

The social health



Why human connection is the missing layer in treatment initiation, adherence, and real-world outcomes.

Pharmaceutical brands have optimized for access, education, and patient support. Yet across therapeutic areas, many patients still fail to initiate treatment or discontinue too early. This white paper outlines why integrating social health into patient support programs is essential to improving treatment initiation, adherence, persistence, and real-world outcomes.



Executive Summary: The behavioral gap in healthcare

Healthcare has made extraordinary progress in developing breakthrough treatments and expanding access to care. Yet across therapeutic areas, **up to 50% of patients do not take medications as prescribed**¹, and many delay or discontinue treatment too early. This gap between clinical efficacy and real-world outcomes remains one of the most significant and costly challenges in healthcare.

The primary barrier is not clinical or logistical. It is behavioral, and largely unaddressed. Patients are often left to navigate treatment decisions without meaningful support from others who understand what they are going through. As a result, uncertainty, fear, and low confidence influence whether they initiate treatment and stay on it over time.

These behaviors are strongly influenced by **social health**, a critical and often overlooked clinical risk factor affecting over **40% of U.S. adults**². Social health refers to the quality of a patient's relationships and their access to meaningful, supportive connections with others who have been in their shoes or are going through a similar journey.

Across studies, low social support is associated with a 50% higher risk of medication non-adherence³ and 60% higher rates of emergency department visits⁴. According to the former U.S. Surgeon General, **the mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day**.⁵ Despite this, social health remains largely unaddressed in traditional patient support programs. This is not a motivation gap. It is a structural gap in how support programs are designed.

Low social support is associated with a **50% higher risk of medication non-adherence**³ and 60% higher rates of emergency department visits.⁴

The problem

Patients often navigate treatment decisions without meaningful support from others who understand their experience, leading to non-initiation, poor adherence, and early discontinuation.

The opportunity

Social health is a scalable lever to improve treatment initiation and adherence by addressing behavioral barriers that current support programs do not solve.

The path forward

Integrate structured, clinically informed peer support into patient support programs to provide ongoing connection that drives engagement and sustained treatment adherence.

For pharmaceutical brands, **strengthening social health is a clear opportunity to improve adherence**, enhance outcomes, reduce avoidable utilization, and maximize the impact of clinical innovation.



The blind spot in patient support programs

Healthcare has optimized for access. But behavior remains underaddressed.

Pharmaceutical companies invest billions in innovation and millions more in patient support programs. The industry has built robust systems to help patients navigate reimbursement, affordability, prior authorizations, and treatment logistics. These investments matter. They reduce friction and improve access to care.

Yet many patients still delay care, never initiate treatment, or discontinue earlier than intended. **Traditional support programs are highly effective at addressing transactional barriers, but those barriers represent only part of the problem. The larger gap is behavioral.**

What traditional PSPs address



Benefits verification



Copay support



Insurance navigation



Refill reminders



Nurse hotlines

These services are essential.

They reduce friction and remove systemic barriers to accessing treatment.

What traditional PSPs leave unaddressed

- Uncertainty and fear around treatment
- Stigma and identity concerns
- Emotional fatigue and social isolation
- Lack of confidence in decisions
- Absence of connections to others with relevant lived experience

These realities shape patient behavior and determine whether clinical innovation translates into real-world value.

Traditional support programs solve for access. **Social health helps solve for action.** When pharmaceutical brands overlook the behavioral layer, they leave significant commercial and clinical impact unrealized.



Social Health: A core driver of patient behavior

Social health is not a wellbeing concept. It is a driver of health behavior.

