

# Dozens of medical groups launch effort to battle health misinformation

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Alarmed by the increasing spread of medical misinformation, 50 U.S.

medical and science organizations have announced the formation of a new group that aims to debunk fake health news.

Called the Coalition for Trust in Health & Science, the group brings together reputable associations representing American academics, researchers, scientists, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, drug and insurance companies, consumer advocates, public health professionals and even medical ethicists.

A small sampling of the groups that have currently signed on includes the American Board of Internal Medicine, the American College of Physicians, the American College of Preventive Medicine, the American Psychological Association, the American Medical Association, the American Nurses Association and the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health.

The coalition plans to take direct aim at what it is calling a "health infodemic."

"I'll start in saying that we in health care are very aware that American society—the contemporary society that we live in—is characterized to a significant degree by a distrust in almost all of institutions of our society, and by uncertainty as to the truthfulness or accuracy of the information that is being presented to them," noted [Dr. Reed Tuckson](#), chair and co-founder of the Black Coalition Against COVID (BCAC) and a core convening committee member of the newly formed coalition.

He argues that this predisposition to distrust is compounded by the fact that many people now get the bulk of their information from [social media](#), which "is rampant with information that is not only untrue, but can also be extremely harmful to human health and human survival."

By launching the new coalition, "what we are saying collectively is that

we cannot allow the status quo to continue," Tuckson explained.

The formation of the coalition will be announced Thursday at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), in Washington, D.C.

[Dana Litt](#) is an associate professor in the department of health behavior and health systems at the School of Public Health at the University of North Texas Health Science Center in Fort Worth.

Though not involved in the coalition launch, Litt's focus has long been on how and why people make the health decisions they make.

"The deep-rooted social and historical underpinnings behind misinformation, as well as the emotionally charged contexts in which this information is often shared, certainly poses a challenge to those attempting to combat it," she said.

"It is important to note that medical misinformation is not a new phenomenon," Litt added. "But it has been exacerbated by the ease of dissemination on online sources without oversight."

Litt pointed to recent research suggesting "that false or misleading health information may spread *more* easily than scientific knowledge through social media. And this misinformation has been shown to affect health-related decision-making."

To tackle the problem, the coalition noted that all member organizations will work towards ensuring that all patients can "have equitable access to and confidence in the accurate, understandable and relevant information necessary to make personally appropriate health decisions."

To that end, the coalition's founders say they will strive to improve

health and scientific literacy; fact-check and correct misinformation and disinformation, and boost public trust in fact-based science.

"This is not going to be a problem or issue that will be solved immediately, or even in the short run," Tuckson acknowledged. "This is a long-term effort."

As to first steps, Tuckson suggested that much of the focus will be on developing practical ways the coalition's member organizations can work together to better disseminate reliable medical information and educate the public.

Figuring out precisely what those steps will be will likely require thinking "outside of our comfort zone," he admitted.

But as an example, Tuckson pointed to the potential benefit of building a network of partnerships with high schools, to better educate and prepare future patients.

The coalition is an important first step in battling misinformation, said Litt, but it won't be easy.

"Unfortunately, countering misinformation requires addressing long-standing challenges that exist within social, psychological, technological and political spheres," Litt noted. "In addition, misinformation is often framed in a sensational manner that tends to heighten psychological responses, namely anxiety, that can create a sense of urgency to share this emotionally charged misinformation with others, which allows it to spread quickly."

In the [virtual world](#), "to that extent that the coalition can better harness the power of social media and try to correct the balance of information by sharing, re-sharing, commenting and engaging with verified content

from reliable sources, there is the potential that they can begin to overcome the rise of online misinformation," she said.

In the real world, added Litt, the coalition "may be able to overcome some of the mistrust of the medical community that exists within certain communities" by building bridges with trusted leaders and influential figures who can counter [misinformation](#) with facts and science.

**More information:** There's more on the battle against fake health news at [Association of American Medical Colleges](#).

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