

WFPHA Global Public Health Week
#GPHW2024

PUBLIC HEALTH

AND THE CHALLENGE OF INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

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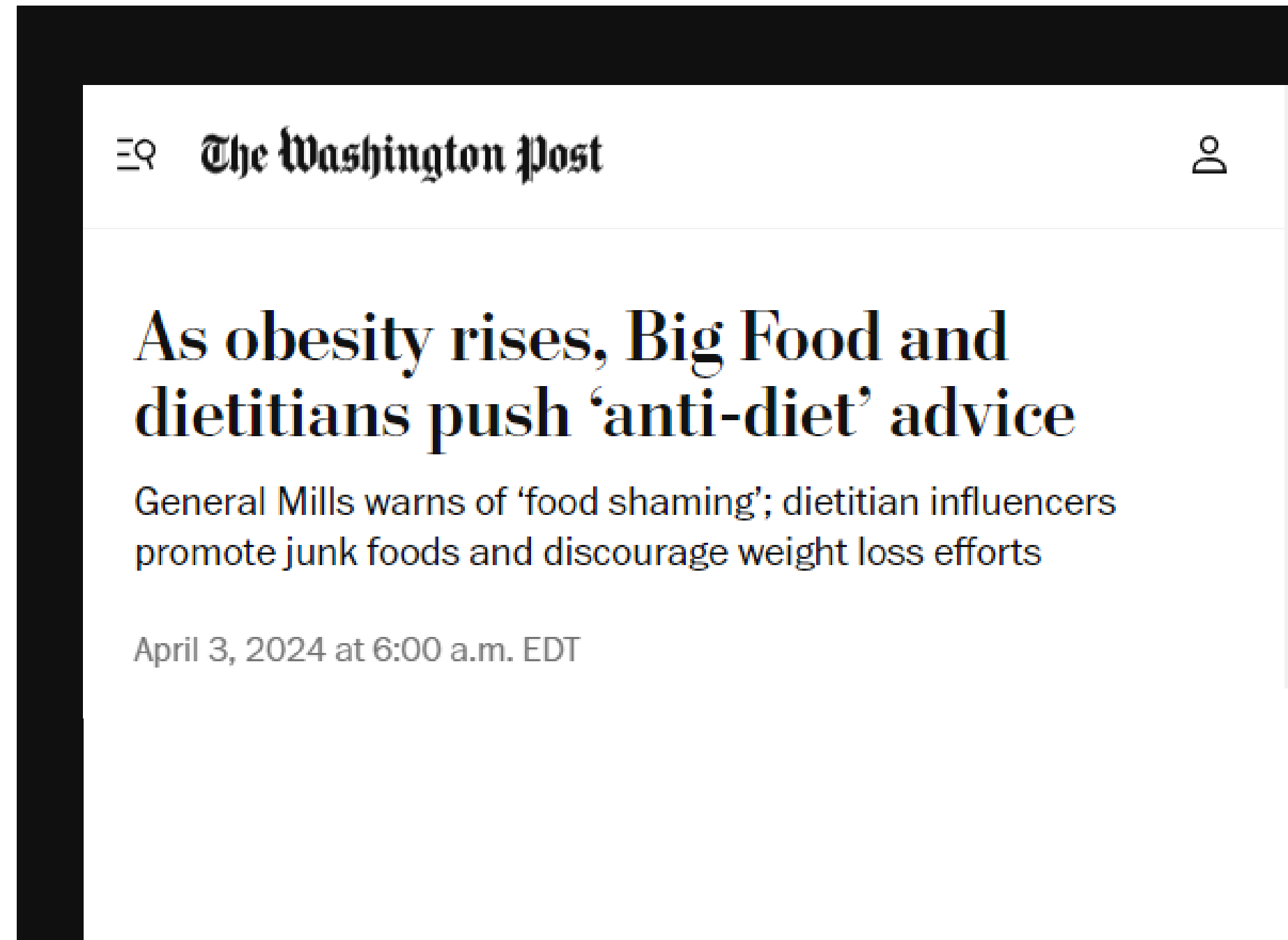
Example #1

Public health problems are uniquely affected by the information environment

Industry marketing and influencers hijack health-conscious communities

Source:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2024/04/03/diet-culture-nutrition-influencers-general-mills-processed-food/>



Example #2

Public health problems are uniquely affected by the information environment

Healthcare professionals 
undermine evidence-based health advice

Source:

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/feb/22/melbourne-doctors-under-review-for-promoting-discredited-covid-treatment>

<https://patientengagementhit.com/news/how-common-is-medical-misinformation-spread-by-physicians>

