



WHITE PAPER

# The path to better health care

A framework for patient experience excellence

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# Executive Summary

## Enhancing Health Care Strategy Through a Patient Experience Lens

### INTRODUCTION

Despite significant financial investment in health care, the U.S. lags in global health indices, highlighting the need for a strategic shift towards patient-centered care. This summary draws from the white paper, “The path to better health care: A framework for patient experience excellence,” which advocates for an approach centered on the patient experience (PX) as a critical factor in health care strategy.

### THE CASE FOR PATIENT-CENTERED CARE

Patient-centered care is emerging as a transformative strategy to achieve better value and improved health outcomes. This approach involves:

- Considering patients as critical partners and using patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) to guide care adjustments.
- Understanding holistic health, including social factors that influence patient access, engagement and well-being.
- Integrating digital solutions seamlessly into the care journey to fully bridge all interactions.

### FRAMEWORK FOR PATIENT EXPERIENCE IMPROVEMENT

The 10-point framework presented in the white paper provides a structured approach to address various aspects of patient experience across three categories:

- **Primary Concerns:** Cost, care quality, and convenience.
- **Table-Stakes Concerns:** Confidentiality, communication, and collaboration.
- **Emotional Concerns:** Consideration, community, comfort, and choice.

Each category addresses specific patient needs, from financial transparency and care accessibility to fostering environments that respect patient confidentiality and promote emotional well-being.

### STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION

Organizations are encouraged to use this framework to:

- Innovate care processes focused on specific patient experience elements.
- Benchmark against competitors to identify performance gaps.
- Guide research and development initiatives aimed at enhancing patient-reported outcomes.

### VALUE AND IMPACT

Adopting a patient experience lens in strategic planning not only improves health outcomes but also enhances patient satisfaction and loyalty. It drives operational efficiency and aligns disparate health care services around patient expectations, crucial for delivering seamless care and maintaining competitiveness in the health care sector.

### CONCLUSION

For health care organizations aiming to lead in the next generation of care, integrating a patient experience framework into their strategic planning is essential. This approach not only meets the evolving demands of health care consumers but also positions organizations to achieve sustainable growth and improved patient outcomes.

Whether working with payers or providers, using BCG’s patient experience framework helps explore problems from multiple perspectives, discover unseen pain points, and invent solutions that seamlessly bridge in-person experiences and digital services. To learn more about our approach, please reach out.

# The path to better health care:

## A framework for patient experience excellence

In the global quest for better health, the United States is falling behind. While health care spending is nearly double the amount per capita compared to most European countries, the U.S. ranked a disappointing 69th out of 195 nations in a recent global health index. This ranking—which places the U.S. below countries like Uzbekistan (49th), Iran (58th), and Belarus (62nd)—is a stark reminder that health outcomes and access to essential services are not solely determined by financial investment.

**However, despite these challenges, there is a path leading toward a brighter future for patients in the U.S.: Patient-centered care.**

As explored in [The Patient Priority](#) by BCG’s Stefan Larsson, Jennifer Clawson, and Josh Kellar, achieving better value for the money spent on health care requires placing patients at the heart of the solution. Delivering patient-centered care demands a holistic approach that involves:

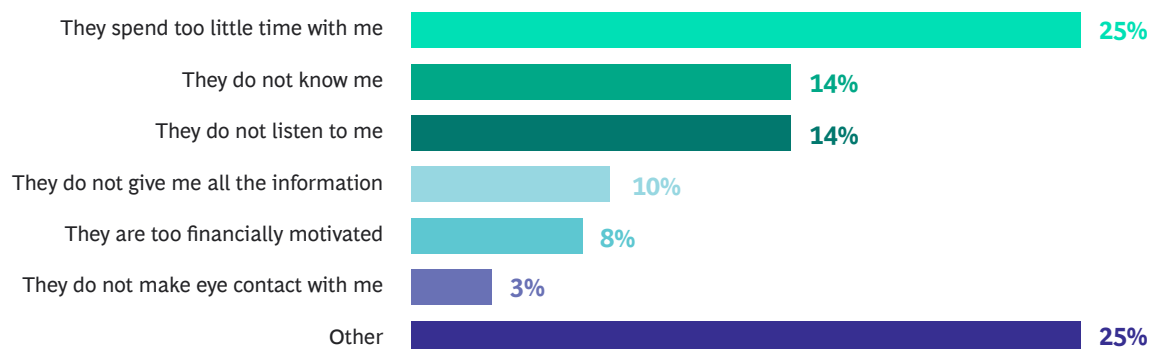
- Leveraging patient-reported outcome measures (PROMs) as big data to shape health care practices
- Embracing the whole health of the individual—including all facets of social factors
- Ensuring health teams make the most effective decisions by bringing together specialist expertise and the latest proven data into what works for a given patient’s cohort

