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Australia's HealthInsite:  
Your Gateway to Reliable  
Health Information <[http://  
www.healthInsite.gov.au/  
index.cfm](http://www.healthInsite.gov.au/index.cfm)>

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# GLOBAL HEALTH SITINGS

*Susan Murray, Column Editor*

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## Australia's Health*Insite*: Your Gateway to Reliable Health Information

<[http://www.healthInsite.gov.au/  
index.cfm](http://www.healthInsite.gov.au/index.cfm)>

Donna MacLeod

**ABSTRACT.** This column discusses Australia's Health*Insite*, a multi-topic consumer health information site that brings together content from more than 80 Australian health information providers. All partner organizations meet stringent quality assurance, process, and publication standards prior to inclusion in the network.

**KEYWORDS.** Australia, consumer health information, Health*Insite*

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## BACKGROUND

### *About the Institution*

Funded by the Australian government's Department of Health and Ageing, this Web site's goal is to "improve the health of Australians by providing easy access to quality information about human health." Recognizing that people are increasingly turning to the Internet for health information, *HealthInsite* provides a wide spectrum of up-to-date and quality-assessed information on a number of health topics from a range of Australian health information providers. In general, the links on the site point directly to resources relating to a search, that is, to documents or specific Web pages, rather than to entire Web sites. While users generally find individual publications such as factsheets or brochures, information about services or organizations, home pages or navigation pages may appear if these are deemed the most useful point of entry to the information.

### *Audience*

*HealthInsite* addresses the needs of both consumers and health professionals, providing easy access to information about daily health needs, such as nutrition, to information about specific life events, such as having a baby. Health professionals, service providers, and researchers use *HealthInsite* as a resource for both their own use and for patient referral, and the site provides free posters and brochures for distribution to patients.

Creating a free "personal profile" allows users to save documents and sort search results. Users are notified by e-mail if one of their saved documents is substantively modified, or they can create automatic "area of interest" searches to keep up with changes or new research on a specific topic.

### *Selection and Quality Assurance*

*HealthInsite's* disclaimer, accessible from all pages, states that the site provides information, not advice, and refers users to medical professionals before taking action. *HealthInsite* requires that all information partners provide a similar disclaimer. With a few exceptions, the site does not create its own content. Instead, it creates partnerships with health organizations, government agencies, and

educational or research institutions. Once an information partner has been assessed and approved by an Editorial Board, it can then provide information to the site. Partners create and maintain resources or identify and evaluate them against the site's standards. *HealthInsite* clearly identifies the source of all information it presents. Partners retain ownership and copyright of their material.

### ***Assessment Process***

All Web sites that appear on the site have been through the *HealthInsite* quality assessment process. To be approved, potential "information partners" must have a demonstrated quality assurance process and adhere to the site's publishing standards, which fall into five broad categories: quality of information, authentication (title, creator, publisher, and date), usability, accessibility, and metadata requirements.

Each partner organization must describe the processes they use to ensure the quality of their information. Information partners must be approved by the Editorial Board and enter into formal agreements before their material can appear on *HealthInsite*. Publishing and selection standards ensure the quality of the information that appears on the site. These include clearance and review processes, qualifications of authors, accuracy, appropriateness for intended audience, documentation of source authority, authentication and disclosure, and currency. Quality Process standards ensure the documents are written and reviewed by qualified professionals, with proper attribution of resources, that conflicts of interest are addressed, that advertising policies are in place, that the material is tested by members of the intended audience, and that metadata is maintained. Only Australian organizations may apply to become *HealthInsite* information partners.

### ***THE HealthInsite WEB SITE***

*HealthInsite* was created in 2001 to allow Australians to connect to high-quality health information on the Internet. Since then, its popularity has seen a steady rise. Between 200,000 and 300,000 visitors display more than 1,600,000 pages per month, and more than 3,000 people subscribe to the monthly newsletter. As of February 1, 2008,

HealthInsite maintains 15,594 active resources from 80 information partner Web sites. HealthInsite complies with the HONcode standard for trustworthy health information.

### Home Page

The home page <<http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/>> (see Figure 1) regularly displays updated news, together with an option to subscribe to the HealthInsite newsletter. News items include health promotion campaigns, studies, reports and resources of note, workshops, programs, and links to other health issues of importance to Australians. On this page, as on all pages of the site, the “last updated” date appears.

A search box appears at the top of the home page. Along the left-hand side, links to the advanced search forms and information about the organization itself appear, followed by an A–Z index of all topics, a diseases and conditions index, a list of general wellness topics (a catch-all for topics not listed elsewhere), information on life stages and events, and access to health services in Australia. Each of these selections is illustrated with examples, to help first-time users understand the structure of the site at a glance. This panel, which also includes links to the news, the newsletter, the help system, and the home page, appears at all times when the user remains on this site.

FIGURE 1. HealthInsite. Home Page



Along the right-hand side, users can log in or create a user profile and access information about the site itself, including consumer participation and rights, information about current information partners, and site statistics. Users can also find a list of questions to help evaluate health information and a list of reliable international online health organizations. Links to frequently-sought information, such as where to find reliable health information in languages other than English, information on medicines, personal stories, questions to ask a doctor, and an overview of evidence-based treatment reviews also appear. This panel also allows access to materials specifically targeting health care professionals and confirms the site's HONcode certification. This panel only appears on the home page.