<https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/n-l-doctor-not-alone-in-spreading-covid-19-misinformation-says-national-association-1.5343279>



N.L. doctor not alone in spreading COVID-19 misinformation, says national association

Amid Florida's Measles Outbreak, Surgeon General Goes Against Medical Guidance

Melbourne doctors under review for promoting discredited Covid treatment

Example #3

Public health problems are uniquely affected by the information environment

Trusted tech platform services 

misdirect and mislead people searching for health information

Source:

<https://www.reuters.com/legal/transactional/exclusive-us-lawmakers-urge-google-fix-abortion-searches-that-steer-women-fake-2022-06-17/>
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/jun/15/google-misleading-abortion-ads-pregnancy-crisis-centers>

U.S. lawmakers urge Google to fix abortion searches that steer women to 'fake clinics'

Google earned \$10m from ads misdirecting abortion seekers to 'pregnancy crisis centers'

Study finds the search giant has profited since Roe was overturned from anti-abortion groups buying misleading search terms

Example #4

**Public health problems are uniquely affected
by the information environment**

**Health data &
privacy** 

**Tracking data from
web and apps sold for
ads and analysis**

Source:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/jun/03/uk-mental-health-charities-handed-sensitive-data-to-facebook-for-targeted-ads>
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandralevine/2022/08/15/digital-medical-companies-funnel-patient-data-to-facebook-for-advertising/>
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/flo-health-privacy-class-action-1.7137600>

**Digital Medical Companies
Funnel Patient Data To
Facebook For Advertising**

**Lawsuit claiming Flo Health app shared intimate
data with Facebook greenlit as Canadian class
action**

**UK mental health charities handed
sensitive data to Facebook for targeted
ads**

Example #5

Public health problems are uniquely affected by the information environment

Communities with multiple vulnerabilities 

may make health choices based on low quality information.

Source:

<https://www.journalism.co.uk/news/uk-s-older-population-targetted-by-health-misinformation/s2/a1066353/>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0264410X18315524>

<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/more-half-parents-and-pregnant-women-exposed-aggressive-formula-milk-marketing>

<https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/girls-health-misinformation/>

UK's older population targetted by health misinformation

Low uptake of nasal influenza vaccine in Polish and other ethnic minority children in Edinburgh, Scotland

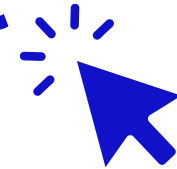
More than half of parents and pregnant women exposed to aggressive formula milk marketing

Social media health myths are destroying the lives of teenage girls

Example #6

Public health problems are uniquely affected by the information environment

Well-funded and
well-organized
“anti” movement



counters health
advice and
politicizes health.

Source:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/09/23/online-misinformation-jim-jordan/>

<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/09/24/anti-vaxxers-political-power-00116527>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2024/02/21/covid-misinformation-earnings/>

Anti-vaxxers are now a modern political force

Tax records reveal the lucrative world of covid misinformation

Misinformation research is buckling under GOP legal attacks

Example #7

Public health problems are uniquely affected by the information environment

Health fraud, scams and deceptive marketing 

exploit vulnerabilities within the information environment

Source:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandralevine/2024/03/04/tiktok-supplements-nurses-doctors-influencers-bytedance-healthcare/>
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2024/feb/03/the-situation-has-become-appalling-fake-scientific-papers-push-research-credibility-to-crisis-point>
<https://www.wired.com/story/telegram-covid-19-vaccination-fakes/>

‘The situation has become appalling’: fake scientific papers push research credibility to crisis point

TikTokers Are Stealing Doctors And Nurses’ Photos To Peddle Pills And Powders

Scammers Are Tricking Anti-Vaxxers Into Buying Bogus Medical Documents

Understanding impact

of new policies
is needed 

Source:

<https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/tackling-wellness-infodemic-social-media>
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/10/covid-19-global-attack-on-freedom-of-expression-is-having-a-dangerous-impact-on-public-health-crisis/>
<https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2022/09/regulation-will-not-solve-misinformation-online-but-it-could-help-school-of-public-health-panel-says>

Monitoring for unintended consequences



Tackling the Wellness Infodemic on Social Media

Covid-19: Global attack on freedom of expression is having a dangerous impact on public health crisis

Regulation will not solve misinformation online, but it could help, School of Public Health panel says