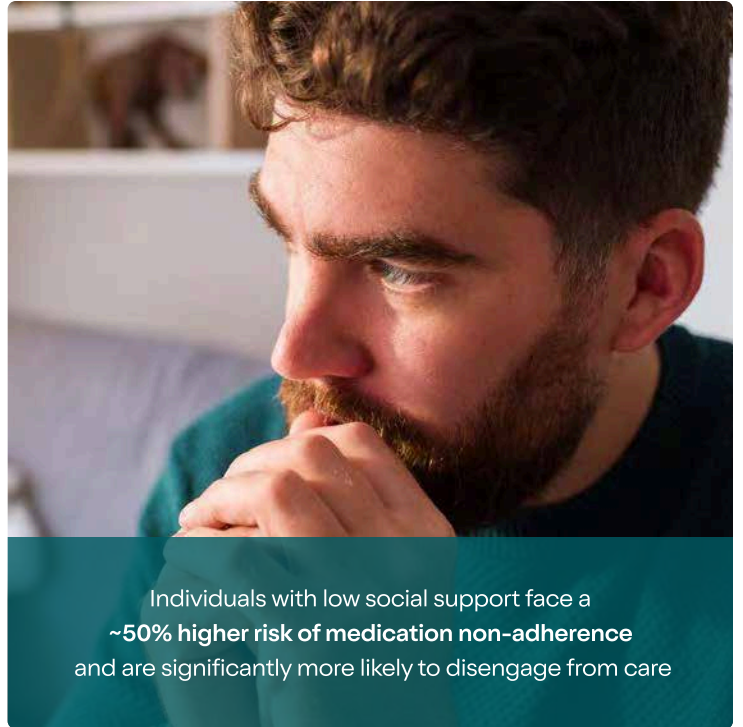
Social health refers to the quality of supportive connections around a person's health journey, particularly access to others with shared lived experience who have been in their shoes and can provide reassurance, perspective, and encouragement.

These interactions build confidence, reduce uncertainty, and shape whether patients feel understood, motivated, and confident as they navigate decisions about their care.

Social health is a **measurable clinical and behavioral risk factor** that directly influences whether patients seek care, initiate treatment, and stay engaged over time.

Social connection influences health outcomes through biological, psychological, and behavioral pathways. It affects stress and immune function, shapes confidence and resilience, and directly impacts whether patients initiate treatment and remain engaged over time.

Research consistently shows that weak social connection is associated with poorer health behaviors, lower treatment adherence, and higher healthcare utilization.



A Behavioral Variable

Social health shapes the conditions under which patients make decisions, influencing whether they initiate treatment and persist over time.



A Measurable Factor

Social connection is directly linked to adherence, engagement, utilization, and long-term outcomes.



A Strategic Lever

Strengthening social health improves treatment initiation, adherence, and persistence, leading to better real-world performance.

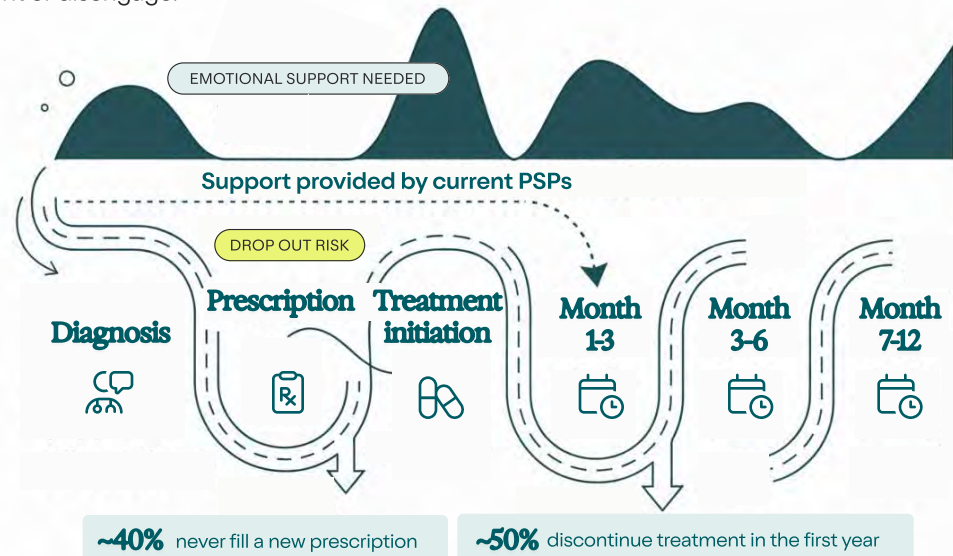
Healthcare often overlooks the social conditions that influence whether people follow through. **Social health is not a wellbeing concept. It is a clinical, behavioral, and outcomes driver** and should be treated as a core component of modern patient support strategy.



