

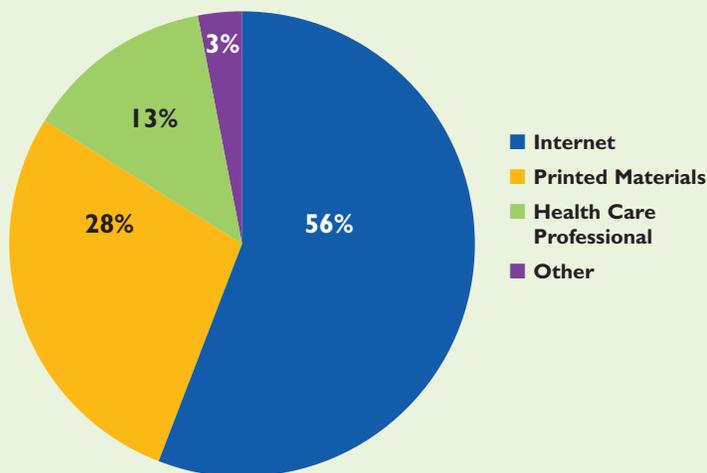
## Implementation of HINTS in Puerto Rico

In 2009, a demonstration project was conducted in Puerto Rico using existing Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) infrastructure to assess the feasibility of adapting the national HINTS survey to a local setting to facilitate local data collection and cancer control planning. The University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center (UPRCCC), in collaboration with the Puerto Rico Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (PR-BRFSS), fielded the 2008 HINTS instrument in Puerto Rico. Data collection was conducted through the PR-BRFSS telephone research center using random digit dialing (RDD) and computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI). All interviews were conducted by experienced bilingual Puerto Rican interviewers.

Collection of HINTS data in Puerto Rico provides an opportunity to better understand the health information and education needs of the population in Puerto Rico. In this HINTS *Brief*, we explore health information seeking in Puerto Rico.

**“The most recent time you looked for information on health or medical topics, where did you go first?”<sup>1</sup>**

*Asked of those seeking health information only*



<sup>1</sup> Data from HINTS Puerto Rico (2008).

## Quick Facts

- Internet penetration in Puerto Rico is fairly low, with only 32.7% of respondents indicating that they use the Internet compared with 68.5% of the mainland U.S. population.
- The percentage of respondents seeking health or medical information from any source also remains low, with 32.9% saying they had looked for health information compared with 61% of the mainland U.S. population.
- The most trusted sources of health and medical information in Puerto Rico are health care providers and government health agencies.
- Only 24.4% of the population in Puerto Rico indicate that they trust the Internet “a lot” as a source of medical and health information.

## Study Documents Generally Positive Information Seeking Experiences

*Health information seeking experiences reported in Puerto Rico generally positive, with some frustration and concerns about quality*

In an analysis of HINTS Puerto Rico data published in 2010, investigators examined health and cancer information seeking behaviors and experiences among the population in Puerto Rico. Approximately one-third of the population had ever sought health or medical information from any source. Those looking for health or medical information characterized their most recent health information seeking experience as generally positive. However, 17.7% indicated that it took a lot of effort to get the information that they needed, 11.1% expressed feeling frustrated during their last search, 19.8% had concerns about information quality, and 16.3% agreed that the information they obtained was difficult to understand.

# Health Information Seeking in Puerto Rico: Differences by Gender and Education

Differences in health information seeking practices in Puerto Rico were observed by gender and education.

## Gender

Health information seeking occurred more frequently among females (41.8%) than males (22.6%). This difference remained significant in a multivariate model testing for independent associations wherein females were nearly 3 times more likely than males to seek health information.

## Education

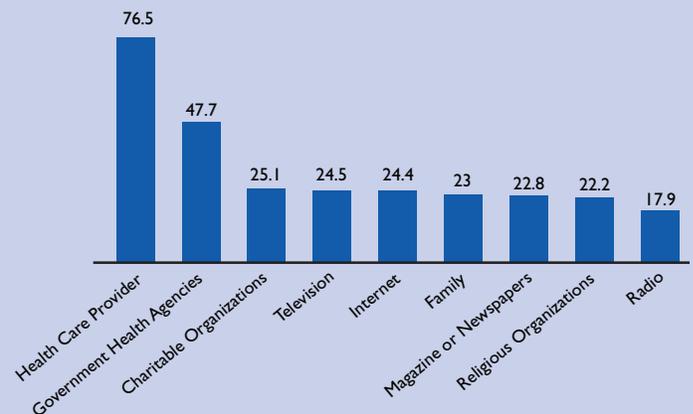
Frequency of individuals reporting health information seeking increased with education level. While 15.1% of persons with less than a high school education reported ever having sought health or medical information, 56.4% of those with a college degree had ever sought health information. This difference remained significant in a multivariate model testing for independent associations wherein college graduates were over 7 times more likely than those with less than a high school education to report ever having sought health information.

## How Can This Inform Your Work?

Data from HINTS Puerto Rico illustrate how HINTS questions fielded within a local context can sharpen the focus of health planning efforts over relying on data from the U.S. national sample alone:

- Trusted sources of health information in Puerto Rico, including health care providers and government health agencies, are ideal channels for relaying important health messages to the public.
- Overall, Internet penetration is low in Puerto Rico, but of those who are actively looking for information, the Internet is an important first stop. Investment of resources to improve Internet access might improve the reach of online health information.
- Women and those with college educations reported looking for health information more frequently than other groups. Consideration should be given to how these two groups can be used as “connectors” or “promotoras” when planning to reach the rest of the population.

% Trust Information Source “a lot”<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Data from HINTS Puerto Rico (2008).

About HINTS  
<http://hints.cancer.gov>

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) fielded the first Health Information National Trends Survey (HINTS) in 2002 and 2003, surveying 6,369 Americans. Subsequent surveys followed in 2005 (5,586 Americans surveyed) and 2008 (7,674 Americans surveyed). HINTS was created to monitor changes in the rapidly evolving field of health communication. The survey data can be used to understand how adults 18 years and older use different communication channels to obtain health information for themselves and their loved ones and to create more effective health communication strategies across populations.

HINTS Briefs provide a snapshot of noteworthy research findings. They introduce population-level estimates for specific questions in the survey and summarize significant research findings that result from analyzing how certain demographic characteristics influence specific outcomes. Many Briefs summarize research findings from recent peer-reviewed journal articles using HINTS data.

## For More Information on Cancer

- Call the NCI Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER
- Visit <http://cancer.gov>
- Order NCI publications at <https://cissecure.nci.nih.gov/ncipubs/>

## References Used in This HINTS Brief

Tortolero-Luna G, Finney Rutten LJ, Hesse BW, Davis T, Kornfeld J, Sanchez M, et al. Health and cancer information seeking practices and preferences in Puerto Rico: creating an evidence base for cancer communication efforts. *J Health Commun.* 2010;15(1): 30-45.

