

# Defining 'White Paper' Publications in the Peer-Reviewed Medical Literature

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## Abstract

### Objective

White papers (WPs) are commonly regarded as policy documents presenting governmental position on a complex issue. However, the term WP is increasingly used as an umbrella term for a broad range of health policy publications in medical journals. Our objective was to define the scope and key aims of peer-reviewed articles described as WPs.

### Research Design and Methods

We conducted a targeted literature search of the MEDLINE database via PubMed for open access articles containing "WP" in the title, published from 01/01/2000–11/09/2018. Duplicates and non-WPs were excluded by a single reviewer. WPs were reviewed to identify authors' affiliations, the topic and aim(s), and the geographic regions addressed.

### Results

Of 157 articles identified, 110 were included. Publication of WP articles has been increasing since 2000, peaking in 2016 with 22 open access articles. 55% of WPs were authored by >1 stakeholder type; the top 3 were academics/clinicians (76%), the private/pharmaceutical sector (39%) and societies (33%). The WPs were mainly relevant to national/local (35%) or global (28%) audiences. A wide variety of topics were covered including: therapy and disease management (33%), research (32%), healthcare system (25%), technology (24%), education (23%). The key WP aims were to raise awareness (67%), improve alignment (53%), educate (35%) and encourage collaboration (21%).

### Conclusions

Open access, peer-reviewed WPs are authored by various stakeholders and cover a wide range of topics. Further research using non-freely available articles, additional databases, and grey literature would provide a more comprehensive characterisation of WPs. Including WPs in publication plans could be effective in raising awareness of specific healthcare issues to policy makers and improving alignment globally/locally between healthcare providers.

## What Is a White Paper in the Medical Literature?

- Open access WPs are authored by various stakeholders, often working in collaboration.
- WPs cover a wide range of health-related topics including therapy and disease management, research, and the healthcare system.
- WPs often have multiple aims; key aims include raising awareness and improving alignment globally or locally.
- The funding source of these publications is infrequently reported, suggesting room for improvement regarding funding transparency.
- Further research using non-freely available articles, additional databases, and grey literature would provide a more comprehensive characterisation of WP publications.

## Relevance to Medical Writers

- While most WPs in our literature search did not involve editorial support, the increasing numbers of WPs published may lead to greater involvement of medical writers in developing these articles.
- Including WPs in publication plans could be effective in raising awareness of specific healthcare issues to policy makers and improving alignment between healthcare providers.

## Author Contributions

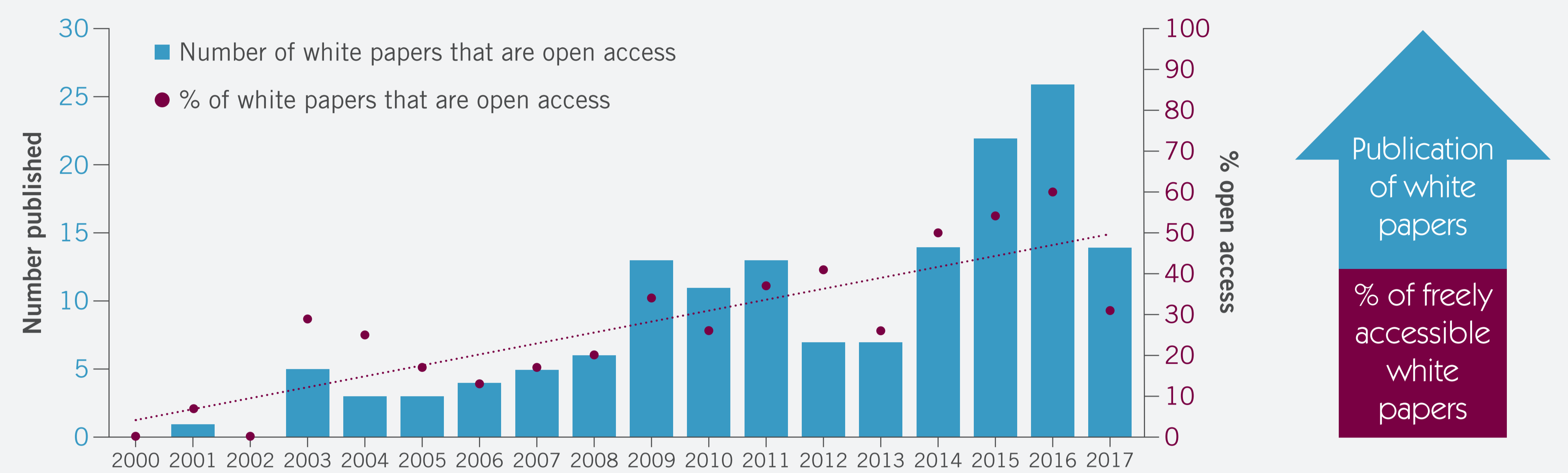
Substantial contributions to study conception/design, or acquisition/analysis/interpretation of data: AP, HT, DS, DN; Drafting of the publication, or revising it critically for important intellectual content: AP, HT, DS, DN; Final approval of the publication: AP, HT, DS, DN.