Where social health drives treatment decisions

Patients do not move through the health journey alone. Behavior is shaped at every stage.

Health decisions unfold over time and are influenced by uncertainty, emotions, and the need for reassurance. At critical moments, particularly at treatment initiation and during long-term persistence, social health plays a defining role in whether patients move forward with treatment or disengage.



Without meaningful support, patients don't stay in treatment

The gap between support needed and support provided is greatest at treatment initiation and early persistence, where dropout risk is highest.

Traditional pharmaceutical engagement typically begins at or after prescription, focusing on access, navigation, and refill support. Social health operates differently. It supports patients at the moments that matter most, building confidence at treatment initiation and reinforcing motivation throughout long-term persistence.

Treatment initiation

Patients often hesitate at the point of starting treatment. Peer connection reduces uncertainty, builds confidence, and increases initiation.

The opportunity

Adherence declines over time as challenges accumulate. Ongoing peer connection reinforces motivation and helps patients remain on treatment.

Social health is not adjacent to the treatment journey. It is embedded in the moments that determine whether patients start and remain on treatment.



Information does not drive adherence

People do not need more information.

They need meaningful support from others who understand their journey.

Patients have no shortage of information. Brand websites provide education. Support hubs offer navigation services. Nurse lines answer questions. What patients often lack is reinforcement: consistent, trusted, health-specific human connection grounded in shared lived experience.

Many patients turn to social networks to find that connection. This behavior reflects a real and unmet need, the desire to connect with others who have been through similar experiences.

However, these environments are not designed for healthcare. They prioritize visibility and engagement rather than structured, clinically informed support. As a result, patients are exposed to misinformation and increased anxiety.

What support programs provide vs. What drives outcomes

What support programs provide	What is missing	What drives outcomes
Benefits verification	Emotional validation	Confidence
Copay assistance	Community reinforcement during difficult moments	Motivation
Refill reminders	Community reinforcement during difficult moments	Persistence
Nurse hotlines	Ongoing encouragement and reassurance	Behavioral change
Disease education	Shared lived experience	Treatment readiness

Traditional support programs solve logistical barriers. Social health addresses behavioral barriers, the ones that determine whether patients initiate and remain on treatment.

The gap between what current support programs provide and what patients behaviorally need is not a failure of intention. **It is a structural gap.**



Activating social health: A framework for action

How structured peer connection translates into measurable health outcomes.

A growing body of evidence points to a clear model. When patients are connected to others with shared lived experience in a structured, clinically informed environment, uncertainty decreases, confidence increases, and patients are more likely to initiate and persist on treatment. This is the mechanism through which social health translates into measurable clinical and commercial value.

Effective social health solutions are not generic communities. They require structured design, including relevant peer matching, moderated environments, guided engagement, and integration with clinical care. These elements ensure that peer connection is safe, meaningful, and able to drive sustained behavior change.

How social health drives outcomes



Peer
connection



Support and
reinforcement



Behavior
shift



Treatment
intake



Long term
persistence

Effective social health programs operate across three strategic functions that map directly to where behavioral gaps are greatest:

Build readiness for treatment initiation

Reduce uncertainty, address fear and stigma, and build confidence through connection with peers who have navigated similar decisions.

Reinforce Long-Term Persistence

Provide ongoing peer connection that reinforces motivation, normalizes challenges, and helps patients stay on treatment.

Maintain behavioral engagement over time

Create a continuous layer of support that keeps patients connected and engaged, reducing drop-off over time.

Social health is measurable. Validated instruments and behavioral markers such as time to initiation and persistence rates allow organizations to track impact and demonstrate ROI.



Social health in action

Abstract concepts become real when you see them through the eyes of the people living them.

The following scenarios illustrate how structured peer connection changes real-world behavior.



Treatment Initiation

Maria, 55 newly diagnosed with cancer

Maria delayed her first oncology appointment for six weeks. Not because of logistical barriers. Her insurance was in place, and she could take time off work. She delayed because she was navigating the emotional weight of a cancer diagnosis alone.

