



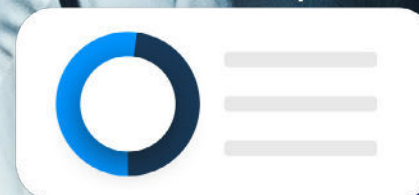
2024

GLOBAL BENCHMARK REPORT

# The State of Healthcare Customer Experience

Research Reveals Rising Demand for Trust, Ease, and Transparency in Healthcare Communications and Data Collection.

HEALTHCARE





# Introduction

Healthcare organizations (HCOs) face several challenges in 2024. Rising costs and shrinking margins paired with ongoing economic uncertainty make it more important than ever for health insurers and providers to meet or exceed member and patient expectations.

Where customer communications are concerned, HCOs still have some work to do — but with the right approach, you can capitalize on unique opportunities to make things better. Now more than ever, healthcare patients and members expect communications to be personalized, relevant and timely. They show a growing preference for mobile and web-friendly interfaces. They also expect to complete forms at their convenience, with minimal effort.

To find out what healthcare organizations can do in 2024 to earn the patient and member trust that drives retention and renewals, Smart Communications commissioned an independent research firm to survey consumers from around the world. Here's what our data revealed.

## Benchmark Report Key Findings



### Key Finding 1

Communications are Increasingly Important to Healthcare Experience and Trust



### Key Finding 2

Data Collection and Communication Practices Directly Impact Customer Loyalty



### Key Finding 3

Trust and Data Security are More Critical Than Ever in Healthcare Transactions



### Key Finding 4

Healthcare Customers Show Growing Preference for Web and Mobile Interfaces



### Key Finding 5

Consumers Demand Transparency in GenAI Use for Healthcare Communications

## Key Finding

#1

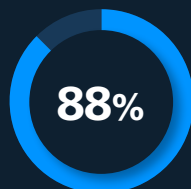


# Communications are Increasingly Important to Healthcare Experience and Trust

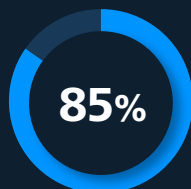
Providing communications that members and patients can easily understand, and follow, has always been critical for health insurers and providers. The importance of clear communications has even prompted regulators to act. For example, the US Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) requires healthcare communications to use “plain language,” defined by the 2010 **Plain Writing Act** as, “Writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience<sup>1</sup>. ”

While this US-focused mandate is due to the relatively low health literacy of the populations Medicare and Medicaid serve, our data supports a widespread consumer desire for clear healthcare communications both in the US and around the world. In fact, consumers place even higher importance on communications in healthcare this year compared to last year.

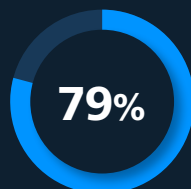
85% of customers feel communications are either very important or somewhat important to the overall customer experience, up from 81% in 2023



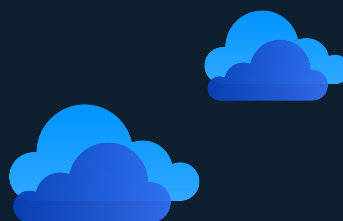
USA



APAC & UK



German-speaking



STEP 01

Member EOB:

✓ [Have a question?](#)

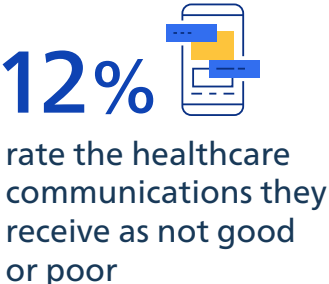
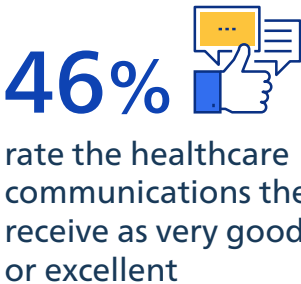






In addition to ensuring content is easy to understand and access, HCOs need to personalize communications. Today's consumers expect the same level of personalization in all areas of their life that they get with market leaders such as Amazon and Netflix. Healthcare is no exception. If anything, the sensitive, and sometimes critical, nature of what you're relaying makes it even more important.

However, our research found that HCOs are not doing a great job of meeting consumer expectations. While 86% of healthcare customers rate communications as either very important or somewhat important, just 46% rate the communications they receive from their HCOs as very good or excellent and 12% rate them as not good or poor. This leaves a lot of room for improvement.

