



Assessment of Health Canada's Communications to External Stakeholders on Marketed Health Products

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

FINAL REPORT

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français

The word "Canada" in a large, black, serif font, with a small red and white Canadian flag icon positioned above the letter "a".

## COPYRIGHT

This public opinion research presents the results of a series of in-depth stakeholder interviews conducted by Pollara Strategic Research on behalf of Health Canada. This study consisted of 81 telephone interviews with Health Canada stakeholders from across the country. The purpose of the study was to understand current perceptions of stakeholders of various Health Canada communication tools related to Marketed Health Products.

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## **POLITICAL NEUTRALITY CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of Pollara Strategic Insights that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communication and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications.

Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings within the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Leigh-Bennett', written in a cursive style.

Richard Leigh-Bennett,

Vice President

Pollara Strategic Insights

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pollara Strategic Insights (Pollara) is pleased to present this report to Health Canada summarizing the results of interviews with its stakeholders regarding the Marketed Health Products Directorate's external communications.

Feedback from this research will be used to inform the refinement of Health Canada's communications to key stakeholders to better meet their information needs related to health product safety and effectiveness.

The purpose and objectives of this research were as follows:

- To undertake an assessment of Health Canada's approach to external communication to key stakeholders on issues of health product safety (for all product lines, including natural health products, non-prescription drugs, cells/tissues/organs, prescription medications, medical devices), and to develop recommendations.
- To obtain feedback from stakeholders on the existing approach, including reach, uptake, and the extent to which tools meet identified stakeholder needs. The research will also be used as an opportunity to obtain more general feedback on the communications approach used by Health Canada for issues related to health product safety.
- To provide an assessment of existing tools, and recommendations for how to enhance the approach to external communications moving forward, including proposed formats, modes of distribution, timing of issuance, and type/level of information required.
- To meet the objectives of the research, a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews (IDIs) was used to obtain feedback from key stakeholders. A total of 81 interviews were undertaken with stakeholders identified by Health Canada. They represented the following sub-groups: Health care professionals (physicians, nurses and pharmacists), government, professional associations, non-governmental organizations, patient safety / advocacy groups, and industry.

*It is important to note that qualitative research is designed to reveal a rich range of opinions and interpretations rather than to measure what percentage of the target population holds a given opinion. These results must not be used to estimate the numeric proportion or number of individuals in the population who hold a particular opinion because they are not statistically projectable.*

Key findings were:

- Virtually all stakeholders used Health Canada sources for information on marketed health products. Many participants declared both receiving and looking for information themselves on the safety of marketed health products.
- Regardless of which set of communication tools respondents identified as the one with which they were the most familiar, many of the stakeholders interviewed were at least somewhat familiar with all four categories: Guidance and Regulations, Risk Communications, Health Product Safety Information, and Transparency Initiatives.
- Health Canada was generally considered the most important source, or certainly among the most important ones, for information related to the category of communication tools selected by the respondent.
- Other important sources of information included other regulatory agencies, professional and industry associations, colleagues, internal corporate networks, subscription and specialty services, scientific literature, and manuals and compendiums.
- With respect to information directly related to the safety of marketed health products in Canada, it was suggested that even if it was found elsewhere or obtained from another source, the information referred to ultimately came from or was developed by Health Canada.
- Health Canada's website was, for the most part, said to be much less user-friendly than those in other jurisdictions.
- The quality of information within Health Canada products was considered good to excellent and there were no issues with the language used. Health Canada was given the most positive assessment with regards to perceptions of trust and having public confidence. On the other hand, timeliness was a definite issue for many, saying that Health Canada tends to lag and not be proactive in sharing information.
- The majority of the stakeholders interviewed received information from Health Canada via email. Virtually all of them preferred this approach because emails arrive in their inbox where they can be filtered, managed, filed and transferred to others.
- Those who used tools that are not pushed but rather reside on the Health Canada website somewhere (such as product monographs, various databases, guidelines and regulations) were more likely to say that they were not easy to find/access.
- The information respondents received or found in databases and on the website tended to be "the right information." Everyone who received information reported looking at it immediately or at a designated point in time, as part of their routine, usually skimming through for relevance and reading in depth when it was warranted. Virtually everyone reported that they shared some of the information they received

at one time or another.

- There was an acknowledgement, by most who have been engaging regularly with Health Canada, that the Department has been improving in the past few years with respect to clarity of information, language used in communications, and overall transparency.
- It should be noted that given the number of front-line health care providers who were part of the study and the fact that many did not regularly look at, or receive information from Health Canada directly, there were generally not a lot of “behaviour changes” as a result of such communications.
- It was recommended for Health Canada to develop a simple, streamlined and comprehensive method for stakeholders to subscribe to communications and ascertain that they will receive all of the information that is relevant to their needs.

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