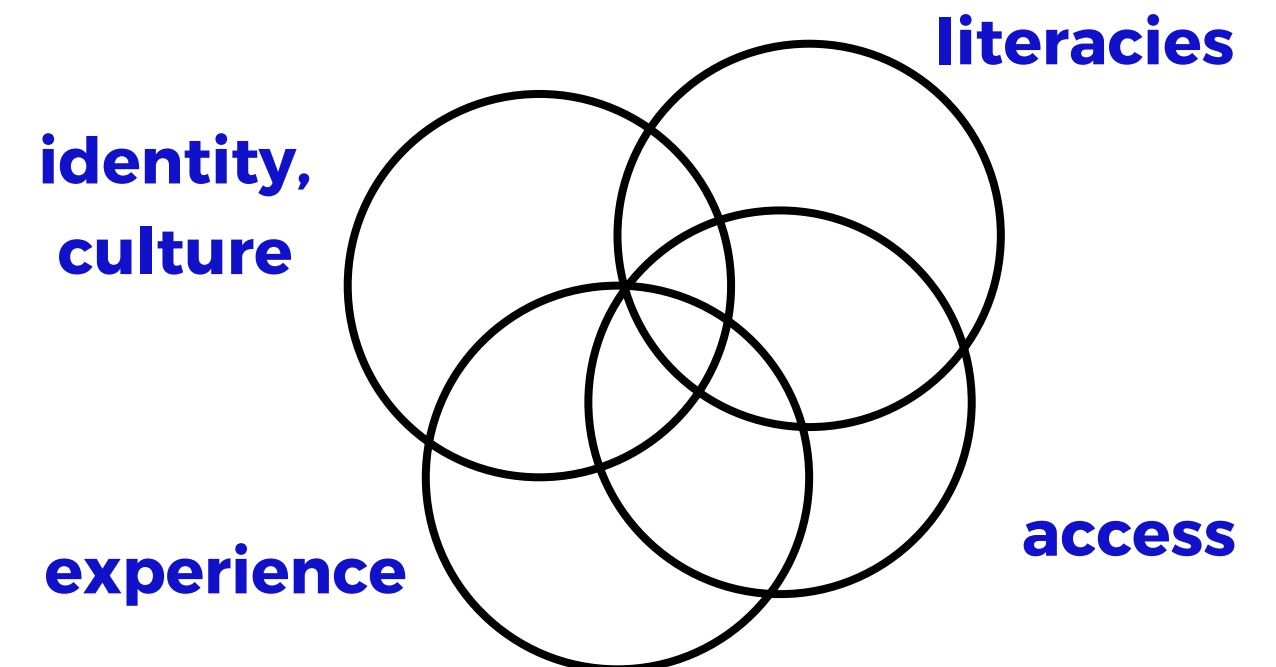
health x information environment

Different ideas of trust

Who to trust?
What to trust?

Trust in health system,
health product or
service, health
guidance, the
messenger, the
platform...

Different components of trust



Health misinformation and a chaotic information environment can erode trust in the health system, health workers and health guidance.



Communities:

experiencing practical, social and economic barriers to following health guidance

historically low levels of trust across all dimensions

sometimes follows health guidance that is practical and reasonable to follow

changing trust over time

follows health guidance

consistent trust

Creating and promoting demand concurrently focuses on three components

Adherence to health guidance

Demand for health information

Demand for health services and products

PUSH - the system wants something from the people

PULL - people want something from the system

The directionality of the demand components can differ

different directions

Examples:

Patients demand cancer treatments with fewer side effects. Although health experts do not recommend alternative medicine or treatments, there is a large demand for these.

Government recommends colonoscopies for people aged over 45, yet extremely low demand persists.



same direction

Example:

A malaria vaccine is being rolled out in more African countries where parents are absolutely thrilled to protect their children from the disease they grew up with. People trust vaccines for children and successful vaccine introduction depends on this preexisting trust.



Bottom line

- **the information environment evolves much faster than the ability of policies and policymakers to keep up.**
- **problem-solving needs to approach this as a problem of the public health practice**

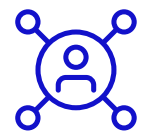


We cannot solve the challenge of the information environment on health overnight.



What can we start doing now to build trust and address information environment challenges in health?

Quick wins

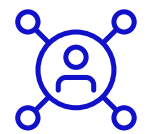


Listen better

- Generate infodemic insights to understand questions, concerns, information needs
- Be truly open to addressing the issues people talk about and they are concerned about.

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Quick wins



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Equip and support health workers

- Equip health workers with the skills to cope with and thrive within the digital information environment within which their patients also live.

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Build people into the process

- Promote deliberative engagement with individuals and communities in their interaction with the health system.
- Promote transparency and deliberative discussions to diffuse polarization in communities seeking, discussing and using health information.



