

# Surveying consumers about Plain Language Summaries

## CASE STORY

### What we did



**Purpose:** Cochrane prepares Plain Language Summaries about each Cochrane Review. We tested whether hiring special plain language writers would make our Plain Language Summaries easier for healthcare consumers to understand.



**Target audience:** Healthcare consumers from around the world who read in English.

**Year:** 2020



**What we did:** 20 people from the Cochrane's Consumer Network tested Plain Language Summaries. Each person read one Summary written by a plain language writer and one Summary written by Cochrane teams. Consumers did not know who wrote the Plain Language Summaries that they read.

Consumers answered a short survey about the Summaries. The Plain Language Summary project team used the feedback to improve the way Plain Language Summaries are written.





## What we achieved

Consumers gave us practical feedback about how to improve the way we write Plain Language Summaries. They told us words and phrases they found difficult to understand. They found Summaries written by plain language writers easier to understand. As a result, we are **producing guidance** for people writing Plain Language Summaries.

## What we learnt

- **Build in time to recruit participants.** It can take time to get people interested. Be prepared to adjust your recruitment methods if you are not getting the number or type of participants you hoped.
- **Test your survey carefully.** Spend time making your survey and instructions easy to follow. Test out your survey questions with a few participants. We adjusted our survey to get more focused responses.
- **Collect demographic information.** Think about what background details to ask for so you know who is responding and which groups are not represented.
- **Only collect information that you will use.** It can be tempting to ask a lot of questions but it is better to ask only what you will use to inform your decisions or improve processes.
- **Have something to compare with.** Comparing ‘new’ Plain Language Summaries with our usual approach gave us useful information about what worked best.

*“The first evaluation round of the Plain Language Summary project provided us with the chance to stop, reflect on progress, and plan our next steps.”*

*- Plain Language Summaries team*

## Find out more



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<https://community.cochrane.org/news/cochrane-begins-project-improve-plain-language-summaries>