Yet, ensuring patients are active participants in their health is not as straightforward as it may seem due to the high levels of mistrust and frustration stemming from years of opaque, expensive, and inefficient health care experiences. ([See Exhibit 1.](#))

While much has been written about how to deliver great customer experiences across different industries—including health care—being a patient in the U.S. is a uniquely complex experience that demands its own special focus.

There is no other “consumer” industry in which anxiety, loss of control, sickness, fear of the unknown, uncertainty, and opaque costs come together quite like health care. It is not a consumer segment that people want to engage with if they don’t have to. Unsurprisingly, many put it off as long as they can: [a third of Americans—roughly 100 million people—do not have a primary care physician.](#)

### Exhibit 1



**Source:** 2021 American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation (ABIM) survey of trust in the U.S. health care system among the public and physicians.

The Beryl Institute—one of the most respected voices pushing for a universal focus on human-centered approaches in health care—[defines patient experience as](#):

*“...the patient experience reflects occurrences and events that happen independently and collectively across the continuum of care.... Embedded within patient experience is a focus on individualized care and tailoring of services to meet patient needs and engage them as partners in their care. ...the patient experience is strongly tied to patients’ expectations and whether they were positively realized (beyond clinical outcomes or health status).”*

So, what exactly are these patient expectations? And how can health care organizations deliver against them to measurably improve the patient experience?

## A Framework for Improving the Patient Experience

In all of BCG’s work with patients across the world, the same critical themes come up time and time again. Our pyramid of needs reflects the 10 most significant influencers of the patient experience, all of which can be grouped into one of three themes: primary concerns, table-stakes concerns, or emotional concerns. ([See Exhibit 2.](#))

### PRIMARY CONCERNS

*These are the foremost concerns occupying consumers’ thoughts, often serving as the starting point for health care organizations when addressing the patient experience.*

1. **Cost:** Can I access care at an affordable cost?
2. **Care quality:** Can I access the level of care I need and expect?
3. **Convenience:** Can I receive care within a reasonable timeframe? Can I fit my care appointments in around my life demands?

### TABLE-STAKES CONCERNS

*These are the basic requirements patients anticipate for their health care experience. While essential, they are also expected, thus their absence only diminishes the patient experience.*

4. **Confidentiality:** Is my personal and medical information well protected?
5. **Communication:** Is my care team clearly communicating and educating me as the patient to ensure the best path forward for me?
6. **Collaboration:** Do all my providers always have access to my most up-to-date information and are they on the same page about my care?

### EMOTIONAL CONCERNS

*These emotional factors affect the patient experience, often without patients fully recognizing their importance.*

7. **Consideration:** Am I respected and understood as an individual with unique needs?
8. **Community:** Is there a good support network in place for me outside of the clinical environment?
9. **Comfort:** Are my interactions with the medical services team calming? Do these experiences make me feel at ease?
10. **Choice:** Do I feel like I have a say during treatment decisions with my care team? Am I empowered to be part of the decision-making process during my health journey?

## Exhibit 2



### How to Use This Patient Experience Framework

This 10-point framework—which we’ll dive into detail on below—can be used to spark ideas during the innovation phase of a project, guide discovery and concept testing, and develop strategic recommendations to improve the patient experience.

Here are a few practical ways to use this patient experience framework:

- Generate ideas that solve for specific aspects of the patient experience. For example, how might we deliver greater comfort with confidentiality in mind? How might we improve care quality by giving patients more choice and ownership of their health?
- Benchmark the patient experience you provide against that of your competitors. Ask questions that touch upon each aspect of the patient experience to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of performance across various dimensions.
- Use the framework to guide ethnographic research, large sample surveys, and concept testing to understand friction points—and opportunities for improvement.
- Use in conjunction with standard tools like NPS and HCAHPS data to support measures of improvement to the current patient experience.