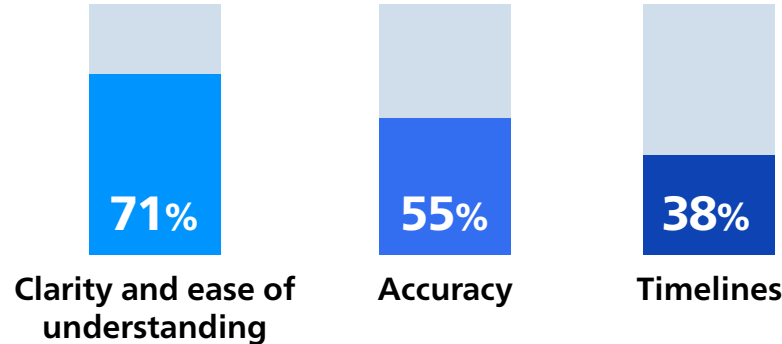


While it's standard to include a member or patient's name and relevant transactional or medical details in healthcare communications, you should also aim to include contextual information that lets the recipient know why they are receiving this information and what it means for them personally. This requires the ability to unlock personal data in core systems and apply it to communications — automatically, and at scale.

## The Connection Between Communication and Trust

While trust is important in any customer relationship, it's absolutely essential in healthcare — because the stakes are higher and much more personal. For healthcare customers, communications play a critical role in establishing this trust, starting with the clear, accurate, and timely dissemination of medical information.

### Most important factors in healthcare communications:



When we break down the data by generation, these factors become even more important to those who are most likely to have higher healthcare utilization. The Silent Generation (1925-1945) and Baby Boomers (1946-1964) are particularly susceptible to having their trust violated through poor communications.

It’s worth noting that lack of clarity and accuracy have been attributed to the filing of medical grievances and appeals, the majority of which are decided in the consumer’s favor. One study found that a whopping 82% of Medicare appeals are successful . Consider the age of your members or patients when communicating with them and take extra care to ensure content is easy to understand for older cohorts and individuals.

For younger patients and members, other factors may be of greater importance. For example, Millennials rate delivery on preferred channel as their top priority (25%). Professional design and layout are important to both Millennials (20%) and Gen Z (21%), while personalization matters most to Gen Z, with nearly a third (28%) saying it’s a top priority. The importance of personalization will likely continue to rise in the coming years.

Key factors in healthcare communications:

	Clarity and Understanding	Accuracy	Timeliness
Silent Generation	88%	53%	40%
Baby Boomers	79%	64%	36%
Gen X	70%	56%	39%
Millennials	65%	47%	37%
Gen Z	63%	49%	40%





## Key Takeaway

#1

# Deploy a Modern CCM Solution to Meet Member or Patient Expectations

Today's healthcare customers expect clear, personalized, and relevant communications from their health insurers and care providers. To enhance member or patient engagement and satisfaction, personalize communications with contextual insights as well as individual medical or transactional information. This calls for the use of a **modern customer communications management (CCM) solution** that can pull personal information from core systems and use it to customize individual communications. You should also take care to use "plain language" when crafting communications, particularly for older generations.



## How Much Are Poor Communications Costing You?

As customer expectations continue to rise, the quality of your communications can directly impact your bottom line. In 2024, 66% of healthcare customers are likely to switch providers if the communications don't meet their expectations — **up 15% from 2023.**







## Key Finding

#2



# Data Collection and Communication Practices Directly Impact Customer Loyalty

Retention is a key consideration for healthcare providers and health insurers who both rely on patient/member loyalty for long-term revenue and growth. This is especially true for those in the private sector, where consumers have more choices compared to public healthcare systems.

The rise of digital healthcare customer experiences as well as remote care, amplified and accelerated during the pandemic, have put even more power into the hands of members and patients. Finding and switching to a new provider or payer has never been easier — all it takes is a few swipes on any smartphone. This means HCOs must work even harder to hang on to existing members or patients by meeting, or exceeding, their expectations.

For healthcare customers, the quality of communications they receive from health insurers and providers can directly impact their loyalty — or their likelihood to switch.



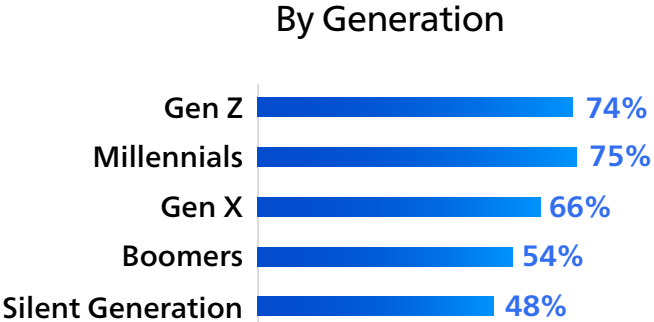
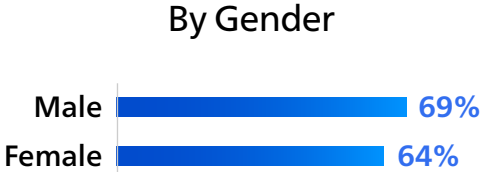
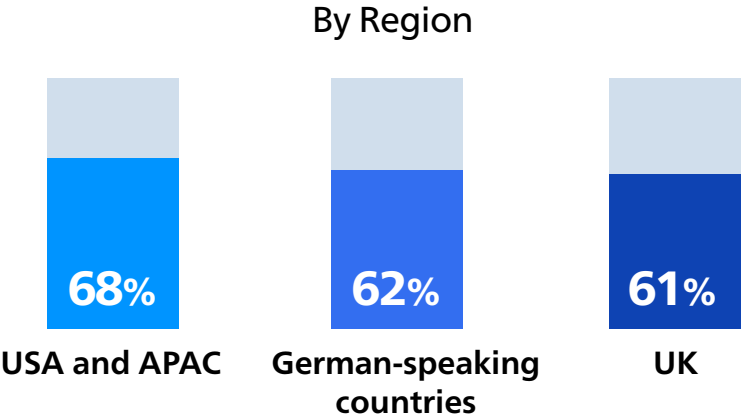
One recent study found that US healthcare organizations have an average new patient **growth rate of 45%**, but a patient **churn rate of 48%**<sup>3</sup>



