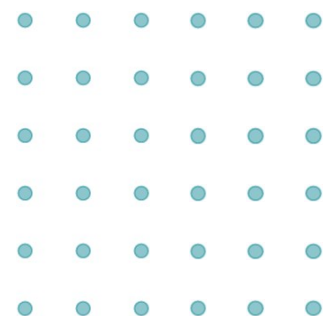


Communicating evidence in a changing landscape



Elisabeth Marnik, PhD | Executive Director, The Evidence Collective

Supporting Evidence-Based Decision-Making and Recommendations

I grew up in a household that didn't trust science.

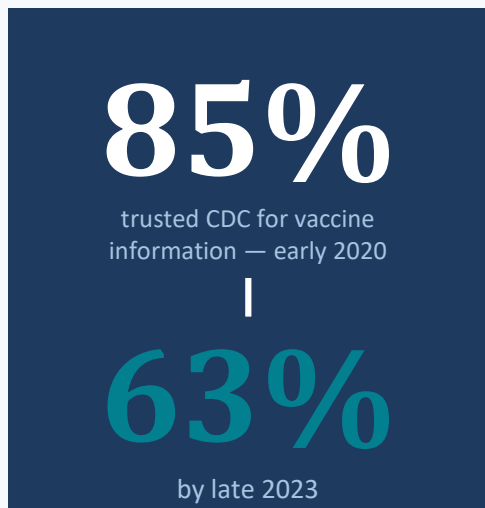
What happens when the people who need health support or information don't trust the people trying to give it?



If we want to build something better,
we must begin with understanding where
we are today.

Distrust Was a Pre-Existing Condition

KFF polling on trust in CDC for vaccine information



This wasn't 2025. It was building for years.

- Republican trust fell sharply in early pandemic
- Democratic trust remained stable through 2023
- By mid-2025, dynamics began shifting as political alignments evolved
- Decline reflected tension between public health messaging and lived experience
- People were carrying lingering questions long before COVID-19 arrived

Source: KFF Health Tracking Polls, 2020–2026

The "4 in 10" Reality

~4 in 10

Americans approve of how RFK Jr.
is handling vaccine policy

- For millions, recent disruptions feel like long-awaited accountability
- People see institutions that stopped listening being forced to answer
- In democratic systems, legitimacy rests as much on responsiveness as technical correctness

Source: KFF Tracking Poll on Health Information and Trust, 2025

Why Health Conversations Work Differently Today

The information environment people navigate has fundamentally changed.

The Old World

- Three TV networks and a local paper
- Doctors were the primary source of medical information
- Information mediated through institutions
- Misinformation limited by distribution

The New Reality

- Hyper-fragmented media and social platforms
- Parents have extensive information
- Misinformation spreads rapidly
- Experiences with cost and access shape trust

Increasingly, people are not looking for a single authority — they are looking for a trusted navigator to help them make sense of complexity.

The Paradox We're Living In

More

information at our fingertips
than ever before

Declining

trust in science and experts

*The problem isn't simply access to evidence, because that isn't enough
to reach people on its own*

There is No Reset Button

TRUTH 1

The systems we had
were imperfect.

TRUTH 2

Abandoning these systems
entirely is dangerous.

Between those two truths is where building must take place.



THE EVIDENCE COLLECTIVE

30+ Subject Matter Specialists · 11B+ Reach over last year · 10M+ Combined Social Followers

**Putting evidence in the hands of trusted people
with communication grounded in curiosity and empathy**

Increase Speed

Rapid-response evidence briefs on emerging public health topics to equip trusted messengers.

Improve Coordination

Experts and creators working in silos produce fragmented, confusing messages. We coordinate across disciplines to speak with one clear voice.

Break Echo Chambers

The communities most impacted by false information don't always engage with institutions. We convene other trusted voices to reach them.

TECs strategy for communication: Empathy first

In a resistant conversation, information isn't the problem.

WHAT WE OFTEN DO

Launch with evidence, statistics, corrections

WHAT THE BRAIN HEARS

You are wrong. I am the authority.

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS

Help the person feel heard first. People trust people.

TECs strategy for communication: Stories + Evidence



Evidence gives us information

Data alone doesn't move people. It can be too abstract, feels impersonal and hard to understand its value.

Story helps create meaning

Story is what makes people care and act.

The anti-vaccine movement wins on story. It's personal, emotional, character-driven.

We can include both evidence and a narrative that helps carry it.

TEC project: What would strengthen legitimacy around vaccine policy?

Reader survey responses — structural and cultural changes most needed

- 1 Transparent, plain-language explanations of **how** and **why** recommendations are made, including areas of uncertainty. "In plain English"
- 2 Regular, published reviews of recommendations using updated data with findings shared publicly in a digestible format
- 3 "How it's made" transparency. Show people "behind the scenes"
- 4 Clearer communication about how and why guidance evolves over time as evidence accumulates

Article written by Dr. David Higgins



Possible steps forward

01

Coordinate messaging and messengers

Fragmented expert voices are a gift to bad actors. Build the coalition before you need it.

02

Protect and resource your trusted messengers.

They need support

03

Invest in rapid-response capacity and prebunking

The attack moves fast. Your response needs to too. Many times we can predict common misinformation and get ahead of it.

04

Build outside the usual public health bubble.

Faith communities, coaches, school nurses, parent influencers — they're already trusted. Partner with them.

05

Pair data with a story.

Stop leading with statistics. Lead with stories. Back it up with evidence.



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How we can help you:

- Access to our network of experts and communicators
- Partnerships on shared topic interests
- Topic and event briefs
- Webinar and trainings

Supporters:



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