### 10 Factors That Influence the Patient Experience

Each of the 10 elements in the patient experience framework plays a crucial role in shaping how patients perceive and engage with health care services. Below we’ll delve deeper into why these elements are vital to the overall patient experience—and share strategies for meeting patient expectations in each area.



## Primary Concerns

### 1 Cost

Given the debilitating effects of ill health on an individual's quality of life, one would assume that getting the best care to recover quickly would be *the* top priority for all patients. However, cost is such a critical factor in health care decision-making that it often overshadows considerations of care quality. A [2017 study of 5000 patients by the University of Utah](#) showed that cost is such a predominant concern in patients' minds that they are unlikely to pay more for better care.

In health care, individuals often commit to services and treatments with little to no idea of what they will cost. But the financial burden associated with treatments and medications—particularly for chronic or life-threatening conditions—can be staggering. [More than 40% of cancer patients spend their entire life savings in the first two years of treatment](#), while roughly [30% of Americans with a cancer history report having had financial problems](#). It is a problem so severe that medical debt has become a leading cause of personal bankruptcy, with an [estimated \\$88 billion of that debt in collections](#) in the U.S.

The downstream impact of this is not surprising. Increasingly large numbers of people delay engaging with the health care industry until their conditions worsen to the point that they are severely impacted and cannot physically continue. This not only makes conditions harder and more expensive to resolve—but also pushes patients toward pain management solutions in what is estimated to be a [\\$78.12 billion dollar market in 2024](#).

#### How to meet expectations:

Price transparency and proactive financial planning *before* patients incur financial debt is critical. Fully integrated payer-providers in the U.S. have a natural advantage due to their aligned value-based care incentives, enabling them to offer estimated costs, leverage data to identify the most cost-effective solutions, and understand patients' insurance coverage.

Success, however, hinges on how readily they embrace the challenge and invest in the necessary technology, processes, and policies.

Many health care organizations are turning to artificial intelligence (AI) solutions to bridge gaps between disparate systems—leveraging price transparency data, medical language models, and access to EHRs—so patients can more readily understand potential costs and available financial assistance.

For a smoother patient experience, emergent solutions must prioritize answering the following questions:

- Is it clear what a given treatment will cost the patient based on their specific insurance and health challenges?
- Can a patient clearly understand the costs before committing to decisions?
- Do patients have the tools to easily spot errors and cost savings in bills?

#### Cost Pillar in Practice

As part of a digital front door (DFD) build for an integrated payer-provider, BCG helped a client connect price transparency and historical health treatment data. This then fueled a patient-facing triage solution that enabled patients to make informed choices about their preferred care paths based on estimated cost.

## 2 Care quality

Despite the emphasis on cost, the importance of care quality cannot be understated. Patients desire both affordable health care and effective treatment outcomes. In the same 2017 University of Utah study, a force ranking of value statements showed that while affordable out-of-pocket costs were the top priority for patients, seeing tangible health improvements was also an important priority.

When it comes to quality of care, safety is a particular concern—especially regarding hospital-acquired infections and adverse drug events—and a patient’s perception of safety has a significant influence on their overall experience. [Studies show that when patients feel safe](#), they are more inclined to recommend a provider.

And [for the first time in two decades of reporting by Gallup](#), less than half of Americans are complimentary about the quality of U.S. health care: just 48% rate it “excellent” or “good.” In fact, most now rate health care quality as subpar, including 31% saying it is “only fair” and 21%—a record high—calling it “poor.” ([See Exhibit 3.](#))

Patient-centered care improves care quality by prioritizing individual needs, fostering open communication, and empowering patients to actively participate in their treatment decisions, ultimately resulting in better health outcomes and heightened satisfaction.