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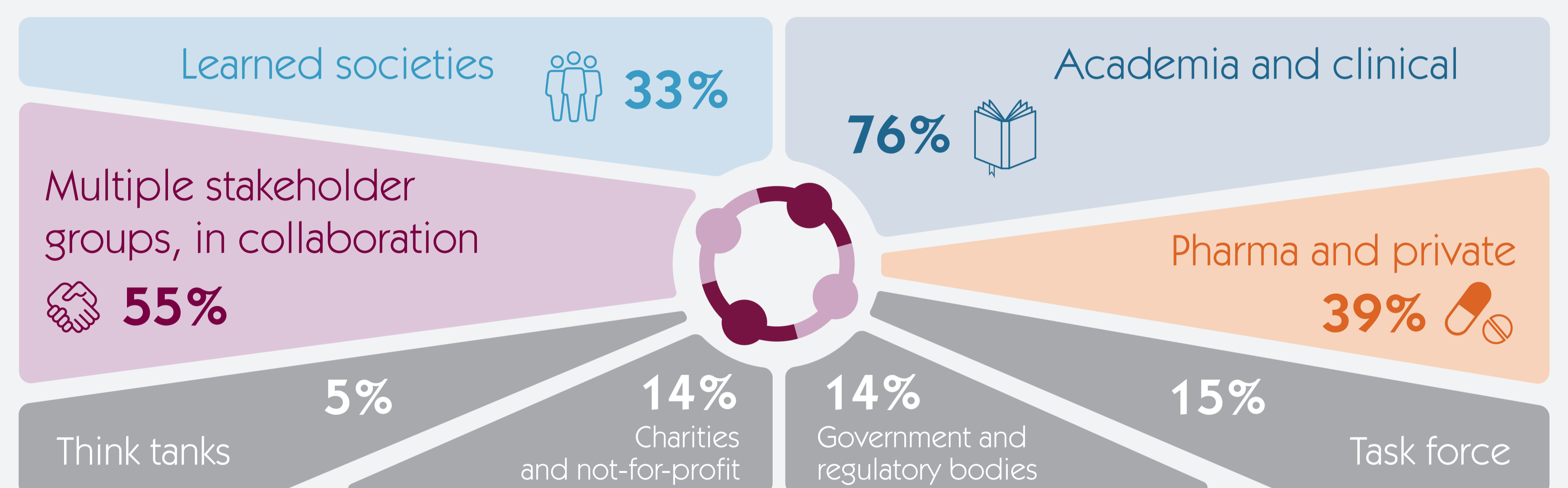
## Results

