

Participant Information Leaflet

Health Information Effectiveness Trial 3 (HIET-3)

Please be advised that the contents of the Participant Information Leaflet (PIL) will be updated to accurately reflect the different modes of communication being tested in the HIET study.

This PIL is based on HIET-3, i.e., AI-assisted visual abstracts vs. published BMJ visual abstracts.

Study title: Can readers understand findings from systematic reviews almost as well from artificial intelligence-assisted visual abstracts as from those published by The BMJ?

Background and study aims

Systematic reviews bring together the results of many studies to answer a healthcare question. They are useful but are often long and technical. Visual abstracts use short text and simple graphics to show the main points more quickly and clearly, but making them takes time and design skill.

Artificial intelligence (AI) could help, but it can also make mistakes, leave out how certain or uncertain the evidence is, or present findings in a misleading way. HIET-3 tests a structured process in which AI produces a first draft and experts in systematic reviews check it against the original review and correct any problems.

Our main question is whether readers understand the information almost as well from the AI-assisted visual abstracts as from visual abstracts already published by The BMJ. The findings will apply to this specific AI-assisted process and the selected BMJ visual abstracts, rather than to AI or human design in general.

Who can participate?

We plan to recruit 656 adults internationally. You may be eligible if all of the following apply:

- You are aged 18 years or older and may be of any sex.
- You are a healthcare interest holder with relevant experience gained through professional, academic, or policy roles. This may include clinical practice, public health, health research, evidence synthesis, guideline development, health technology assessment, journal publishing, healthcare policy, or active involvement in healthcare or research as a patient, caregiver, or peer-research partner.
- You can read and understand English well enough to use the visual abstracts and complete the assessments.
- You have internet access and a computer, tablet, smartphone, or another device that can display the visual abstracts and complete the online study.
- You are able and willing to provide electronic informed consent.

You cannot take part if you helped select, develop, anonymise, pilot, or pretest any of the visual abstracts used in this trial. Being a patient is neither required nor a reason for exclusion; you must independently meet the healthcare-related eligibility criteria above.

Do I have to take part?

No. Taking part is voluntary. Before the study begins, you will see an electronic consent form and can decide whether to continue. You may stop at any time by leaving the online survey. If you stop, no further information will be collected from you. Choosing not to take part, or stopping, will not affect your rights.

What does the study involve?

If you open the study through Prolific, you will be taken to QuestionPro, the online survey platform used for this trial. After consent and eligibility screening, you will answer short questions about your background, English reading ability, and experience with systematic reviews.

A computer will then randomly place you into one of two groups, like drawing names from a hat. One group will see three AI-assisted visual abstracts that have been checked and corrected by experts. The other group will see three visual abstracts published by The BMJ. Both sets will cover the same three systematic reviews.

Information that could reveal where a visual abstract came from will be removed as far as possible. You will not be told which development approach produced the set you see during the session. The relevant visual abstract will remain visible, or be available to reopen, while you answer its questions. You will not be given the source article, citation, or external links, and we will ask you not to search for them during the session.

After each visual abstract, you will:

1. Answer six questions about the information shown.
2. Rate the clarity and suitability of the graphics and layout.
3. Rate how trustworthy the visual abstract seems.

After all three visual abstracts, you will be asked how you think they were developed, how important it is to know their development source, and how acceptable you find different development approaches.

The participant part of the study is completed online in one session and is expected to take about 30-60 minutes. There is no long-term follow-up, and you will not work or communicate with other participants.

Separately, the research team will assess the reading level of the text. Independent experts will compare the final visual abstracts in both groups with their source reviews and judge whether they could mislead readers. They will also compare each first uncorrected AI-generated draft with its source review and record the types, number, and locations of any errors. These expert and automated assessments do not require anything further from you.

Possible benefits and risks

You should not expect a direct personal or clinical benefit. Your answers may help researchers improve how findings from systematic reviews are communicated and may inform future testing of AI-assisted visual abstract development.

This is a minimal-risk study and involves no medical treatment or physical procedure. You may feel tired, frustrated, or uncomfortable if the information is difficult or does not match your own views or experience. You may stop by leaving the survey. No serious adverse events are expected.

Payment

If you complete the study, you will be paid through Prolific. The payment will be based on the completion time confirmed in pilot testing and will meet or exceed Prolific's minimum hourly rate in force when recruitment begins. The exact amount will be shown on Prolific before you decide whether to take part. If screening shows that you are not eligible, you will receive the fixed screen-out payment shown on Prolific.

Privacy and data protection

The research team will not receive your name or personal contact details from Prolific. QuestionPro will assign a study code to your responses. A pseudonymous Prolific identifier may be used where needed for payment or duplicate checks, but it will be stored separately from your outcome responses and will not be included in the analysis dataset.

The study will collect information needed to confirm eligibility and describe the sample, including demographic information, professional or academic background, English reading ability, and previous experience with systematic reviews. It will also collect your answers to the study questions and completion times.

Study data will be downloaded from the online platforms and kept in password-protected files on secure University of Galway storage. Only authorised members of the research team will access de-identified data for cleaning and analysis. Data will be handled in line with the General Data Protection Regulation and University of Galway data-protection policies.

You will not be identifiable in reports, presentations, or publications. De-identified data may be shared with other researchers on reasonable request, subject to appropriate ethical, legal, and institutional safeguards.

How to take part

If the study is available to you, you can open it through your Prolific account. You will first see the study information and consent form, followed by the eligibility questions. Only eligible participants will proceed to the main study.

Where and when is the study being run?

The study is managed by the Centre for Health Research Methodology at the University of Galway, Ireland. Recruitment and all study procedures will take place online. International participants will take part remotely from their own locations through Prolific and QuestionPro. Recruitment is expected to run from 1 November 2026 to 22 December 2026, and the study is expected to be completed by 31 March 2027.

Who is funding the study?

The study is supported by the University of Galway, Ireland. The funders have no role in deciding who takes part or how individual responses are analysed.

Ethics approval

The University of Galway Research Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study (reference 2023.05.011; amendment reference Amend 2410).

If you want to know more

For more information, please contact Xuenan Pang at x.pang1@universityofgalway.ie.

Thank you for considering taking part in HIET-3!