



## Not just another PSP: 5 top tips for evaluating your patient support programme

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**Evaluating patient support programmes before launch is critical. We present you with our top tips for conducting successful market research to ensure your PSPs maximise value to your customers.**

### 1. Make the most of patient insights

Patients and their unmet needs should form the cornerstone of any PSP design, so you need to start with strong patient insights. A good PSP takes into account not only the illness or the medication, but also the characteristics of the patients who are living with the illness and using the medication. For example, a 22-year-old urban student will have very different needs for managing their asthma to a retired 75-year-old asthma patient who also suffers from hypertension. One might be looking for a mobile app to support their disease management, whereas the other may welcome a helpline or a face-to-face support group.

One size does not fit all when it comes to PSPs; personalised offerings are key. When undertaking patient research, we recommend you consider the variability in your target audience and implement a carefully considered sampling plan to ensure the findings enable you to tailor services to individual patients. In the analysis, look at the language used by patients when talking about their disease and treatment. Then you can ensure communications about your PSP reflect the language and tone that patients use, and your messages will resonate better.

### 2. Complement the patient perspective

Whilst patients are an obvious target for PSP market research, other stakeholders, including those who at first sight appear to have less direct or obvious involvement with PSPs, are valuable for understanding where the 'pain points' exist in the patient journey, and where the opportunities are to provide better support. Caregivers are often heavily involved in patient care. They may handle appointments and medication schedules, especially for paediatric and elderly patients, or those with debilitating diseases. They're also the person closest to the patient, their disease and its management. From our experience, caregivers are a vital stakeholder to include, not just to better understand the patient, but also to understand their own needs.

Patient Advocacy Groups (PAGs) and Patient Associations are another key stakeholder. These organisations have in-depth insight into the lives of patients living with specific illnesses, including the day-to-day challenges patients face. They are often extremely influential, particularly amongst engaged patients, providing precious information about new treatments and services that could make a difference to their lives. Patient organisations are especially valuable for rare and very serious diseases, where finding patients for market research can be a challenge, as they can be included as part of the sample, and consulted to support with recruitment.

### 3. Get HCP buy-in

Physicians are one of the first points of entry for PSPs – they act as gatekeepers, informing patients about any available services to support their disease management. 'What's in it for them?' is a good question to bear in mind when developing your PSP and considering targets for research. A multi-faceted approach ensures that all influential stakeholder perspectives are understood. Understanding the needs and priorities of HCPs to gain their buy-in could be a promising strategy.

For example, whilst physicians might say that PSPs only represent a 'secondary driver' in brand choice, a PSP that saves them time has the potential to influence prescribing choice. It's also a good idea to understand HCP concerns such as loss of control over patient management, patient data privacy, and fear of third party information being provided to patients. If known, objections could be handled better from the outset.

Depending on the market, nurses and pharmacists may also have a role in the enrolment and fulfilment stages and their buy-in could be needed for successful implementation. As such, they should be considered as valuable targets for research. Payers, meanwhile, can provide a broader perspective, and depending on the nature of the support programme, can be influencers or key decision makers at the hospital or administrative level.

### 4. Opt for a customer-led, needs-based approach

Though it might be tempting to go into PSP market research with preconceptions about what your PSP should entail, starting with a blank canvas will be more efficient in unearthing genuine unmet needs. At Research Partnership, we frequently ask stakeholders to describe each step of the disease journey, from pre-diagnosis through to ongoing management of the disease, with detailed probing and laddering used to gain a deep understanding of experiences and pain points at each stage of the journey. When discussing unmet needs, respondents are encouraged to consider all angles – educational, emotional, financial, and logistical. Taking the time to ensure that what might seem like a mundane practical consideration isn't overlooked can often lead to rewards.

### 5. Take an ethnographic approach

A truly successful PSP is one that is capable of supporting the patient day-to-day through their most challenging periods of need, such as when they do not have their HCP to turn to. For example, this could be during phases of maintenance post-chemotherapy, when patients are most scared of potential infections. Designing market research to understand the needs outside of the main 'touchpoints' of the patient & HCP interaction will help to create value in your PSP, enabling better patient self-management and driving improved outcomes, which both patients and HCPs will appreciate. To address this, we use 'ethno' pre-tasks in our market research studies to capture patient attitudes, mind-sets and behaviours between appointments. This provides rich insights into the 'real world' impact of living with the disease. During interviews, we use outcomes-based techniques and questioning. At the end of the day, the PSP should improve patient outcomes so it's important to first understand the desired outcomes that different stakeholders want to be able to achieve and identify the gaps where patient support initiatives can help.

**We have developed a comprehensive market research approach to help pharma companies optimise their patient support programmes. PSP Enhance covers initial design, development and testing, and launch monitoring, providing insights to help maximise their success.**

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