### White paper publications over time\*

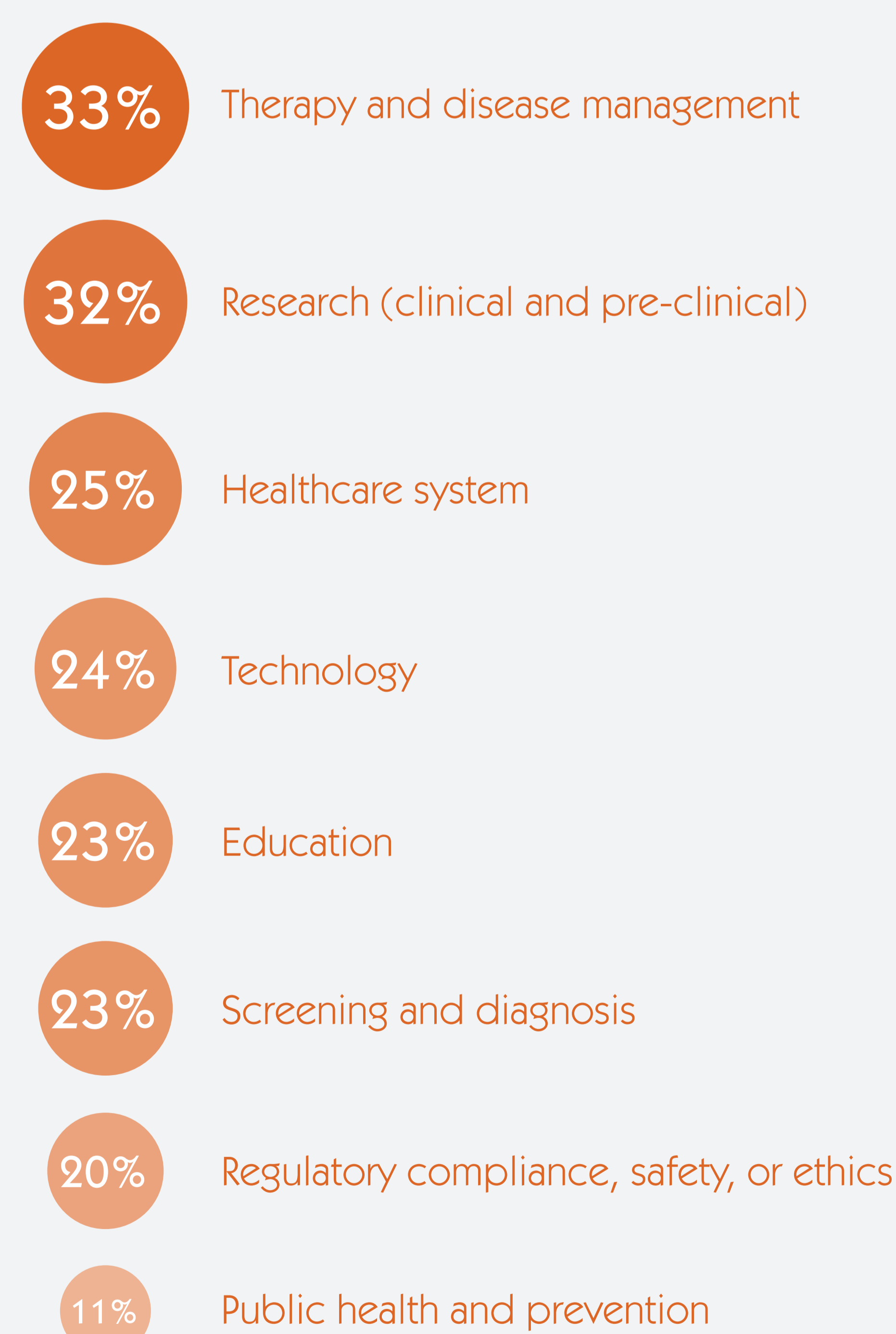


\*Includes duplicates.

