A quick guide to

Fighting misinformation online

Public discussions of health and medicine are full of misinformation – false or misleading stories which can spread virally and undermine public health messaging. It’s very hard to change people’s minds with facts. It’s more effective to spread good information about a topic before people are exposed to the misinformation. In other words, it’s easier to “pre-bunk” than to de-bunk.

6 tips
to effectively fight misinformation online

TARGET THE “FENCE SITTERS”
1 Spend your time and resources on those who haven’t fully made up their mind. It’s too hard to try and change strong beliefs.

AVOID ONLINE ARGUMENTS
2 Fill the space with clear, accurate, true information. Social media algorithms reward conflict, so arguments only spread the misinformation further.

BUILD TRUST TO SPREAD TRUTH
3 Be a regular source of reliable, truthful, transparent information. People’s beliefs are strongly influenced by the beliefs of those they trust.

START WITH THE TRUTH BEFORE DEBUNKING THE MYTH
4 Explain the truth as simply and clearly as possible, then warn that there is a myth about this topic. If people hear the myth before the truth, they tend to remember the myth instead.

UNDERSTAND COMMUNITY
5 Identify and work with trusted communities (patient groups, community health centres, pharmacists). Share reliable information with them to reach the public through existing relationships of trust.

USE STORIES TO MAKE THE TRUTH STICK
6 Sources of misinformation often use personal narratives to make false facts stick, but stories of real patient experiences can be used ethically to help make the truth stick, too.