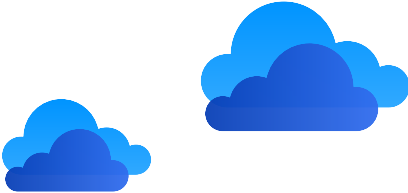


Demographic factors may also play a role in loyalty. Men have a higher propensity than women to make a change, for example, and those living in the US and APAC are also most likely to switch. To drive retention, prioritize high-quality communications. The more transparent and empathetic your communications are, the better.

**Likelihood of patients/members to switch providers/payers due to poor communications:**

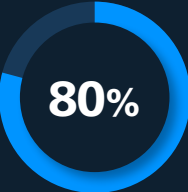


Generationally, retention is a greater challenge with younger groups, who are considerably more likely to switch than their older counterparts. This speaks to the vulnerability of future revenue and profitability, because you're unlikely to win back a customer once you've lost them. With Millennials and Gen Z making up an increasing majority of the workforce, the time to prioritize loyalty is now.





On the other side of the coin, good communications can help you drive both renewals and new membership, as happy customers and patients are more likely to recommend your company to others. In the age of online reviews, word of mouth marketing is a powerful tool for growth.



**80%** of respondents are likely to recommend an organization to a friend if their communications exceed expectations



## Time to Reimagine Forms and Data Collection Processes in Healthcare

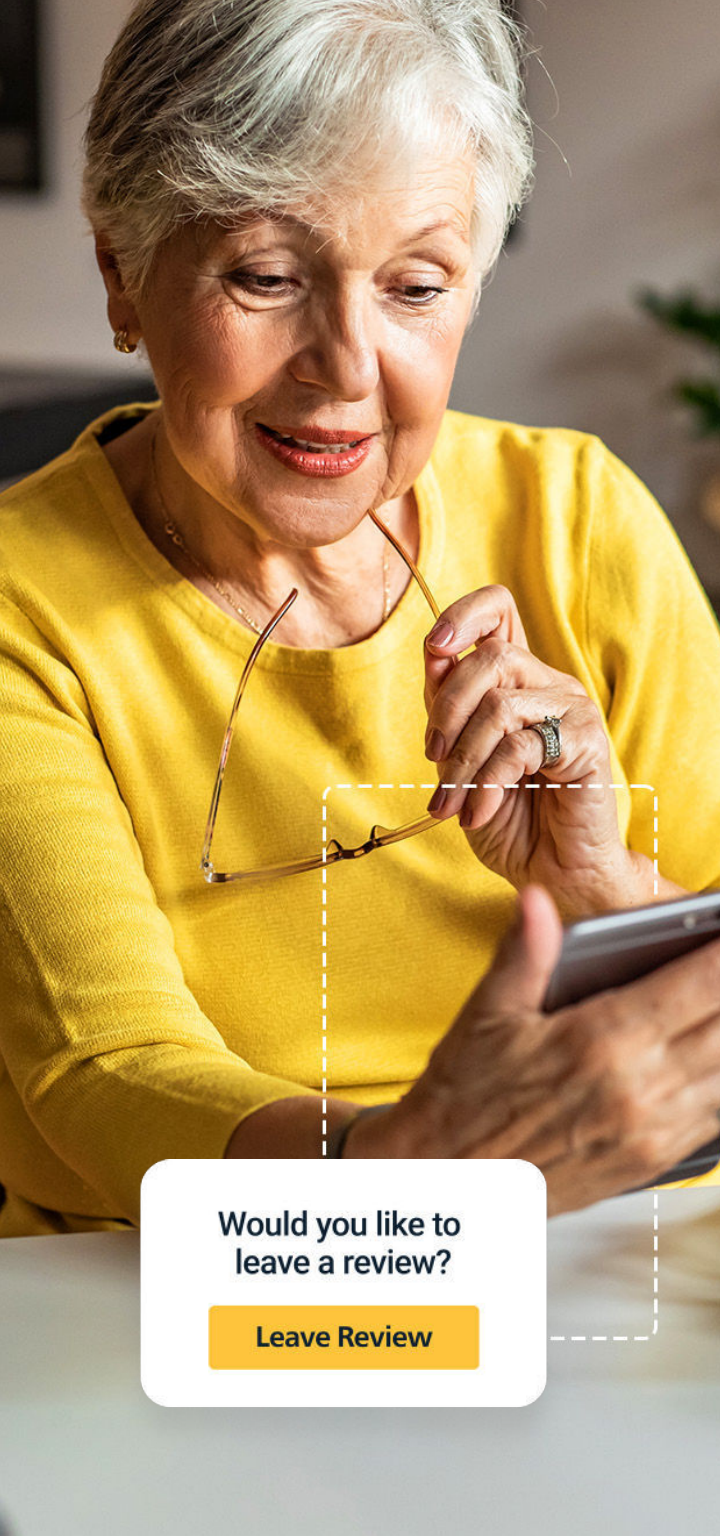
Forms are a necessary part of healthcare administration — from patient intake and treatment consent forms for providers to health assessments and claims filing with payers. In the past, this meant a mountain of paperwork for patients and members. But today’s consumers don’t have the patience for outdated processes that are difficult, confusing, or time-consuming. They certainly don’t want to sit and fill out a stack of paper-based forms or enter information into multiple fillable PDF or HTML forms when they need to access care or engage with their payer. If they encounter any friction, they’re likely to become frustrated or abandon the form completely.