Across the bottom of all pages, links allow for feedback, read privacy, security and copyright policies, and the site disclaimer, or to contact the site editors directly. Contacting the site elicits a swift and professional response.

### ***Topic Pages***

The A–Z index displays all the Health*Insite* “topic pages,” which are comprehensive predefined searches created by the editors preceded by an introduction explaining what the page covers. Topic pages may also contain a summary of key issues for the topic, links to subtopic pages or to related pages, and a listing of information partner links on the topic. As of February 1, 2008, Health*Insite* maintains 1,131 active topic pages.

## ***SEARCHING HealthInsite***

A search bar on the top right-hand side of the screen allows users to perform a simple search. The results page clearly distinguishes between Health*Insite* topic pages, links to partner results, and news items. The hyperlinked message “To make this search more specific, select options within the Refine Search page” brings users to the Advanced Search page (see Figure 2), where they can define a search more specifically using drop-down menus. In addition to typing search text, users can indicate whether they want the words to appear “anywhere in all items,” as “exact word/phrase only,” in the “title, description and subject keyword only,” or in “Health*Insite* topic

FIGURE 2. HealthInsite. Advanced Search Page

pages only.” They can also specify the level (child, youth, adult easy, adult medium, or professional), the language, or the format(s) of information. In addition, they can request only information in the last 1, 2 or 3 months or new material added within a specific date range.

## RESULTS

Performing a simple search for “asthma risk factors” found 26 HealthInsite topic pages, 951 partner results, and no news page results. The articles, not surprisingly, covered asthma (all topics) and risk factors for a number of diseases, but an unsophisticated searcher could find enough asthma-related material with this search to be satisfied. A slightly more specific search for “asthma risk factors” limiting the search to “exact word/phrase only” yielded two HealthInsite topic pages, one partner result, and no news page results (see Figure 3) for a search performed on February 20, 2008.

When the HealthInsite topic page results are selected, the Search Results Summary page displays an elegantly formatted list of topic pages that provide the (hyperlinked) title, publisher, date, and a concise description of the contents of the article. The font is quite small, however, and no obvious text-resizing option is provided. For



FIGURE 3. HealthInsite. Search Results Summary Page

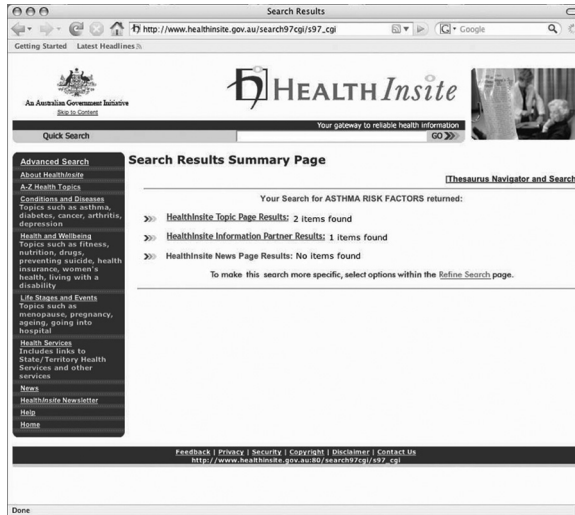


FIGURE 4. HealthInsite. Search Results: Topic Pages



example, the two topic pages that appear for the asthma risk factors search (see Figure 4) are: "Causes of Asthma" ("Links to information on asthma risk factors and protective factors") and "Asthma" ("Links to general information on asthma, and topic pages on the causes and complications of the disease, as well as management and control treatments, support services and statistics").

Both topic pages yielded rich results. For example, clicking on the "Causes of Asthma" article leads to a *HealthInsite* topic page. This page features a text description of asthma causes, followed by 15 links to partner-created resources selected by *HealthInsite* staff to answer client needs. These resources discuss asthma in general, smoking and asthma, a survey of the incidence of asthma in Australia, asthma and food, and more. If you now click on a specific partner-created resource, a screen appears to clearly indicate that you are leaving *Insite*. The warning message states, "You are leaving *HealthInsite*. The *HealthInsite* information partner page you have requested [title, publisher] may contain links to websites which have not been reviewed by *HealthInsite*'s Editorial Team." This message is followed by two buttons, allowing users to open the resource they have chosen in a new window or in the same window.

Partner resources are in general well-designed, useful, and authoritative. Because of *HealthInsite*'s extensive quality assurance checks, users can be sure the information they find on this site comes from a reliable source.

## CONCLUSION

*HealthInsite* does an excellent job of providing Australians with understandable and reliable health information. Both beginner and advanced searchers can find what they need quickly because clearly described lists of resources make selection easy. Because *HealthInsite* has already done the leg work, users can be sure the information they find on this site is reliable.

*HealthInsite*'s approach to networking health information providers is an excellent example of how government can ensure that reliable health information is both created and disseminated effectively, while allowing organizations to create and provide information that their client groups actually need and use. Not only

does this relatively hands-off approach allow Health*Insite* to provide a meta-search-based “one stop shop” for reliable health information, it also allows them to play a leadership role in establishing and promoting good, quality information practices within the Australian community of health information providers. By modeling and explaining best-in-class information practices and providing access to a broad audience, this site improves the overall quality of health information in Australia.