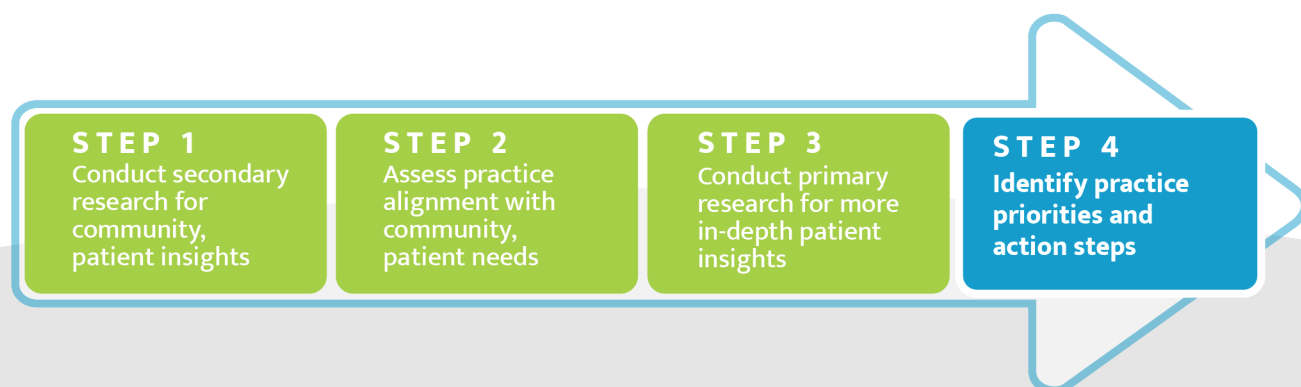# Conducting Market Research to Gauge Community Needs and Patient Satisfaction.

Primer Two focuses on helping private practice physicians and care team members understand how to use market research to assess relevant community health needs and patient satisfaction levels. This information can lead to more effective and responsive practice positioning and promotional strategies, as discussed in Primer One: *A guide to identifying your practice's marketing advantage.*

Market research helps you understand the perceptions and needs of your patients and community. You can then align your practice to be as responsive and accommodating as possible.

There are two overarching types of research–primary and secondary. Primary consists of new information and data, while secondary consists of existing knowledge and data. We recommend starting with secondary research to gather insights about your community and patient population using a wide range of existing resources. This is all you will need in many cases, and we offer source suggestions in this guide. If the insights from secondary research indicate a need for more in-depth information, specifically from your patients, we also provide ideas for primary research.

This guide provides a structure for choosing the research options that meet your needs and allows you to record key findings and determine the implications and action steps for your practice.

STEP 1	**STEP 2**	**STEP 3**	**STEP 4**
Conduct secondary research for community, patient insights	Assess practice alignment with community, patient needs	Conduct primary research for more in-depth patient insights	Identify practice priorities and action steps

STEP I: Guidelines for Conducting Secondary Research for Community, Patient Insights

This section outlines how to find and use secondary research to gather and evaluate information about your community and patients. The outline below provides a framework for identifying the types of information you may want to collect, what you should look for as you review the data, and what questions to ask yourself to draw conclusions relevant to your practice.

Understanding Your Community: The Population and Their Needs

Where to gather baseline information online

- Census data
- City, county, state, and federal websites (i.e., the CDC offers population information by state)
- Local hospital websites and their *Community Needs Assessment* reports
- Local hospital association websites (particularly their advocacy sections, which may outline health-related priorities for your region)

Information that may be useful to you

- Community demographics (median age, ethnicities, population trends — growth or decline)
- Prevalence of diseases or health conditions in your community relevant to your practice (i.e., diabetes, obesity, lung cancer)
- Occupational risks in your area (i.e., back injuries, chemical exposure)

Questions to ask after your review to help you draw conclusions and make decisions

Is your practice structured to meet any population trends in your community?

Do you offer specialized services or specific diagnostic tests in your office, or do you have areas of expertise that help meet unique population needs or trends? For example: If your community is experiencing an increase in retirees, do you offer expertise, support services, or streamlined access opportunities that help older patients? Do you provide educational opportunities for this population relevant to your specialty?