To ensure you get the information you need, in the format you need it, forms processes should be simple and seamless. Patients and members want to complete forms online, preferably on a smartphone or mobile device, and at their convenience. That means enabling them to start and stop as needed without having to start the whole process over. Customizing forms to individuals also helps to streamline the process by removing redundant or irrelevant questions, which waste time.

A sample form with three rows. Each row contains a 'Yes' button, a 'No' button, and a text input field. The 'Yes' and 'No' buttons are blue with white text. The text input fields are white with a light gray border. A dashed yellow line connects this form to a woman looking at a paper form.

### Top reasons for abandoning a forms process:

- 71%** Too difficult to provide necessary supporting documentation
- 64%** Requires me to repeat or re-enter the same information multiple times
- 61%** Contains redundant questions that don’t apply to me
- 59%** Unable to save progress and return at a later time
- 58%** Takes too much time to complete



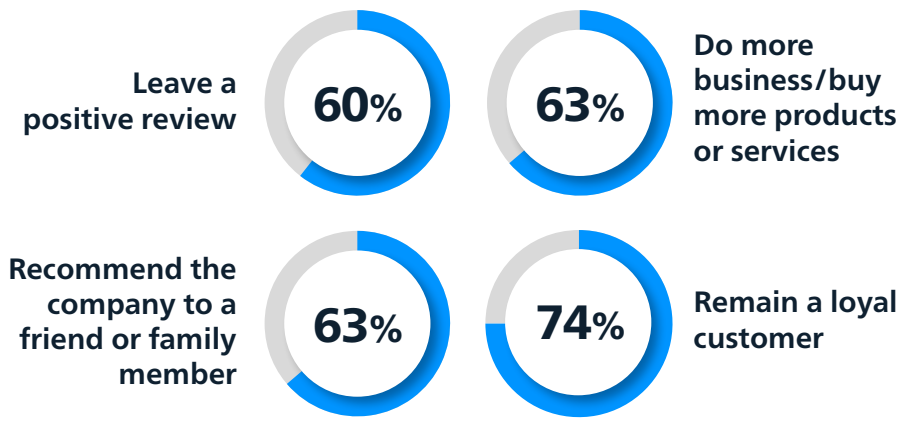
Would you like to leave a review?

Leave Review

If you’re still using outdated forms, including HTML, fillable PDFs or even paper, it may seem daunting to overhaul your entire process. However, it can be easier than you think – and getting it right will pay dividends — especially with Millennials, who are most likely to leave a positive review, recommend you to a friend or family member, and stay loyal.

Broadly speaking, younger generations love to advocate for companies when they have a positive experience, while Boomers and the Silent Generation are most likely to remain loyal. So, modernizing your forms processes is a wise investment no matter which age group you’re serving.

