



Effective Strategies for Increasing Post-Discharge Survey Response Rates

Why do higher response rates matter?

They can

- Reduce the size of the sample you need
- Improve the quality of your data
- Give you a more accurate picture of your target population
- Reduce bias in your results

You can use a combination of strategies to improve your survey response rates.



Provide context

- Tell patients
 - Why you're conducting the survey
 - What you'll do with the results and who the data will help
 - How they can view the results (e.g., provide a link)
 - What's in it for them



Make it timely

- In alignment with survey procedures, try to send your survey as close to the patient's discharge date as possible. (Keep in mind that patients have different post-discharge recuperation periods.) Generally, the closer to their hospital stay that patients receive the survey, the higher the return rate.



Make it prominent

- Use a variety of methods to let people know about the survey — consider signage/posters in the hospital, notes in patient handouts, mentions in discharge briefings, hospital websites and emails. Prominence communicates the importance of the survey and increases response rates.



Add a sense of urgency

- Consider including a deadline for completing and returning the survey. This encourages recipients to respond immediately, instead of delaying and forgetting.



Add a sticky note

- Add a handwritten sticky note to the cover letter or survey requesting completion. This simple act can double response rates.
 - You can use pre-printed notes that look handwritten if your survey volume makes handwritten notes impractical.



Simplify

- Keep surveys clear, short and user-friendly (we encourage the use of coloured ink).
- Provide clear instructions.
- Limit the number of times participants need to interact with the survey.



Tailor to your audience

- Make sure your survey questions are clear and easy for your audience to understand (e.g., appropriate language and reading level).
- Personalize the survey when possible (e.g., address patients by name).



Leverage your brand

- Brand your survey to build trust and authenticate it.
- Make sure it has a professional appearance.
 - For online surveys, a plainer appearance is better.



Ensure relevance

- Demonstrate the purpose and benefits of the survey and how the results will be used (e.g., provide a link to where results will be made available).



Respect privacy and confidentiality

- Let respondents know whether all or part of the survey responses will be kept anonymous and/or confidential.
 - For parts that won't be kept anonymous and/or confidential, tell respondents who will see their information and in what context.
- Where practical, allow respondents to decide whether they want to provide identifying information.



Choose your delivery method

Paper

- Deliver by mail and get a record of receipt.
- Provide stamped, self-addressed return envelopes.

Online

- Use recorded delivery or cookie tracking.

Telephone

- Call at different times of the day during follow-up.



Follow up

- Send multiple follow-up reminders, with or without the survey attached.
- Follow up using different means: phone call, recorded phone message, email, letter, reminder at follow-up appointment.
 - A phone follow-up is more effective than a mailed follow-up.