### How to meet expectations:

Although quality surveys like HCAHPS have been instrumental in evaluating patient satisfaction regarding the quality of their care, there’s a [general agreement that they require modernization](#) to reflect changes in health care delivery and patients’ technology expectations. HCAHPS survey response rates have also been declining annually, possibly attributable to the survey’s length and absence of digital options. Consequently, health care providers must supplement these surveys with alternative tools for assessing patient satisfaction with care quality.

To identify opportunities to improve quality of care, ask questions like:

- What other factors outside of the medical encounter can help patients feel safer when receiving care?
- How can we help patients express their care preferences, and define quality outcomes that are personalized based on those preferences?
- How can we better [engage individuals so that they are no longer “patients” but “partners”](#) in their care?

### Care Quality Pillar in Practice

As part of a ground-up redevelopment of a provider search tool, BCG helped a nationwide health care organization source and implement a ratings and reviews platform. This helped support patients with a comprehensive understanding of provider reputation.

## Exhibit 3 - Americans’ Views of U.S. Health Care Quality

Overall, how would you rate the quality of health care in this country – as excellent/good, only fair or poor?



Source: [Gallup 2022 Health and Health care survey.](#)

### 3 Convenience

Despite recognizing the importance of maintaining good health, many patients struggle to find the time needed to prioritize their well-being. The pressures of work and supporting dependents often make it challenging to find the time to be proactive in preventative health activities.

A significant hurdle lies in securing timely appointments with health care providers. As the population ages, demand for care increases, and medical professional shortages continue to grow, an appointment wait time crisis has emerged—with the [average wait](#) to see a new doctor now standing at 26 days.

It's incredible that despite appointments typically lasting less than 30 minutes, patients frequently wait weeks to secure a slot. And patients overwhelmingly agree: [one study found](#) that the ability to schedule a timely appointment placed second in importance to patients.

While patients are [generally willing to travel up to 30 minutes](#) for medical appointments, commuting during working hours poses a challenge for many. This inconvenience explains the prevalent misuse of emergency rooms and urgent care facilities, which offer walk-in appointments outside typical working hours. Although patients value continuity of care from a familiar provider, timeliness and convenience often take precedence.

#### How to meet expectations:

Without viable alternatives, investments in educational marketing alone will not suffice to increase adherence to preventative health appointments or reduce unnecessary spending on ER and urgent care visits. Patients are looking for solutions that seamlessly integrate into their lives, aligning with the urgency of their needs.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual care was unfamiliar to many, with most patients accustomed only to in-person visits. However, the pandemic accelerated the adoption of virtual care as patients rapidly adapted to remote health care options. Now, many patients favor the convenience of virtual care, especially for non-urgent reasons. [This shift also improves health care accessibility](#), enabling providers to reach underserved populations, including those with disabilities, elderly individuals, and residents of rural areas.

To improve convenience—and ultimately the patient experience—health care organizations should answer the following questions:

- How can existing solutions be made more efficient and flexible to increase convenience?
- Are alternative options readily accessible and clearly communicated to patients?
- Have technology solutions been effectively harnessed to offer greater choice and timeliness?
- How can the importance of cost be leveraged to steer patients away from unnecessary ER visits and towards appropriate, cost-effective alternatives?

#### Convenience Pillar in Practice

While working with one of our clients in the renovation of the physical spaces within their pediatric unit, it became clear that one of the biggest opportunities was to cut down the wait time. BCG built a digital solution that enabled patients to fill out documentation and submit insurance from home. Once completed, they would receive a number in the queue. A text or call would then provide them with a dynamic notice on when to come in so they could do most of their waiting from the comfort of their home.





**Patients are looking for solutions that seamlessly integrate into their lives, aligning with the urgency of their needs.**

## Table-Stakes Concerns

### 4 Confidentiality

When interacting with health care professionals, patients expect that the information they provide is essential to receiving ongoing care. Moreover, they trust that this information will be kept confidential, only accessible on a need-to-know basis.

Confidentiality is a fundamental expectation for patients, requiring no detailed understanding of regulatory frameworks like HIPAA. [Nearly 75% of patients are concerned](#) about protecting the privacy of their personal health data, while just 20% say they know the scope of companies and individuals with access to their data. There exists an implicit expectation in the patient-provider relationship that the patient's personal information will be kept private and secure.

