



# Patient involvement in health technology assessment

**Health technology assessment (HTA) is a process by which it is determined which health treatments and technologies should be made available. However, despite the relevance of this mechanism to patient communities, not always are patients adequately involved in this decision-making process. IAPO discusses three arguments in support of high-quality patient involvement in HTA.**

## Introduction

As stated in IAPO's [Declaration on patient-centred healthcare](#), a patient-centred healthcare system is one in which adequate patient involvement in decision-making takes place regularly. HTA plays a crucial role in informing health policy decisions that will inevitably impact on patients' lives. If a decision is envisaged to have an impact on patients' lives, it cannot be taken without involving patients throughout all stages of the process. By relying on their unique set of skills and knowledge, individual patients and patient advocates can provide additional, distinctive insights, which must be appropriately valued and incorporated in HTA and beyond.

## Definition

HTA is the process used in a growing number of countries to decide which treatments and medicines should be available for patients. More specifically, according to the definition by the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), HTA consists of a systematic process aimed to "evaluate the social, economic, organizational and ethical issues" of a health intervention and technology. As further clarified by [Health Technology Assessment international \(HTAi\)](#), "health technologies include "pharmaceuticals, devices, diagnostics, procedures and other clinical, public health and organizational interventions".

New technologies and treatments can play a fundamental role in improving the quality of patient access to care. However, if technology is to make a strong, positive impact on patients' lives, it is crucial that the implications of its introduction and use are carefully evaluated from multiple points of view. In this regard, because patients are intended to be the first beneficiaries of health innovation, they should be able to add their views, experiences, and ideas to the key stages of the HTA process. In particular, as highlighted by [EUPATI](#), patients can have strong impact on increasing the legitimacy, acceptability, and credibility of decision-making by explaining "how important a decision is" and why it is important to them.

## Policy landmarks

At global level, the WHO has traced an important connection between health technology assessment and universal health coverage in the Resolution [WHA67.23](#). Stating that the “efficient use of resources” is crucial to ensure the sustainability of health systems and inform policy decisions in support of universal health coverage, the WHO has called on member states to put in place methodologically robust health technology assessment mechanisms.

Important steps have been made to encourage the establishment of HTA by WHO Regional Offices as well. For example, in 2012 the Resolution CSP28.R9 (Eng.) by the 28th [Pan American Sanitary Conference](#) encouraged member states to look at HTA as a primary tool to inform decisions as far as resource allocation in healthcare is concerned. Equally, in the Resolution [SEA/RC66/R4](#), the Regional Office for South-East Asia (SEARO) has identified and highlighted the necessity for all the key health stakeholders to come together and “formulate national strategic plans concerning capacity development for and introduction of health intervention and technology assessment research”.

In order to strengthen the legitimacy of HTA and increase the acceptability of decisions made, decision-making should be evidence-based. In addition, the acceptability of such decisions heavily relies on adequate patient involvement throughout the various stages of the process.

In this regard, at the IAPO 2014 Global Patient Congress, HTAi launched [the Values and Standards on Patient and Citizen Involvement in HTA](#). The document provides a systematic overview of the criteria and quality standards of patient engagement with regard to both the general and individual HTA processes

## Advocating for patient-centric HTA

HTA represents one of the key decision-making processes in healthcare in that it can have a significant impact on patients’ lives. For this reason, patient advocates are called on to identify and make the most of the opportunities of involvement so as to make their unique views matter. IAPO identifies three key arguments in support of patient engagement in HTA.

- **Patients’ unique views can increase the quality of decision-making.** As stated in IAPO’s [Declaration on patient-centred healthcare](#), every patient has unique values and perspectives. This uniqueness must be put into appropriate use in decision-making. It in fact represents a key resource that has the potential of improving the quality of HTA decisions by ensuring that these decisions are more aligned with and respondent to patients’ needs and expectations. IAPO’s research has shown that patient advocates are extremely aware of the fact that no-one is in a better position than patients to provide insights as to how it is to live with a condition, and the implications it generates on the quality of people’s lives.
- **Patients’ experiences can represent an invaluable source of data.** As voiced by many patient representatives at the IAPO 2016 [Global Patient Congress](#), patients’ experiences and stories can represent an invaluable and distinctive source of data. Patients’ experiences, however, can hardly be captured by or translated into numbers. Therefore, in order to enable patients to contribute at their best to decision-making in HTA, it is paramount to design and employ appropriate research methods to elicit, collect, and adequately value patient preferences and views.
- **What makes patients’ input truly unique?** In the previous policy briefing on [patient access](#), it was argued that access to decision-making builds on patients’ ability to seek for opportunities to make their unique perspectives into use. In this respect, it is worth noting that it is certainly true that high-quality information and capacity building increase patients’ ability to contribute to decision-making. That said, though, it is important to keep in mind that regardless of their professional, cultural, and social backgrounds, patients develop a distinctive set of skills and knowledge by “simply” being patients. It is in those skills and knowledge that patients’ uniqueness actually lies. In that respect, however, high-quality information, training, and capacity building can do a lot to enable patients to translate that distinctive knowledge into usable and actionable input.

## How to move forward

IAPO is committed to working in close collaboration with HTA bodies to enable patients’ voice to be heard in HTA decision-making. By being an active member of HTAi’s [Patient and Citizen Involvement Working Group](#) and by participating in WHO-led initiatives aimed at improving HTA globally, IAPO aims to ensure that patients are not left behind, especially when discussions concerns decisions that will affect patients more than anyone else.