Traditional support programs addressed none of that fear. When she connected with a peer community of others going through cancer treatment, she gained clarity and confidence. The delay collapsed from six weeks to two days.



Long-Term Persistence

James, 48 living with MS relapsing-remitting MS

Eight months into treatment, James began considering stopping. Not because of unmanageable side effects, but because of the emotional fatigue of managing a chronic condition alone.

Clinical care and support services were in place, but they did not address that isolation. After connecting with a peer community of others living with MS, his experience shifted. The challenges felt more manageable, and his motivation to continue was reinforced. He remained on treatment.

Social health is not theoretical. It shapes how patients respond to diagnosis, whether they initiate treatment, and whether they remain engaged over time.



Why this matters commercially

Social health is not just an experience issue. It is a key performance lever.

For pharmaceutical brands, real-world value depends on more than clinical efficacy. It depends on whether patients initiate treatment and remain on it over time. When these behaviors improve, treatment performance improves, and the return on innovation investment is more fully realized. Across therapeutic areas:

~40%

of patients never fill a new prescription

~50%

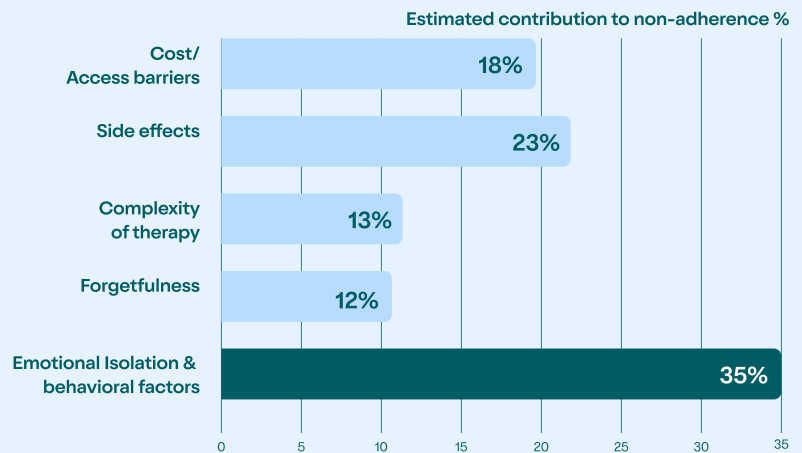
discontinue treatment in the first year

Behavioral factors are the largest drivers of treatment non-adherence

Emotional isolation and lack of peer support represent a leading driver of non-adherence (~35%) and the least addressed dimension in current patient support infrastructure.

These are not clinical failures. They are behavioral gaps. And the largest of these gaps is emotional isolation in the treatment journey.

Chart data are illustrative estimates based on aggregated findings across multiple published adherence studies, including: Kleinsinger F. (2018); Brown MT & Bussell JK (2011); Dayer L, et al. (2013); Improt A, et al. (2026); Fischer MA, et al. (2010).



Benefits of integrating social health for pharmaceutical brands



Increase treatment initiation by reducing patient uncertainty



Improve adherence and persistence through ongoing peer support



Strengthen real-world outcomes by addressing behavioral barriers



Maximize return on treatment investment through sustained engagement

Medicine creates possibility.

Behavior determines results.

Social health helps shape behavior.



The future of patient support is behavioral



Nearly 40%

of patients lack the social support needed to initiate treatment and remain on it over time. This is a widespread and measurable gap that directly impacts real-world outcomes.

Pharmaceutical companies have invested heavily in access, education, and patient support services. Yet across therapeutic areas, many patients never begin prescribed treatment, and many who do discontinue early. These are not clinical failures. They are unmet behavioral needs.

Patients do not stop treatment because they lack information. They stop when the burden of managing illness alone becomes too heavy to sustain. They are looking for connection and support from others who understand their experience and help them navigate uncertainty and follow through on treatment decisions.

Traditional patient support programs are not designed to meet this need. They are primarily transactional, focused on access and navigation. As a result, many patients engage once and disengage, leaving the most important drivers of behavior unaddressed.