Patients get alarmed in real-world care settings where conversations between patients and providers, or among providers discussing a patient, can be overheard. [Research shows that these occurrences can diminish patient trust](#), highlighting the critical need for discretion in communication and the provision of sound-proof spaces to protect patient privacy. Additionally, health care data breaches further undermine patients' trust and damage the reputation of organizations—particularly concerning [given the escalating frequency and severity of attacks](#).

#### How to meet expectations:

At its core, meeting patients' privacy expectations involves safeguarding patient trust and ensuring their encounters remain private, free from potential eavesdropping or exposure in vulnerable states.

With digital solutions, data sharing should be streamlined for easy approval and deactivation, reinforcing the principle of limited access on a need-to-know basis. Simplifying the patient experience by automating access revocation once specific criteria are met can help build trust and the overall patient experience.

Since [patients increasingly want control over how their information is utilized](#), data transparency is vital to building patient trust and enhancing accountability among providers. This transparency empowers patients by providing them with choices regarding the handling of their sensitive information, ultimately strengthening the patient-provider relationship.

Working through the following questions can help organizations ensure they meet patients' high confidentiality standards:

- How can digital solutions facilitate health care conversations tailored to a patient's needs while ensuring the confidentiality of protected health information (PHI)?
- How can physical spaces and operating processes be designed to uphold patient privacy and confidentiality?
- How can providers increase trust by making data sharing practices more transparent to patients?

#### Confidentiality Pillar in Practice

The robust deployment of HIPAA within digital patient portals is a must. However, it can occasionally prevent patients from effectively sharing health information with specialists—and prevent caregivers from supporting those in need. In the deployment of a nationwide health care portal, BCG helped a client design and implement a foolproof solution for patients to manage access to their data. With clear instructions and simple controls for sharing, patients could easily understand and make their own choices in accordance with both federal and state regulations

## 5 Communication

Health is an inherently personal subject. Describing physical and emotional pain can be as challenging as enduring it, and patients are desperate to feel seen and understood in discussions concerning their health and that of their loved ones.

For many providers, this represents a significant change in how they train and practice. Building communication and empathy skills are only relatively recent additions to the health care professional's ongoing education and training activities.

Health issues induce significant stress, prompting patients to seek validation and solutions quickly. When interactions with providers fail to yield satisfactory answers or affirmation, patients are increasingly inclined to switch providers or seek answers independently. More and more patients turn to internet sources for health guidance and treatments—often encountering less credible advice with potential risks.

Patients who distrust their health care provider or perceive a lack of genuine concern for their well-being are also less likely to follow their recommendations. Research suggests that individuals with strained doctor-patient relationships are less inclined to adhere to essential medication regimens, potentially jeopardizing life-saving interventions. Evidence also shows that failure to listen to patients is a major factor affecting quality of care—and a contributing factor to fatal errors.

### How to meet expectations:

Patients expect honest and upfront dialogue about their diagnosis, treatment, and the cost—even when some of these remain unknown. They anticipate that their symptoms will be taken seriously and that recommendations for next steps will be delivered with clear and logical explanations.

When discussing treatment options, patients expect to receive clear explanations of medical procedures, complexities, risks, and associated out-of-pocket costs. These conversations should be conducted through the patient's preferred channels for maximum convenience—and delivered with clarity and empathy.

To identify opportunities to provide more collaborative care, health care organizations should answer the following questions:

- What solutions can enable providers to better prepare for each patient encounter, allowing them to tailor their communications effectively to put the patient at ease?
- How can we ensure patients are well prepared for provider encounters to make the most of their time together?
- How can we reassure patients that their symptoms have been carefully noted and discussed, and that the recommended treatments are suitable?
- What solutions can provide a simple way to document conversations and next steps, allowing patients to quickly refer back to them? .

### Communication Pillar in Practice

In the recent deployment of a digital front door for patients, BCG helped our client personalize every aspect of the patient experience. The goal of this was to make patients feel welcomed, understood, and like an active participant in their health. Building a dynamic approach to the use of language, visual elements, and content prioritization within each screen allowed us to deliver a uniquely tailored sense of human comfort to each patient or caregiver.

