

How to identify a high-quality patient decision aid (PDA)

What is a patient decision aid (PDA)?

A PDA is a tool used by providers in shared decision making to engage patients in health care decisions by providing them with information needed to make an informed choice when there is more than one clinically appropriate option. High-quality PDAs provide a structure for the patient conversation, including a comparison of those options, while considering personal preferences and values.

PDAs come in many forms:

- A written document
- An interactive website
- Videos
- Visual aids

How do I identify a high-quality PDA?

The Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA) certifies PDAs to ensure they meet a certain standard of quality. To ensure high quality, HCA uses a list of [certification criteria](#) based on standards established by the International Patient Decision Aids Standards Collaboration (IPDAS). [Visit HCA's website](#) for a list of currently certified PDAs.

PDAs do not have to be certified to be high quality. The HCA program has been limited in scope and there are other high quality decision aids that have not been evaluated for formal certification. The following is a subset* of the criteria used by HCA for certification, which can help identify important elements that make up a high-quality PDA:

- 1) Describe the health condition or problem.
- 2) Explicitly state the decision under consideration.
- 3) Identify the eligible or target audience.
- 4) Describe the options available for the decision, including non-treatment.
- 5) Describe the positive features of each option (benefits).
- 6) Describe the negative features of each option (harms, side effects, disadvantages).
- 7) Help patients clarify their values for outcomes of options by:
 - a) Asking patients to consider or rate which positive and negative features matter most to them, and/or
 - b) Describing each option to help patients imagine the physical, social (e.g., impact on personal, family, or work life), and/or psychological effects.
- 8) Make it possible to compare features of available options.
- 9) Show positive and negative features of options with balanced detail.

*For a full list of the criteria, [see the certification criteria](#).



Certain criteria are often challenging to assess, including how much detail is needed to meet the standard for enabling **clarification of values** (criterion 7). Every patient is different and will prioritize the potential risks and benefits of each option differently. The goal of this standard is to ensure that the PDA encourages the patient to explore the impact of their values on the decision.

Another challenge is the consideration of **bias**, which plays a role in several of the criteria. It is important that a high-quality aid present information in a neutral way, offering information to the patient and supporting them in making the decision that aligns with their individual needs, but not pushing them toward a particular decision.

Accuracy: in HCA’s certification process, an independent evidence reviewer assesses whether the scientific evidence presented in the aid is accurate and up to date. When assessing an aid outside of the certification process, it is important that a clinical expert review the aid and ensure that the information presented is accurate and up to date.

What is the difference between a PDA and patient educational materials?

There is an important distinction between a PDA and non-PDA educational materials. A PDA supports a patient in making a decision by fully exploring all their relevant options, while educational materials typically focus on a single possible approach. Educational materials have an important role but are not a substitute for PDAs. The table below clarifies this distinction further.

Table 1: difference between a PDA and educational material

PDA	Educational material
Provides information about more than one option to help patients choose the right one for them.	Typically provides information about one option and what the patient can expect.
Assumes there is a choice that needs to be made.	Assumes there is not a choice to be made or one has already been made.
Helps patients and clinicians compare features of available options, including benefits and risks of each.	May provide information about one treatment, including benefits and risks.
Helps patients clarify their values, or what matters most to them, for outcomes of options.	Often provides information needed to consent to a treatment, rather than exploring reasons to make one choice versus another.

For additional questions or information, please contact shareddecisionmaking@hca.wa.gov.