Social health fills this gap.

By integrating structured peer support and community into patient support programs, pharmaceutical brands can provide what many patients are missing: meaningful, relevant human connection. This connection reduces uncertainty, builds confidence, reinforces motivation, and helps patients follow through on treatment decisions.

The case for social health is both clinical and commercial. Clinically, stronger social support improves adherence and outcomes. Commercially, improving initiation and persistence increases the real-world performance of therapies and the return on investment in innovation.

Social Health, peer support, and community are not optional enhancements. **They are essential** to improving treatment initiation and adherence.

Organizations that fail to incorporate this layer will continue to see gaps in performance. Those that do will build more effective, more engaging, and higher-performing support programs.

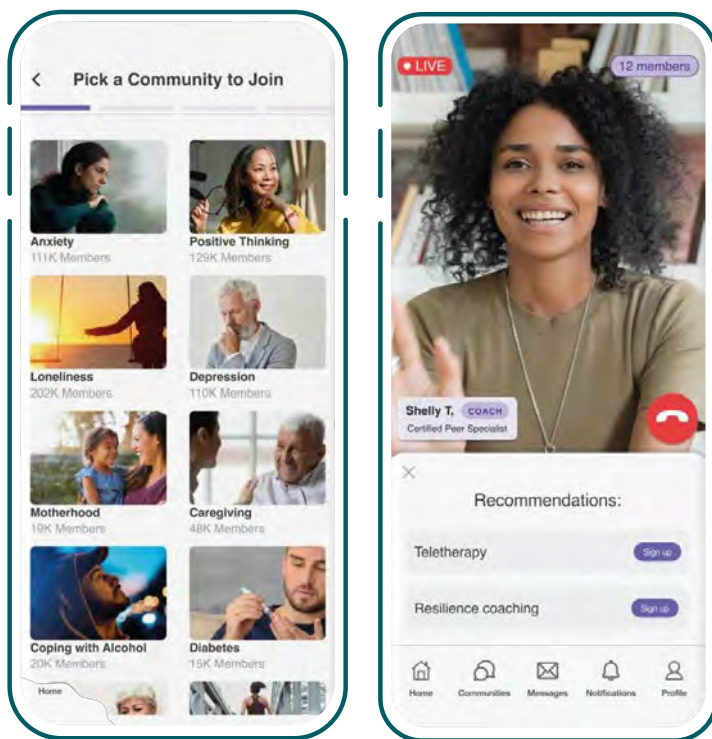


Wisdo Health: Delivering **social health at scale**

The opportunity to improve treatment initiation and adherence is clear.
The question is how to do it at scale.

Wisdo Health, a Talkspace company, is a clinically validated peer support and social health platform designed to close the behavioral gaps that impact treatment initiation and adherence.

Through AI-powered precision matching, moderated peer communities, and guided group coaching, Wisdo connects patients and caregivers with trained peers based on shared lived experience. This creates structured, safe, and scalable support that reduces uncertainty, strengthens motivation, and helps patients follow through on treatment decisions.



500,000+

individuals have engaged with Wisdo

Peer-reviewed studies demonstrate its impact on engagement and clinical outcomes. Informed by over 100 million peer interactions, Wisdo is used by leading global life sciences organizations to enhance patient support programs and improve real-world performance.



Sources: 1. Brown MT, Bussell JK. Medication Adherence: WHO Cares? Mayo Clinic Proceedings, 2011; 2. U.S. Surgeon General. Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation, 2023; 3. Holt-Lunstad J, et al. Social Relationships and Mortality Risk. PLOS Medicine, 2010; 4. Manemann SM, et al. Social isolation and outcomes in heart failure patients. Journal of the American Heart Association, 2018; as cited in National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults, 2020; 5. U.S. Surgeon General. Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation, 2023; 6. Fischer MA, et al. Primary Medication Non-Adherence. Journal of General Internal Medicine, 2010; 7. Kleinsinger F. The Unmet Challenge of Medication Nonadherence. Permanente Journal, 2018.

Let's Talk

To learn more about how **Wisdo** can support your patient population

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