## 6 Collaboration

Patients have high expectations for their health care experience, often using other consumer brand interactions as a baseline for what “good service” should look like. A recurring frustration in the U.S. health care system is the burden placed on patients to coordinate their own care across fragmented providers, specialists, labs, pharmacies, and insurance companies.

Differing opinions on diagnosis, an onus on the patient to coordinate referral appointments, and the repetitive nature of filling out paperwork and describing symptoms fail to instill confidence in patients regarding their care. Such issues would not be tolerated in any other consumer experience. Unsurprisingly, [research indicates that imposing these frustrations on patients](#) only heightens anxiety, prolongs recovery time, and increases overall health care costs.

### How to meet expectations:

There are numerous avenues to improve care coordination throughout the patient journey. For example, a provider can coordinate with social services to help a patient find community resources such as housing, transportation, or food. Providers can also take part in programs such as the [Medicare Shared Savings Program](#) that support care coordination. These types of programs provide the necessary support while rewarding successful coordination.

In the U.S., fully integrated payer-providers have an inherent advantage when it comes to care coordination due to their aligned value-based care incentives. Leveraging comprehensive data, they can identify cost-effective solutions to aid patients in achieving and maintaining wellness. Having a network of specialists under one roof also helps eliminate inefficiencies and communication gaps often present in poorly coordinated care.

Emergent solutions aimed at improving coordination need to ensure patients can easily view and share their diagnoses and treatment plans from across various providers—all within a single, collaborative space.

### Collaboration Pillar in Practice

BCG recently helped one of our clients build a digital platform that eliminates the burden on patients of getting a second opinion. The platform enables patients to find world-renowned specialists, securely connect with a dedicated coordinating nurse, submit health records, prepare for virtual consultations, and benefit from the very best medical professionals across a range of specialties.





**Patients expect honest and upfront dialogue about their diagnosis, treatment, and the cost—even when some of these remain unknown.**

## Emotional Concerns

### 7 Consideration

Research indicates that [provider diversity positively impacts the patient experience](#), and connecting patients with providers who share their racial or ethnic background fosters a sense of cultural relatability, ultimately leading to better health outcomes.

The current reality falls short of this ideal, however, as only [5.7% of U.S. doctors are Black](#) and [6.9% are Hispanic](#), despite making up 13.6% and 19.1% of the U.S. population. And studies reveal troubling trends in the interactions between a predominantly white physician workforce and Black patients.

[Doctors tend to command conversations more with Black patients](#) compared to white patients—a phenomenon called “verbal dominance.” Black patients also report feeling their concerns are more frequently dismissed by health care professionals. Additionally, [analysis of doctors’ language in medical records](#) shows more instances in which physicians seemingly doubted Black patients’ statements.

People with disabilities also report challenges accessing health care and often find that doctors’ offices refuse to accommodate them. [In one study](#), only 41% of providers were very confident about their ability to provide equal care to patients with disabilities, and just 57% strongly agreed they welcome disabled patients into their practices. It’s this general reluctance to care for people with disabilities, [according to another study](#), that plays a key role in exacerbating health care disparities.

#### How to meet expectations:

Ensuring that [health care staff reflects the values of the local community](#) can significantly improve patient outcomes and reduce health disparities. This requires the ability to deliver care that respects every patient’s social, cultural, and linguistic background. Recruiting providers from diverse backgrounds and implementing cultural competence training at all levels has been shown to positively impact patient trust and health outcomes.

Cultural competence is at the heart of delivering more considerate and inclusive care. Health care organizations must prioritize closing the gap between patients’ diverse needs and providers without the right level of cultural competence training. [To improve cultural competency](#), health care organizations should analyze demographic data to identify the needs of the local community, communicate those findings to determine their priorities, and educate staff and align programming to meet community needs. [Disability inclusion](#) is also essential to ensure people with disabilities can take advantage of the same health promotion and prevention activities as people who do not have a disability.

#### Consideration Pillar in Practice

In a recent case with a BCG client, we ensured accessibility was at the center of every design decision. Whether it was building digital interfaces could be infinitely zoomed across devices—or that intake forms supported patients self-identification with regards to gender, race, and religion—we made sure that inclusivity was integrated into every aspect of the user experience. This approach not only enhanced usability but also demonstrated the client’s commitment to respecting and accommodating diverse needs.