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Protect people from harm

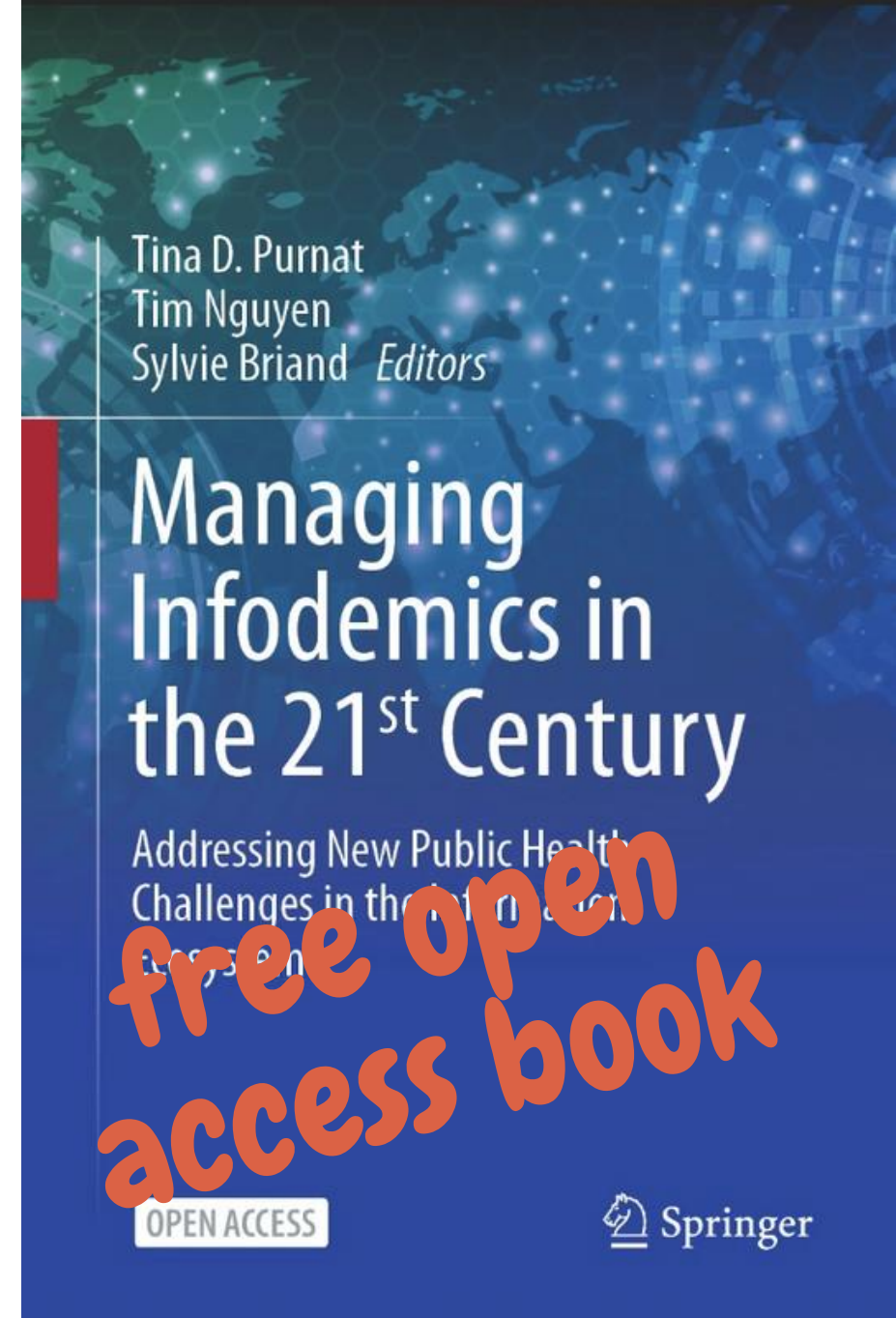
- Protect consumers from deceptive marketing, protect health workers from doxing and harassment, enforce policies that protect patient and data privacy,
- Regularly reevaluate policies in light of new health challenges and changes in the information environment.

THANK YOU

RESOURCES FOR
ADDRESSING INFORMATION
ENVIRONMENT CHALLENGES:

<https://tinapurnat.com/resources/>

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Effective demand promotion reduces asymmetries

**asymmetries
in health
information**



**health
service needs
asymmetries**

**trust
asymmetries**

These are not just a medical
but also a social issues.

Health systems are not yet
built to be human centered
and emphathetic.