Understanding Your Patients: Their Perceptions and Levels of Satisfaction

Where to gather baseline information online

- Google Reviews/Google Business
- Yelp (often negative comments only, but can be insightful)
- Clinician profiles on Zocdoc, Healthgrades, and *US News & World Report*
- Your practice's social media sites
- Practice reviews provided through any hospital affiliation you may have
- Email messages you receive via the Contact Us link on your website
- Glassdoor and Indeed (to read reviews from former employees)

Information that may be useful to you

- Quantity of reviews
  - While the quantity of reviews does not directly convey a positive or negative patient experience, a large pool of positive reviews can help offset negative ones, which are inevitable. People tend to complain more quickly than they compliment.
  - To generate more significant numbers, you may want to encourage patients to post reviews when they have had a positive experience.

- Average rating
  - On any review site, you want your rating to be as close to the top as possible. For example, you want your average rating to be between 4 and 5 stars on Google.
  - Interestingly, however, research indicates that 5-star ratings may be perceived as "too good to be true," while a rating between 4 and 5 indicates honest, reliable assessments from patients.

- Comments
  - Comments can provide vital insights into the specific issues that drive ratings. For example, a patient may give you only a 3-star rating, but through their comments you may realize that the wait times were more problematic than the care.
  - Use both positive and negative comments to identify attributes you may want to promote or issues you may need to address.

- Trends
  - If you have made changes in your practice based on insights from reviews, watch for trends in the ratings and/or comments. Did they improve after the change was made?

- Engagement on any practice social media sites (total number of Likes, Comments, Shares)
  - While the quantity of responses is not directly connected to your patients' satisfaction levels, it is helpful to note what topics generate the most engagement. For example, do your followers respond more to health and wellness information or to new providers or new services? What types of health information generate the most interest?
  - Use these insights to enhance your social media presence.

Questions to ask after your review to help you draw conclusions and make decisions

Are you generating reviews, and are they positive? (Consumers use reviews today to make many healthcare and purchase choices, so assessing your baseline is essential.)

Are there positive themes to build upon?

Are there negative themes to address?

STEP II: **Worksheet for Assessing Practice Alignment
with Community, Patient Needs**

Secondary Research Source	Key Findings	Practice Implications and Action Steps
Population & Community Health Overview		

Secondary Research Source	Key Findings	Practice Implications and Action Steps
Patient Perception & Satisfaction Level Overview		

STEP III: **Recommendations for Conducting Primary Research for In-Depth Patient Insights**

Conducting primary research to gain more insights about your community is unnecessary for most practices. Secondary research can provide a great deal of valuable information to guide your marketing decision-making. However, you may want to conduct primary research with your patients to gather deeper and ongoing insights into their satisfaction levels with your practice and whether they would recommend you to a family member or friend. Below is a four-step guide for creating a simple patient satisfaction survey. You can review the steps below to check alignment if you've already created a survey like this for your practice.

STEP 1: Set Goals

- Identify what you want to know from the survey.

STEP 2: Create the Survey

- Keep the survey brief–about five questions.
- Use both closed and open-ended questions.
  - Closed: On a scale of 1–4, how would you rate...
  - Open-ended: Are there other services we could provide to manage your health better or improve your experience?

STEP 3: Determine Your Distribution Method(s)

- Through an existing patient portal
- Via follow-up text messages, emails, or other established ways that you communicate with patients
- Through printed cards given at checkout that can be completed immediately and dropped into a survey response box, or that include a QR code that links to the survey online.

STEP 4: Follow Up

- Allow patients to include their names and contact information if they choose. Send a "thank you" note if the response is positive and call or email any patient to discuss further their concern or poor experience.
- Ask patients for permission to post their comments in the office to encourage others to submit reviews.
- Review survey responses regularly with your team members. Discuss trends or issues, opportunities to recognize good work, and challenges to address.

Question Topics for Consideration, Depending on Your Practice Priorities

1) Ease of finding a physician online and making an appointment

2) The attitude of the care team

3) Ease of access (location, parking, signage)

4) Wait time

5) Clarity of communication from the physician or other care professional

6) Provider's bedside manner

7) Overall experience

8) Willingness to recommend

9) Areas for improvement