



# The Guide to Getting & Using Your Health Records

Using Health Literacy and Design Best Practices to Empower Patients to Access and Use Their Health Records

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## Background

The Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) partnered with CommunicateHealth (CH) to create an online consumer resource to improve patient's access to their electronic health information. According to recent data, almost half of individuals nationwide were not offered access to their health information by a health care provider.

Using plain language, step-by-step instructions and engaging graphics and quizzes, the Guide to Getting & Using Your Health Records shows patients, parents, and caregivers how to get a copy of their or a loved one's health record, check it for accuracy, and use it to make the most of their health care.

## Audiences

The target audience is adult patients, caregivers, and parents who want to access and use their health records.

## Approach

We conducted 2 rounds of usability testing with a total of 18 adult participants to gauge what worked well on the site and what features needed to be improved. We tested the site on both desktop computers and mobile devices.

- **Site Design:** To build a microsite geared toward users who need to access their or another's health record, we started with best practices in health literacy and plain language, as well as a design with vibrant colors.
- **Pre-Launch Testing:** Prior to the website launch, we conducted 9 usability testing sessions of the development site. Participants answered questions about their information needs and performed a series of tasks on the website so we could assess which features needed improvement.
- **Site Improvement:** Based on the results of the pre-launch testing, we made improvements to the site, including reducing scrolling by restructuring the site from 1 to 4 pages and improving navigation by keeping the top menu buttons visible while scrolling.
- **Post-Launch Testing:** After ONC launched the site in 2018, we conducted post-launch usability testing with 9 adults.
- **Further Site Improvements:** Based on user feedback, we made more improvements to the site, including restructuring it from 4 to 5 pages to minimize scrolling, revising the introduction to clarify the Guide's purpose, and adding jump links at the top of each page to help users quickly preview content.

## Implications

We expect that individuals who use the site will be better informed and thus more likely to successfully request a copy of their health record. This is important because about 8 in 10 people who access their electronic health information rate it as both easy to understand and useful for monitoring their health, according to the 2017 Health Information National Trends Survey. We expect that people's access to and use of their electronic health information will enable them to better manage their health care and monitor their health, leading to improved health outcomes.

In addition, the Guide has the potential to increase health literacy and patient engagement by encouraging consumers to use their health data to advocate for and take charge of their health care.

## INTRO

This section introduces users to the Guide to Getting & Using Your Health Records. Users can also read about what a health record is and their right to access it. This page, like several others, ends with an interactive quiz to increase engagement with the material.



## WHAT'S IN IT

Since patients may not know what to ask for when they need to request their health record, this section lays out options for the different types of records to request. Patients can also learn about other variables, including: the number of copies they need, how they want it delivered, and what format they'd like to receive it in.

## HOW TO GET IT

This section spells out the process a patient will use to get their health record. An infographic summarizes the process, and an accordion lists different types of questions that patients may need to answer on a health record release form. Frequently asked questions with answers help mitigate confusion that patients might have. There are also tips that patients can use to make the request process go more smoothly.



About 8 in 10 individuals who used their online patient portal found it helpful and easy to understand.

## CHECK IT

This section helps patients see what types of information they should be looking over for mistakes, as well as how to request that a mistake be fixed. Frequently asked questions with answers and tips are included in this section as well. The section ends with an interactive activity where users can learn medical jargon and what it means, which can help them better understand their record.



Did you know that nearly 1 in 10 people who check their online health record ask to have a mistake corrected?



## USE IT

Here, users can learn about sharing their record with appropriate people, including family members and other health care providers. They can also learn about using their record to take control of their health and health care. There's even a section on how to use health apps and what to look for when choosing an app. This section ends with an interactive quiz about what to look for when choosing an app for health records.



About 4 in 10 people with a smartphone or tablet have a health or wellness app.