## 8 Community

Loneliness is now a public health crisis. [An advisory from the U.S. Surgeon General](#) acknowledges it has reached epidemic proportions, with 50% of U.S. adults experiencing loneliness. And loneliness is more than a feeling—it harms patients' health: the same advisory from the U.S. Surgeon General noted that the impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and even greater than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity.

An individual's community plays a pivotal role in shaping their health and well-being, with community support being essential for addressing health disparities. [Social determinants of health \(SDOH\)](#)—the conditions and circumstances in which people are born, work, or live—contribute to health inequities. For instance, limited access to grocery stores offering healthy foods can lead to poor nutrition, increasing the likelihood of developing health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

When health care interactions are designed to embrace a patient's support network and ensure patients remain connected to their lives and communities, patients recover faster and cope better with their health issues.

### How to meet expectations:

When addressing the needs of a patient, it's essential to extend consideration to their potential caregivers and support networks. Look for ways to ensure all parties involved feel welcome and included wherever possible. Fostering positive social interactions between patients and staff can also create a stronger sense of community and diminish feelings of isolation.

Providers can also invest in and partner with community organizations to promote, restore, and maintain the health of their patients. [Providers should be responsible for](#) ensuring access to high-quality health services, providing clear information and advice on the benefits of health to the community, and empowering residents to better manage their health with the support available in their communities.

To effectively cultivate and sustain a patient's community, it is crucial to address the following patient experience questions:

- How can solutions effectively incorporate a patient's support network into their care journey while respecting the patient's privacy?
- What interactions offer opportunities to enhance a patient's sense of connectedness with others, even in the absence of a direct support network?
- How can patients be introduced to new communities of support that offer additional understanding of their condition?

### Community Pillar in Practice

When health care providers have large physical footprints in the heart of a city, they can become highly influential in the provision of local community. In the master planning strategy for one of BCG's clients, we worked to ensure that their new health care campus was woven into the fabric of the local community. This allowed our client to respond to the community's unique needs, as well as create new opportunities for social interactions and heightened living standards.

## 9 Comfort

As our understanding of the detrimental effects of stress on the body grows, so does the importance of creating comfortable and soothing environments in health care settings.

Overhearing other patients' private conversations, noisy environments hindering sleep, harsh lighting, and unnatural chemical smells [have all been found to exacerbate patient discomfort and agitation](#). Conversely, incorporating private rooms, windows with natural light, and images or artwork depicting scenes from nature has been proven to shorten recovery times and expedite hospital discharge.

Health care providers can significantly enhance patient outcomes by providing tranquil environments during moments of uncertainty, stress, and vulnerability. This investment in creating relaxing spaces yields considerable returns on investment in the delivery of care.

### How to meet expectations:

Prioritize comfort as a fundamental element in a patient's care journey. Emergent solutions to improve patient comfort should [leverage trauma-informed design principles](#) to create comfortable, relaxing spaces for patients and their support networks.

Ensuring a pleasant environment and enjoyable interactions can positively impact patients' mental well-being and perception of the overall experience, resulting in quicker recovery and better health outcomes.

### Comfort Pillar in Practice

First impressions count. In a recent design project for a BCG client, we were asked to radically modernize their common areas to ensure everyone who visited their clinics felt relaxed and well looked after. We produced a clean and organized design that provides distinct placemaking for easy wayfinding, friendly informational guides to inform and entertain, spaces that feel secure and private, and the use of soft, sensory furnishings and decoration that bring a sense of calm.

## 10 Choice

Humans have an innate desire to have control over their lives—and nowhere is this more difficult to achieve than in times of illness. Without confidence in their ability to affect the desired outcomes, patients may lack motivation to tackle even minor challenges.

To empower and instill a sense of control in patients, they must feel capable of making choices and fully understand their available options. [Research shows](#) that this positive self-efficacy significantly influences adherence to medication and treatment regimens, with pre-surgery self-efficacy even predicting recovery times in cardiac patients.

Ironically, health care professionals may inadvertently diminish patients' self-efficacy by inundating them with excessive or complex health information, resulting in a reluctance to explore new options.