If the forms/data collection process exceeds expectations, members/patients are likely to:



Impact on loyalty/recommendation by generation:

	Leave a positive review	Recommend to a friend or family member	Do more business/ buy more products or services	Remain a loyal customer
Silent Generation	60%	60%	47%	79%
Baby Boomers	59%	60%	60%	79%
Gen X	54%	62%	60%	73%
Millennials	65%	70%	68%	74%
Gen Z	60%	61%	63%	70%





## Modern Data Collection Experiences and Dynamic Communications Key to Retention

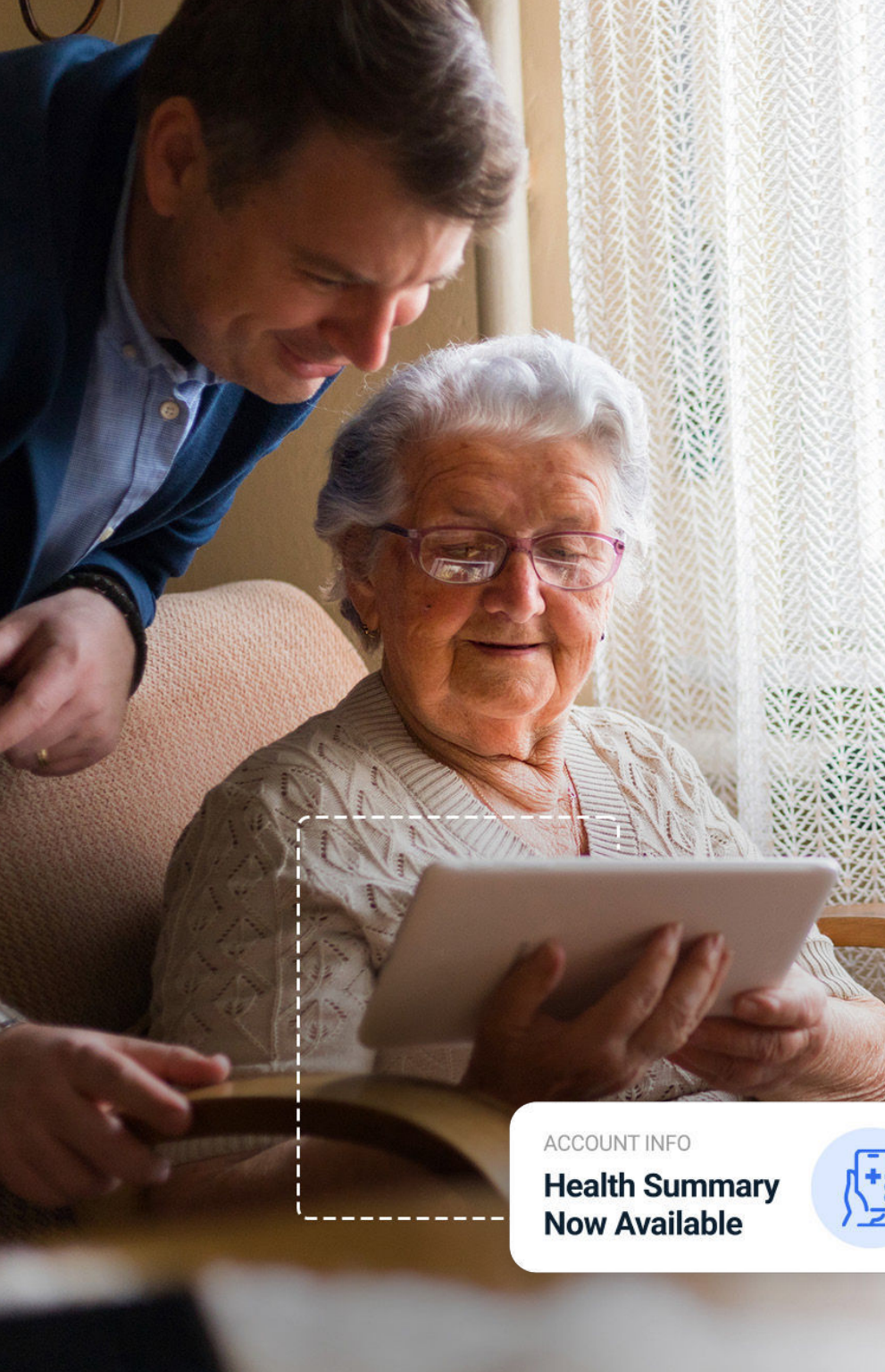
Communication deficiencies can increase the likelihood of members or patients switching to a new provider or health insurer, especially in younger generations. To drive retention and renewals, focus on transparent, empathetic communications. A modern CCM solution can help HCOs take a more nuanced approach — for example, designing interactions based on individual needs or channel preferences.

When it comes to forms, outdated processes can significantly impact your customer experience — and your ability to collect the information you need. Members and patients will quickly abandon a forms process that's not seamless. To provide the ease and speed they demand, reimagine processes with a forms automation solution. More than just digitizing forms, true transformation allows you to uplevel static processes into dynamic, highly personalized experiences, while allowing members and patients to stop and start as needed. Plus, you can connect to core systems to pre-fill information, saving time and effort.

Investing in a modern CCM platform and a forms automation solution will pay off through satisfied members and patients who renew their memberships, remain loyal to you as a provider, and recommend your company to others.

Younger generations have the lowest tolerance for poor communications, with 74% of Millennials and 75% of Gen Z saying they'll switch from a provider or payer due to one bad experience. At the same time, they're most likely to recommend your company to others if you exceed their expectations.





