



# *The Action Gap*

Why Healthcare Engagement is Failing the Next-Step Moment

## Key Takeaways

# The action gap, *explained in 60 seconds.*

### 01. The action gap is a health outcomes problem

98% of people researching health topics want to take a specific action next.<sup>1</sup> Only 41% leave feeling they accomplished their goal.<sup>1</sup>

### 02. Additional touchpoints haven't closed the gap

People move across search engines, health sites, social media, provider directories, and AI tools with purpose—but the next step still falls short.

### 03. Confidence isn't the same as clarity

80% feel more confident after researching their health online.<sup>1</sup> But 83% are still looking for guidance on practical next steps—not just more information.<sup>1</sup>

### 04. The gap is widest before and after the visit

The pre- and post-visit window is where opinions form, decisions take shape, and people need support most.

### 05. Convenience without trust isn't enough

People want speed and personalization, but healthcare decisions still require credible backing.

### 06. Brands have an opportunity to close the gap

The brands that show up with the right next step at the right time can help people move from intent to action. Fullspan Health is built to make that experience feel seamless, trusted, and outcome-focused.



**98%**

of people researching a health topic are trying to take a specific action next<sup>1</sup>

**70%**

find brand messages more relevant or trustworthy when they offer solutions, not just information<sup>1</sup>

**52%**

of the time, AI missed emergency scenarios requiring hospitalization<sup>3</sup>

**41%**

say they nearly reached their goal with online health resources—signaling an action gap<sup>1</sup>

**32%**

of the time, AI tools failed to correctly identify or flag medical misinformation<sup>3</sup>

# The *action gap* is putting health outcomes at risk.

In early 2026, Fullspan Health conducted two studies spanning more than 1,200 U.S. adults and healthcare consumers.

We uncovered a striking disconnect: people have more ways than ever to find health information, and often feel ready to act on it—but still lack a clear, credible next step at the moment it matters.

**That disconnect is the action gap. The space between the health information people trust, and actually having the best next step available at the right time in their journey.**

For brands, that gap is both a problem and an opportunity—because closing it is how you drive real health outcomes.

## **This report draws on Fullspan Health's findings to examine:**

- Why the action gap is now the central challenge in healthcare engagement
- Where current approaches fall short
- Why trust matters more in an AI-driven world
- How brands can move beyond information to help people take action



# The *action gap* starts the moment people search.

People aren't just browsing. They want to understand symptoms, compare options, find care, prepare for a visit, or decide on next steps. And they're more confident than ever—**80% feel more confident after researching their health online.**<sup>1</sup>

But confidence isn't the same as clarity. More touchpoints haven't closed the gap between information and action—they've multiplied the places where people can stall.

AI is accelerating expectations. 58% of consumers are interested in AI that can recommend a doctor and book an appointment, while 60% would use an AI agent to find and order medication at the best price.<sup>1</sup> People know what they want. The experience just isn't keeping up.

## **Visibility alone is no longer enough.**

**The brands that win won't just be seen; they'll help people move forward.**

**98%**

of people researching a health topic are trying to take a specific action next<sup>1</sup>

**41%**

say they nearly reached their goal with online health resources—signaling an action gap<sup>1</sup>

**+346%**

surge in AI chatbot use for health information compared with five years ago<sup>1</sup>

# The health journey now starts *in more places than ever.*

The old path (**search engine** → **provider website** → **appointment**) has been split across many platforms and touchpoints. People move between channels based on what they need in the moment.

When a health concern feels serious, **42% of people say they turn to health sites instead of AI for medical expertise.** In fact, **39% do this because they feel the stakes are too high to trust less reliable options like AI.**<sup>2</sup>

People are moving through these channels with purpose—they want answers quickly, to feel understood, and support that helps them make decisions with confidence.

But that's where many experiences fall short. People may find the information they need, without the guidance, context, or clear next step that helps them act on it.



## Where People Go With Health Questions<sup>1</sup>

**81% Search engines**

**49% Social media**

**48% Health sites**

**28% Provider directories**

**16% AI tools**



# People are ready to act. *The next step isn't always clear.*

People have more access to health information than ever. But when it's time to act, the path forward often breaks down.<sup>1</sup>

Even strong educational content leaves questions unanswered: *What should I do now?*

## People want to take action based on health research:<sup>1</sup>

**32% want** practical lifestyle tips

**30% want** to know if they should see a doctor

**28% want** to compare medications or treatments

**26% want** advice on questions to ask their doctor

**25% want** food and recipes for their health needs

**24% want** to buy health or wellness products

**83% of people say they're looking for guidance on practical next steps, not just information to read.<sup>1</sup>**

Without that direction at high-intent moments, they move on or keep searching without making progress.

**This is the action gap:** the space between the information people find and the next step they feel confident taking.

Many healthcare brands treat it as a UX problem, solvable with better navigation or clearer calls to action. But the challenge runs deeper. People don't need more efficient pathways through content.

