

4 Tips for welcoming patients to your conference

These are tips for anyone in healthcare who is organizing a healthcare conference and including patients, caregivers and members of the public.

1. Co-designing the conference with patient partners

Co-design content. Are your themes and rosters of invited speakers (including patient/caregiver partners) co-developed with your patient/caregiver partners? Are the presentations and panels co-developed?

Co-design logistics. Is the agenda co-developed to meet the diverse needs of your audience? Is the venue chosen with patient/caregivers participating in setting the requirements and making decisions to accommodate everyone?

2. Making the conference known and available to patients

Spreading the word. Beyond your usual channels, have you looked at notifying patient groups and using social media like Twitter and Facebook? Are your host organization members urged to invite their patient and caregiver partners, and their networks?

Supporting attendance. Is your scholarship program supported in the budget with a transparent, fair selection process? Has the potential mix of patient/caregivers been taken into account? And do you know what is needed to support their participation? Have you considered free registration for patient/caregiver partners who can make their own travel and accommodation arrangements?

3. Creating a healthy environment

The impact of sound, light and visuals. Is the audio crisp and not too loud or soft? Is the background music soft and easy to talk over? Are the lights too bright, too low? Can they be adjusted? Is there too much visual clutter? Are the screens easy to see and well placed?

Retreating, resting and regrouping. Are there quiet, visually calm and softly lit spaces for small meetings and resting? Are washrooms easy to find and get to? Are they truly accessible?

Easy movement. Can everyone navigate the conference space with ease? Is the location easy to get to? Can participants easily access their hotel from the conference venue to take a rest? Can those using mobility devices or with slow gait manage to move between sessions on time? Are wheelchair seating areas easy to identify and access?

Eating arrangements. Are there places to sit with tables near the food? Are the plates and utensils easy to lift and carry? Are special meals well marked and accessible?

4. Supporting connection and networking

Connecting patients with each other. How do you facilitate connecting patient/caregivers with each other? When? Where? How?

Patient partner point person. Have you designated a contact person for patient /caregiver participants during the conference? How is this person visible, available and proactive during the conference?