## Key Finding

#3



# Data Security and Trust are More Critical Than Ever in Healthcare Transactions

In the digital era, earning the trust of your customers is critical to building long-term relationships. While this is true for all industries, it's a deal-breaker for providers and payers dealing with sensitive medical information. Our survey found that 64% of healthcare customers almost always trust their healthcare organization, while 28% do occasionally and 8% rarely or never. These numbers suggest that there's room for improvement.



Older generations are more trusting than younger cohorts, with 80% of Silent Generation and 72% of Baby Boomers almost always trusting their healthcare companies. Only 60% of Gen Z, 64% of Millennials, and 58% of Gen X stated they trust their healthcare companies.



So, what are the most important factors for establishing trust? Accuracy, ease, and security top the list, followed closely by proactive communications and personalization. A modern CCM solution with built-in data security measures and automation ensure accuracy, personalize communications, and enable you to be proactive can help check all of these boxes. Being available on your customers' preferred channels makes it easy to contact you — another core advantage of agile, cloud-based systems.

ACCOUNT INFO

**Health Summary  
Now Available**







### Most important factors in establishing healthcare patient/member trust:



Demographic factors may also play a role in loyalty. Men have a higher propensity than women to make a change, for example, and those living in the US and APAC are also most likely to switch. To drive retention, prioritize high-quality communications. The more transparent and empathetic your communications are, the better.

Demographic factors may also play a role in loyalty. Men have a higher propensity than women to make a change, for example, and those living in the US and APAC are also most likely to switch. To drive retention, prioritize high-quality communications. The more transparent and empathetic your communications are, the better.

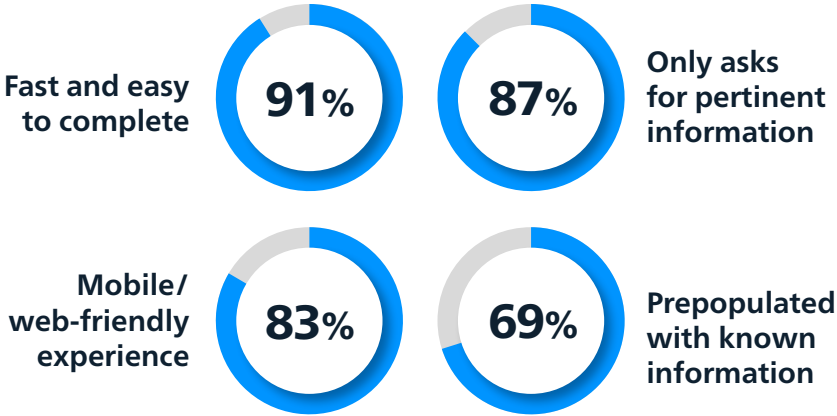


Security is the number one factor customers care about when completing healthcare forms.

When asked what the most important factors for completing healthcare forms, respondents ranked security the highest at 94%. They also value speed and ease of completion (91%), limiting questions to pertinent information (87%), mobile/web-friendly experience (83%), and pre-population with known information (69%).

To meet these expectations, you need a modern solution that does more than digitize forms. Aim to automate and transform the entire process into a dynamic, intelligent user experience that unfolds like a conversation.

### Most important factors for completing healthcare forms:





## Key Takeaway

#3

# Boost Patient and Member Trust with Secure Communications

Prioritizing privacy and data protection with secure healthcare communications can help you win and maintain the critical trust of your members or patients. This can be achieved with an enterprise-grade CCM platform that meets stringent security requirements, including compliance with healthcare-industry regulations such as HIPAA. Ensuring all medical and care-related comms are accurate, clear, and timely will help to further bolster patient confidence in healthcare services.

To address consumer concerns around data collection processes, HCOs must adopt a modern forms automation solution. Transform static processes into highly personalized digital experiences, with security baked into the process. This will ensure peace of mind while also accelerating the speed at which you can collect critical patient and member data.



HEALTH SCREEN



HIPAA Compliant





## Key Finding

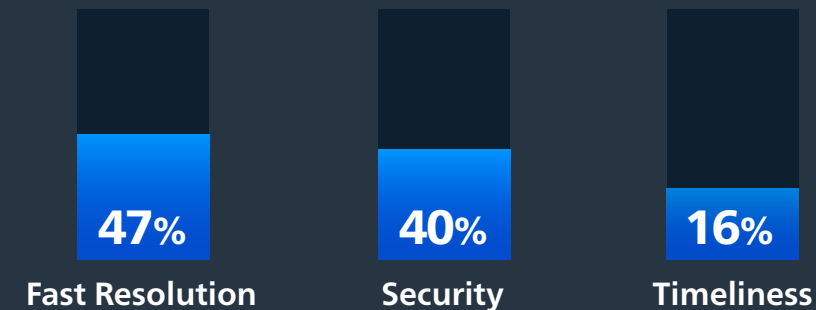
#4



## Healthcare Customers Show Growing Preference for Web and Mobile Interfaces

It's no surprise that consumers today use their phones for just about everything, and this preference extends to healthcare interactions as well. According to our survey, the most important factors when it comes to digital healthcare communications are fast resolution (47%), security (40%), and timeliness (16%). While security is built into the backend, speed and timeliness are most easily achieved by offering mobile and web-friendly communications.