**They need experiences that make the next step feel clear, relevant, and credible enough to act on.**

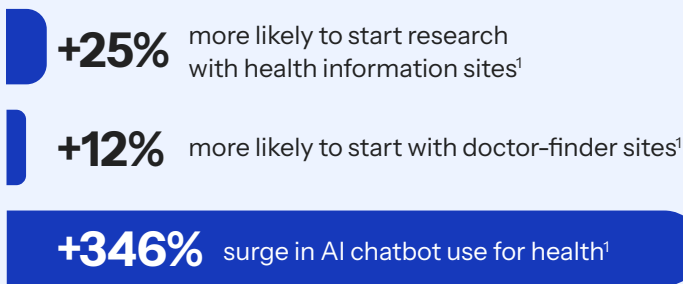


# Convenience is changing behavior. Trust determines whether it *leads to action*.

More people are gravitating toward health sources that feel fast and easy, even when those sources aren't the most reliable.

That shift is especially visible with AI. About 25% of ChatGPT's 800 million weekly users ask health-related questions.<sup>3</sup> Pew Research finds that 22% of Americans use AI chatbots for health information, rising to 32% among adults 18 to 29.<sup>4</sup>

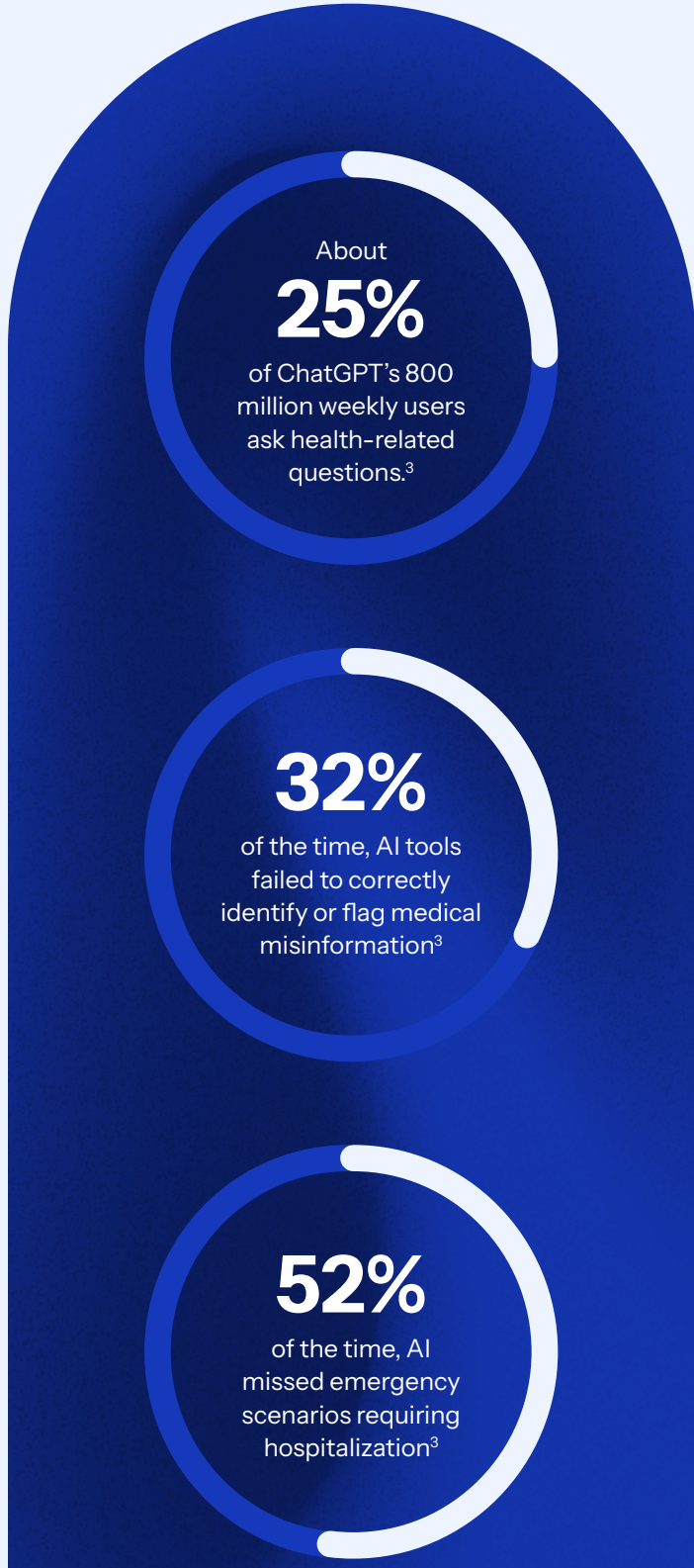
## Behavioral Shifts: Compared With Five Years Ago



Health information sites remain the most trusted source for researching health conditions, with 59% of people viewing them as trustworthy.<sup>1</sup> But AI is closing the gap. What this tells us isn't that people are choosing convenience over trust. It's that they want both.

