health. Additionally, such programmes should also include guidelines and best practices to improve health inclusivity, enabling pharmacists to address the unique needs of patients from diverse backgrounds. By having access to training and educational programmes both in their pharmacy curricula and as continuing

professional development, pharmacists can stay up to date with the latest advancements in health care and develop the necessary competencies to enhance health inclusivity in their communities.

## 5. Conclusions

Our health inclusivity roundtable brought to light the importance of discussion as we move towards more inclusive and equitable health care. Discussions around the health inclusivity index have drawn attention to some of the key enablers and barriers to health inclusivity as well as what solutions and tools can be used to improve it.

The following key themes emerged from this roundtable:

Enablers of health inclusivity and self-care:

1. Health literacy
2. Trust in the pharmacy workforce
3. Healthcare professionals' awareness of their role

Barriers to health inclusivity: inaccessibility, bias, and prejudice

1. Whole system level
2. Healthcare providers' level
3. Individual/patient level

Tools and solutions:

1. Utilising existing tools and evidence
2. Designing new tools and interventions
3. Measuring health inclusivity and literacy
4. Communicating with patients
5. Utilising technology and digital platforms
6. Educating and training pharmacists

It is therefore crucial to understand that health inclusivity is a complex issue and requires a whole system approach in which all stakeholders are involved in moving towards it. It is essential to acknowledge that health inclusivity goes beyond providing healthcare services. It encompasses access to healthcare services, patient education, cultural sensitivity, health literacy and health equity. Therefore, addressing these aspects requires the involvement of multiple sectors and collaboration among them. It is only by working together and adopting a whole-system approach that we can achieve health inclusivity for all individuals, irrespective of their socio-economic status, cultural background or health condition.

FIP will ensure that it embeds the needs identified in this report into its plans for 2023 and 2024 to deliver the steps towards a health literacy strategy for pharmacy.



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