### Most important factors for digital healthcare communications



The desire to get things done online or using a smartphone extends beyond communications to other important healthcare processes, too. Healthcare patients and members expect retail-like convenience and ease when it comes to managing their coverage and care. If you're not offering mobile and web-friendly interfaces for account management, patient intake, appointment scheduling, and claims submissions you're already behind the curve.

	Mobile or Web	Fillable PDF	Paper Form
Silent Generation	12%	36%	38%
Baby Boomers	30%	28%	24%
Gen X	43%	27%	16%
Millennials	52%	26%	14%
Gen Z	53%	26%	14%

Some demographics and areas still prefer more traditional channels for these processes, so you should take these factors into consideration when it comes to your customer communications strategy. For example, older generations show a strong preference for picking up the phone and speaking with a call center rep while younger generations overwhelmingly prefer mobile and web. Despite their preference for paper Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation most highly value speed (92%) and ease of completion (95%) when it comes to filling out forms. They also emphasized the importance of pre-filling information, with 69% of Baby Boomers and 74% of the Silent Generation saying this factor was important to them.

35%

would prefer to use mobile interfaces or web forms for account management processes, such as health risk assessments or making a beneficiary change, followed by:



28%  
Call Center



20%  
Fillable PDF Sent via Email



14%  
Paper Sent via Mail





Despite their preference for paper, Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation most highly value speed (92%) and ease of completion (95%) when it comes to filling out forms. They also emphasized the importance of pre-filling information, with 69% of Baby Boomers and 74% of the Silent Generation saying this factor was important to them.

None of these factors can be achieved with paper-based forms, or even most fillable PDFs. As a healthcare provider or insurer, adapting your forms process may help you deliver on the desires of older cohorts, who are the most frequent users of healthcare services. Making life easier on the most active groups within your organization will help to strengthen these relationships and drive word of mouth marketing, while at the same time increasing accuracy and efficiency within your organization. It's a win-win.

**Millennials and Gen-Z increasingly prefer a mobile/web-friendly approach to their digital communications and data collection processes. Older generations value ease, speed, and pre-filling information — which presents a unique opportunity for HCOs to capitalize on this desire with an automated digital forms solution.**

Regionally, mobile/web-friendly interactions are preferred by people in the UK (42%), USA (33%), and APAC (47%), while German-speaking countries show a unique preference for fillable PDFs (38%). The call center still holds some value in English-speaking countries and APAC, with paper forms being the least preferred option in all regions.

Overall, the emphasis is on secure, efficient digital channels for healthcare customer engagement. The good news is, 62% of healthcare customers say their providers and payers always or almost always communicate on their preferred channels, while just 11% say they rarely or never do.



## Key Takeaway

#4

# Take an Omnichannel Approach with a Focus on Mobile and Web

Healthcare organizations should prioritize digital interfaces for patient interactions and data collection, aligning with the growing consumer preference for seamless digital experiences. While older members and patients may prefer paper forms, they also want forms to be faster and easier to complete. Adopting a modern digital forms automation solution that connects to core systems, pre-fills patient/member information and allows customers to complete forms on their smartphone or mobile device, start and stop without starting over, and get things done quickly and easily will boost satisfaction across generations.

As younger cohorts begin to make up the bulk of active patients and members, you'll need to accommodate shifting preferences by prioritizing mobile and web-friendly interfaces on secure, efficient digital channels. A modern CCM solution paired with forms automation will allow you to stay ahead of the curve while also catering to demographic differences and individual preferences.



Lab Test Results Available







A percentage of these communications were generated by AI

## Key Finding

#5

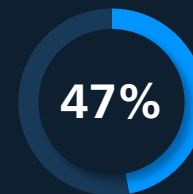


# Consumers Demand Transparency in GenAI Use for Healthcare Communications

In a landscape of accelerated innovation and rapidly changing technology, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) offers healthcare companies a rare opportunity to unlock deep efficiency gains by integrating this transformative technology into your customer communications applications. Unlike previous AI models, which rely on predefined rules and algorithms, GenAI uses large language models (LLMs) to generate new content in response to user prompts.

Applying GenAI to customer engagement will allow healthcare companies to converse with customers in a more meaningful, personalized way by generating unique responses that sound natural. Because LLMs are continually learning, HCOs can use them to generate the building blocks of customer communications. Exposing the LLM to industry-specific content as well as internal knowledge bases allows you to ensure responses are relevant and accurate without losing your brand voice.