For brands, that's an opportunity and a responsibility. Guidance that helps someone find care, compare options, or act on health information has to be grounded in expert-reviewed content, not just optimized for speed.

That's not an argument against AI. It's an argument for what goes into it. Outputs are only as good as their inputs. When AI draws from medically credible sources, it can move people forward. When it doesn't, it becomes one more place where people stall.

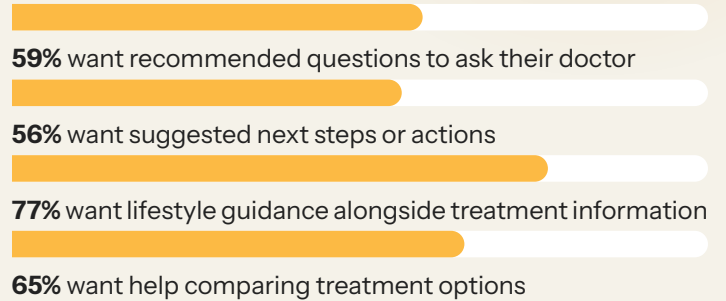


# The *action gap* window is wider than brands think.

The greatest opportunity to make a difference isn't just during an appointment—it's before and after, when people want to act but need help knowing what to do next.

Before a visit, people are figuring out symptoms, comparing options, finding a provider, and preparing questions. After, they need help understanding treatment choices, following up, and staying engaged. That's where utility has the most impact: moving people from uncertainty to a clear next step.

## People know exactly what that looks like<sup>2</sup>:



The stakes of getting this right are real. **1.8 times more consumers decided to book a doctor visit than not to see the doctor after researching their health online,**<sup>1</sup> presumably because they found the information and utility they needed.

# Marketing now means *bringing action* to the right people at the right time.

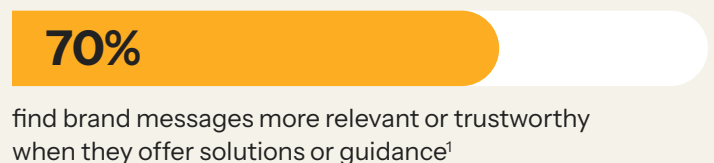
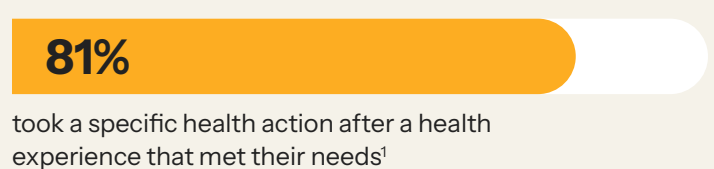
Healthcare marketing is built around reaching the right people at the right time—with the right *action*.

People are already searching for answers, weighing their options, and figuring out what to do next. Brands can be useful in these moments by helping them:

- Understand their options
- Compare treatments or care paths
- Prepare for a conversation with a provider
- Find care or support
- Follow through after a visit

When experiences meet people where they are, they're more receptive—and more likely to act. When people use a health tool or service to reach a goal, they are more receptive to brand messages if they offer solutions connected to that goal.<sup>1</sup>

## When health experiences truly meet people's needs, action follows.



# Five priorities for brands ready to close the *action gap*

The action gap is a health outcomes problem. But it's also an opportunity for brands willing to move beyond visibility and into genuine utility. The ones that do will be the ones people turn to, trust, and act on.

## 01 Match presence to moments of intent

Moments before and after a visit are high-intent and shape every decision in between. Fullspan Health helps brands identify and act on these moments through behavioral insights and audience intelligence grounded in real health journeys.

## 02 Focus on utility, not just messaging

70% of consumers want guidance, not just information.<sup>1</sup> Fullspan Health connects credible content to the next step—whether that's a savings module, treatment comparison, or scheduling with a provider.

## 03 Build trust into every next step

Healthcare decisions require reliable backing—especially as people increasingly start their search with AI and social. Fullspan Health's content infrastructure, built on decades of clinical credibility across Healthline and Healthgrades, means every next step is backed by a source people already trust.

**Discover what closing the action gap looks like for your brand.**

**Get in touch today**

## 04 Design for the whole patient journey

People need support across discovery, decision-making, care, and follow-up. Fullspan Health helps brands connect those moments—linking trusted health content with provider data, ratings, and the tools people need to find and access care.

## 05 Measure what moves people forward

Impressions don't tell you whether the action gap is closing. Fullspan Health helps brands connect engagement to downstream outcomes—so the measure of success is action taken, not attention captured.

### References

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3. Leventhal, Rajiv. "ChatGPT Health shows inconsistent safety safeguards in high-risk medical scenarios." EMARKETER, March 3, 2026.
4. Pasquini G, Stocking G, Kikuchi E, Pula I, Yam E. "Users of social media and AI chatbots for health information are more likely to say they are convenient than accurate." Pew Research Center, April 7, 2026.