

Europeans becoming enthusiastic users of online health information

A new EU-wide survey shows that Europeans are hungry for online information about health and healthy lifestyles.

Six out of ten Europeans go online when looking for health information.



European Commission

Graph showing 6 people next to a laptop with health info

- Over 75% think the Internet is a good way of finding out more about health.
- Six out of ten Europeans go online when looking for health information (almost eight out of ten of 15-39 year-olds have done so, compared with less than a third of people aged 55 and over);
- 90% of those said that the Internet helped them to improve their knowledge about health-related topics;
- When online, people are hunting for health-related topics or to improve their lifestyle choices such as nutrition, physical activity, smoking etc.



Find the results of the Eurobarometer survey of Europeans digital health literacy and the results per country here.

Almost 90% happy with online health info

- Nearly 9 out of 10 people who looked for health information online say they were satisfied with the information they found. Of the 10% who were not satisfied, roughly half say it was not reliable (50%, 75% in LU and 12% in EE), it was commercially oriented (48%, 74% in CZ and 11% in CY), or it was not detailed enough (46%, 73% in BE, PL and 10% in MT);
- Eight out of ten surveyed said the information they found was useful (94% in UK and 53% in SI),

and easy to understand (94% in UK and 44% in SK).

- However, four out of ten people do not think the information came from a trustworthy source (11% in UK and 82% in SK).



The internet is not the only source...

- After having searched online for health-related information, respondents most commonly spoke to friends or relatives (47%, 63% in CZ and 22% in EE), or made a doctor's appointment (40%, 50% in EL and 23% in FI);
- Most people who didn't use the Internet for health information say they usually rely on their doctor for this sort of information. Four out of ten people did simply not need to look for this kind of information; a third say it's because they don't have Internet access.

Gaps between EU member states in digital health literacy

People in the NL (73%), SE (70%), and DK (70%) are more likely to have searched the Internet for health information during the past year, while in RO (47%) and MT (49%) less than half of the population use the Internet for this purpose. Europeans' digital health literacy also depends on their general level of education: while 71% of people who finished their education aged 20 or above mention having used the Internet to search for health-related information, only 23% of people who left school aged 15 or under say the same thing.

This Flash Eurobarometer was carried out in the 28 EU member states between 18-20 September 2014. Some 26,566 people were interviewed.

This survey's results will help the Commission design policies on eHealth that are focused on people's needs and requirements.

The European Commission is already funding projects to improve citizens' health literacy as well as digital skills of healthcare professionals:

IROHLA focuses on improving health literacy for the older people in Europe by taking stock of on-going health literacy activities and making use of knowledge and experience of programmes in other sectors (e.g. private and social sectors) to be applied to the health sector.

ENS4Care aims at enhancing e-skills for nurses and social care workers and will provide evidence-based clinical guidelines for the deployment of eHealth services (such as guidelines on nurse ePrescribing, ICT enabled integrated care).

CAMEI will provide the ground for IT-skilled healthcare workforce in Europe and coordinate research activities and policies with the USA and establish a network of best practices in medical education informatics.

Under Horizon 2020, the European Commission will continue to fund projects, aiming specifically at improving citizens' digital health literacy.

The importance of citizens' digital health literacy was also emphasized in the responses to the Green Paper on mHealth. The summary report of these responses will soon be published.

Background

The use of Information and Communication Technologies in healthcare ("eHealth") can empower us to better manage health and disease, improve prevention, enable more accurate diagnosis and treatment and facilitate the communication between healthcare professionals and patients. eHealth can give more equal access to healthcare while facilitating patients' access to health information.

The eHealth Action Plan 2012-2020 identified the lack of awareness of eHealth opportunities and challenges for users as one of the barriers to wider uptake of eHealth solutions. The Commission also committed to support activities to overcome this information gap. This survey has helped to measure how Europeans use the Internet and online resources to help manage their own health.

Useful links

- Read the full Eurobarometer survey report (item 404)
- eHealth on the Digital Agenda
- Green Paper on mHealth
- European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing

Related topics

eHealth, Wellbeing and Ageing

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