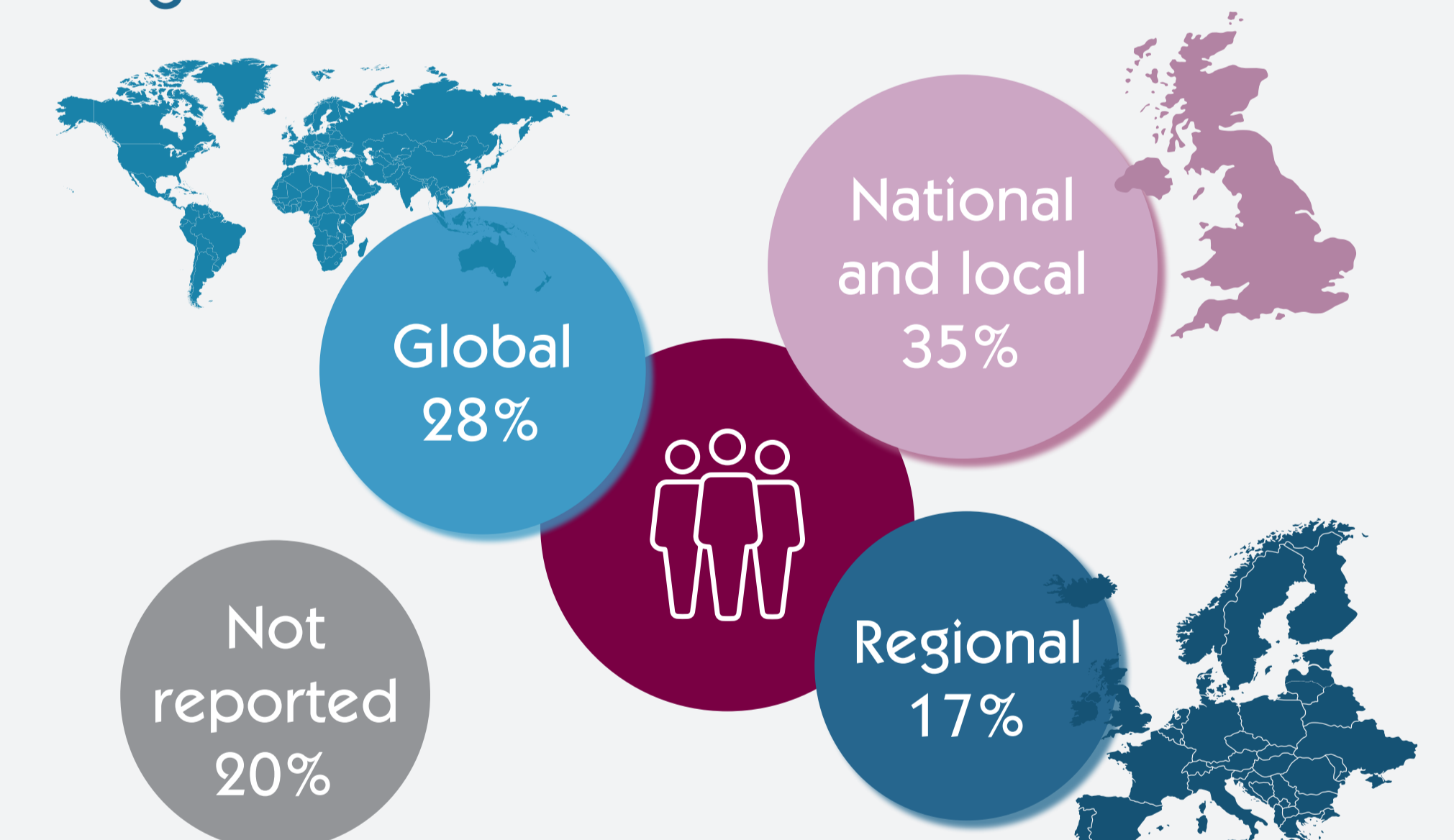
### Authors



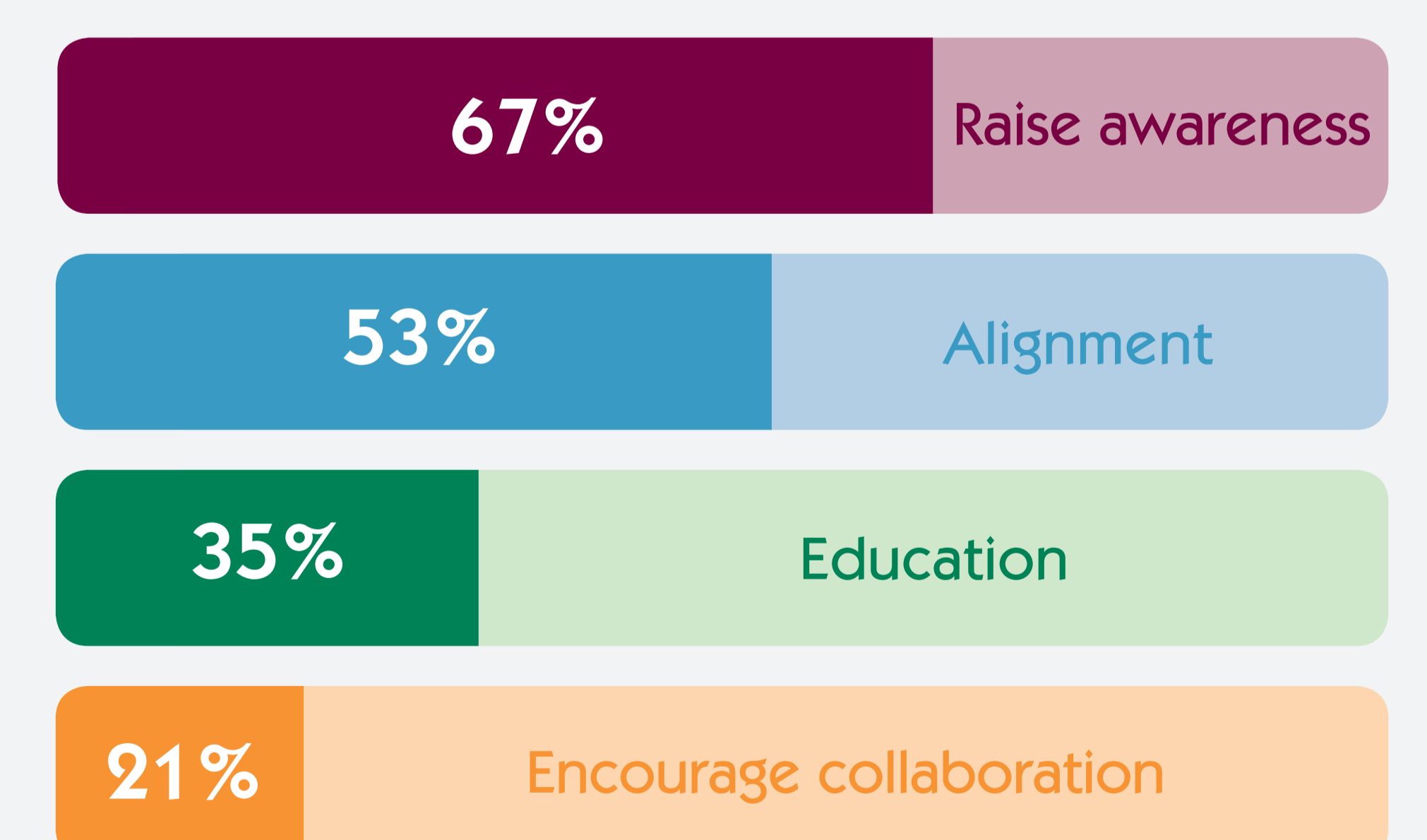
### Topics covered



### Target audiences



### White paper aims



58% of white papers had multiple aims



Only 31% of open access white papers reported a funding source

Of these, funding was mainly received from:  
Government and regulatory bodies (41%)  
Charities and other not-for-profit organisations (35%)  
Pharma and private companies (32%)



6% of open access white papers were developed with medical writing support

The original abstract reported data from 111 open access white papers. During development of the poster, 1 additional duplicate was identified; 110 articles were included in the final analyses.