### How to meet expectations:

Strategically guide patients through their care journey by offering clear, comprehensible options and [emphasizing the importance of shared decision-making](#). Help patients build confidence in their ability to manage their health by leveraging effective behavior change techniques and ensuring they never feel overwhelmed.

Self-efficacy can be cultivated through offering meaningful choices and implementing behavior change interventions like skills mastery, modeling, and social persuasion. While these techniques are prevalent in gamified social media, education, and fitness apps, they are not consistently utilized in health care interactions.

To foster a sense of choice and control, emergent solutions should prioritize answering the following patient experience questions:

- How can providers be supported with tools and information to empower patients with a sense of control?
- How can technology enhance patients' understanding of their health care journey, enabling them to manage their health proactively?

### Choice Pillar in Practice

One of the positive outcomes from the digitization of health care has been the speed at which lab test results and diagnosis can be delivered to patients. An unforeseen challenge, however, has been that patients now often see these results before their provider—and certainly before the provider has been able to speak to the patient.

At BCG, we worked with one of our clients to overcome this challenge by ensuring our digital solution delivered well-crafted and easy-to-understand information about the meaning of the results for every test patients received. This helped ensure patients did not resort to consuming unreliable sources of information from the internet, and that they were well primed for follow-up conversations with their providers.

## Empowering Patients, Transforming Lives

The tangible impact of prioritizing the patient experience is undeniable. Improved patient experience correlates with better adherence, faster recoveries, and fewer setbacks. These aren't just patient benefits—they're crucial metrics for organizations, shaping decisions on health care quality and provider contracts.

Take Medicare Advantage Star Ratings, for instance. They serve as a crucial measure of health care quality for consumers, guiding them in making informed decisions about their health plans. These ratings also significantly influence the value of government contracts awarded to health care providers.

But beyond the metrics and financials lies a more profound truth: health care is about people. In a world where profits often overshadow purpose, health care stands apart as the only consumer industry with the power to heal, uplift, and change lives for the better. For providers, it's not just a job—it's a calling, a relentless pursuit to make a positive impact on the lives of others.

Unfortunately, this pursuit is being tested: burnout among health care providers is rampant, with [40% of physicians planning to leave their current roles](#). By adopting a patient-centered approach, we can also help reignite the passion that brought health care workers to medicine in the first place.

The patient experience is, like patients themselves, complex and multi-dimensional. Designing a patient experience that leads to better outcomes requires looking at the entirety of the patient's journey. From the initial appointment scheduling to follow-up care and managing a health condition at home, each interaction shapes their overall experience.

Recognizing the complexity of the patient experience in our work with patients and health care organizations around the world led us to develop this comprehensive patient experience framework. Taking a holistic view of the patient journey—where each patient is seen as a whole person with unique needs, preferences, and fears—it provides a structured approach to improving the patient experience. By embracing this approach, health care organizations can empower patients to take an active role in their own well-being and ultimately lead healthier, happier lives.

## Boston Consulting Group

Boston Consulting Group partners with leaders in business and society to tackle their most important challenges and capture their greatest opportunities. BCG was the pioneer in business strategy when it was founded in 1963. Today, we work closely with clients to embrace a transformational approach aimed at benefiting all stakeholders—empowering organizations to grow, build sustainable competitive advantage, and drive positive societal impact.

Our diverse, global teams bring deep industry and functional expertise and a range of perspectives that question the status quo and spark change. BCG delivers solutions through leading-edge management consulting, technology and design, and corporate and digital ventures. We work in a uniquely collaborative model across the firm and throughout all levels of the client organization, fueled by the goal of helping our clients thrive and enabling them to make the world a better place.

## BCG X

BCG X is the tech build and design unit of BCG.

Turbocharging BCG's deep industry and functional expertise, BCG X brings together advanced tech knowledge and ambitious entrepreneurship to help organizations enable innovation at scale. With nearly 3,000 technologists, scientists, programmers, engineers, and human-centered designers located across 80+ cities, BCG X builds and designs platforms and software to address the world's most important challenges and opportunities. Teaming across our practices, and in close collaboration with our clients, our end-to-end global team unlocks new possibilities. Together we're creating the bold and disruptive products, services, and businesses of tomorrow.





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