While many businesses are eager to integrate GenAI into their tech stack and start reaping these benefits, consumers are a little more hesitant. Almost half (47%) agree that GenAI has the potential to improve healthcare communications. However, two-thirds (66%) are concerned about its security and nearly as many (63%) have ethical concerns when it comes to AI and communications.



of healthcare customers agree that GenAI has the potential to improve the communications they receive





63%

of healthcare customers are concerned about the ethical use of AI in customer communications, and 66% have security concerns

In general, women are more concerned about both the security and ethics of GenAI than men, while more men than women believe GenAI has the potential to improve communications. However, both genders agree on two points: companies should be open and honest about when and where they're using AI, and humans should be involved in the process. To address these concerns, transparency is vital. Just as with the rise of AI-powered chatbots five to ten years ago, people want to know when they're interacting with technology.

Fortunately, this is an easy fix. Explicitly calling out the use of GenAI in your customer communications will ensure there's no ambiguity. It's also important to deploy human oversight for any GenAI application in order to prevent errors and unexpected outputs. Manually checking AI-generated responses safeguards patients and members while also assuaging their concerns, which will help you build trust and strengthen your customer relationships.

Regardless of where your organization is on your technological journey, AI is here to stay. Now is the perfect time to re-evaluate your customer communications tech stack and consider how and where GenAI can benefit your patients or members as well as your bottom line.

77%

of healthcare customers feel it's important that it's explicitly called out when GenAI is used, and 81% believe a human should always be checking suggested content



Curious about how to use GenAI in your customer communications strategy? [Download our latest white paper](#), 'The Impact of AI in Customer Communications' to learn more.





## Key Takeaway

#5

# Focus on Transparency, Security, and Oversight with GenAI Application

Even though consumers believe AI can help to improve the communications they receive from their healthcare insurers and providers, they're not completely confident about its application. You can address customer concerns surrounding the secure and ethical use of AI by pairing total transparency with continuous human oversight. With an approach that's both thoughtful and careful, GenAI has the potential to transform your customer communications strategy, enhancing satisfaction and personalization as well as operational efficiency.

Thanks for your recent doctors visit, here is a link to your EOB:

<https://bitly/tflxir>

Perfect!





NEW SUBMISSION

An new intake form  
has been submitted.



## Recap and Next Steps for Healthcare Organizations

The top takeaway from our survey is that healthcare companies need to focus on quality and security when it comes to communications and data collection processes. Consumers increasingly prefer digital interactions for everything from scheduling appointments to filing claims. Providers and payers should take care to adapt delivery preferences for various demographic groups, including different generations. Younger cohorts overwhelmingly choose mobile and web-friendly interfaces, while older generations may still prefer traditional channels. Moving to a modern, centralized CCM solution that connects to core systems will allow you to maintain a high standard of quality while also adopting a more granular approach, using all available data to personalize processes and communications. No matter the context or content, communications should be clear and easy to understand.

To earn the trust of patients and members, prioritize security. This applies to digital communications, data collection processes, and GenAI applications. Enterprise-grade CCM and forms automation solutions are designed to meet stringent security requirements and ensure compliance with key industry regulations. Ease and speed also matter, even to older patients and members. You can check all the boxes with a modern forms automation solution that delivers eCommerce-like ease, pre-population of personal data, mobile access, and the ability to stop or start on any device. Making sure it's easy to provide information is essential to retention and loyalty, because it's never been easier for patients and members to switch providers or payers.

**Ready to transform faster and succeed sooner?**

[Request a demo now](#), and experience the power of Smart Communications.



## Research Methodology

Smart Communications commissioned Harris Interactive, a Toluna company, to conduct consumer research online in the UK, US, APAC (Australia, New Zealand, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore) and German-speaking markets (Austria, Switzerland, Germany). Across all markets, a nationally representative audience (on age and gender) was targeted. To qualify, all respondents must be a healthcare customer.

**All fieldwork took place in February & March of 2024.**

### About Smart Communications

Smart Communications provides the platform that leading health payers, providers, and life sciences companies across the globe trust to deliver personalized, consistent, and compliant conversations across all touchpoints and channels. The Conversation Cloud™ consists of SmartCOMM™ for managing customer communications across the enterprise and SmartIQ™ for simplifying and automating forms and other data-intensive processes. By integrating with core systems such as Salesforce Health Cloud, Pega, Healthedge, Trizetto and others, we create deeply personalized and compliant real-time customer engagement. Many of the world's largest healthcare organizations rely on Smart Communications to increase operational efficiency and deliver highly secure, frictionless experiences across the customer lifecycle. That's the power of Smart Communications.

#### References:

1 Source: plainlanguage.gov, "[What is plain language?](#)"

2 National Council on Aging, "[The Medicare Appeals Process: A Comprehensive Guide for Professionals](#)," January 18, 2024.

3 Buxton, "[What's Your Churn? A Smart Approach for Patient Retention](#)"

