

# What type of research focusing on health inequalities is being done by the pharmaceutical industry?

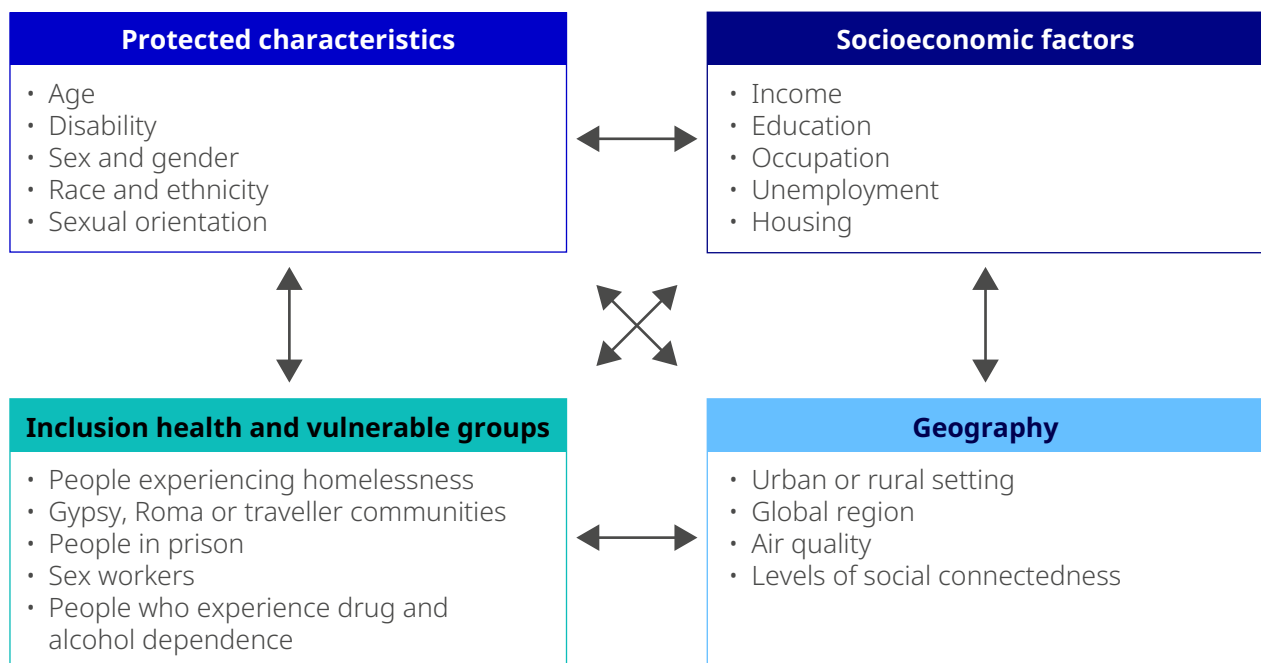
This is a plain language summary based on the article called “[Health inequalities research involving the pharmaceutical industry globally: a scoping review](https://doi.org/10.1080/03007995.2025.2465618)”. It was published in a journal called *Current Medical Research and Opinion* in February 2025. You can read the article for free here: [doi.org/10.1080/03007995.2025.2465618](https://doi.org/10.1080/03007995.2025.2465618). Two patient authors gave their perspectives on the research. These perspectives can be found in **Box 1** and **Box 2** in the full article.

## Why was this study done?

In this study, Pfizer wanted to understand how pharmaceutical companies are using scientific research to help to reduce health inequalities.

**Health inequalities** describe differences in the health of different groups of people that are often unfair. This could mean differences in aspects of people’s health (such as how long a person may be expected to live) or in factors affecting people’s health (such as their access to healthcare).

Different characteristics can lead to health inequalities. Here are some examples of characteristics provided by the UK government.



People may experience health inequalities because of a combination of these characteristics and their interactions.

Researching health inequalities may help to identify groups of people with an unmet need. It can also help to make sure that healthcare resources are spread fairly in the population. This type of research may show how pharmaceutical companies can improve the way their medicines and vaccines are developed and used by patients, to help to reduce health inequalities.

## How was this study done?

This study included researchers from the pharmaceutical industry and academia, as well as patient authors. The patient authors gave their personal perspectives on health inequalities research and the role that the pharmaceutical industry can play to reduce health inequalities.

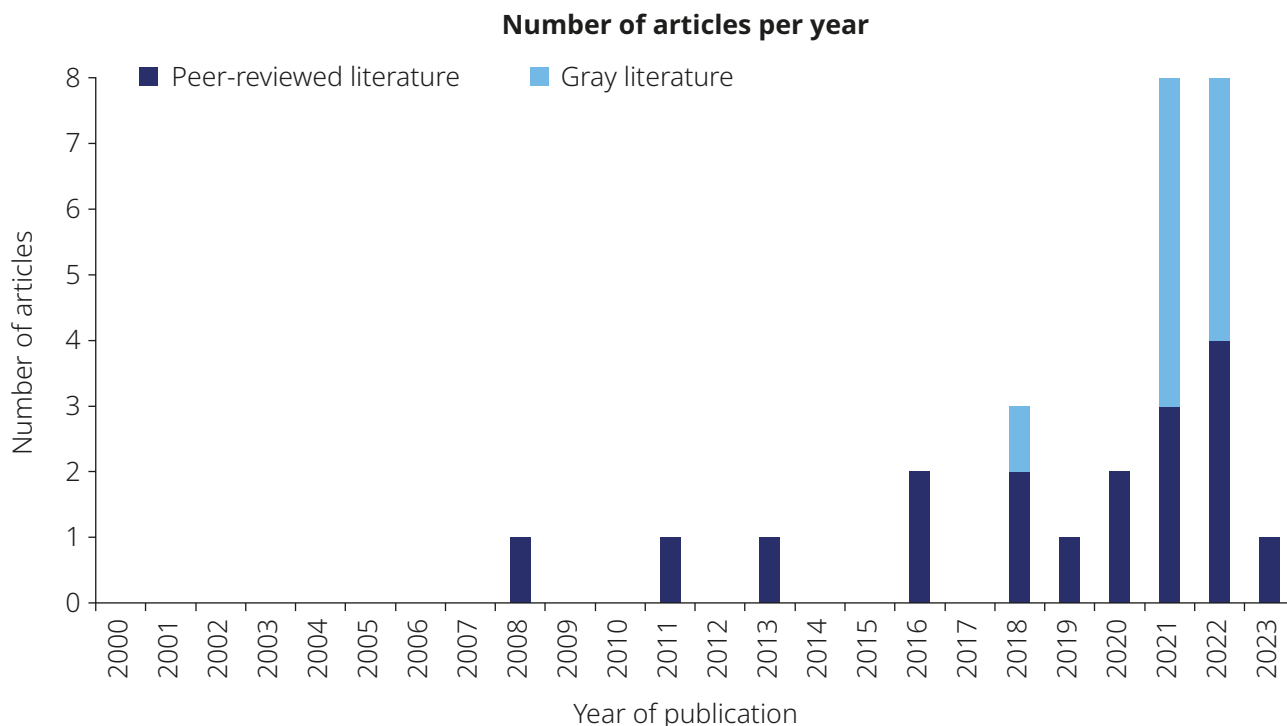
We searched 3 sources to find English-language articles and information published since the year 2000 about what kind of scientific research, activities and initiatives pharmaceutical companies are doing to address health inequalities. These 3 sources are shown below.

Peer-reviewed literature	Gray literature	Pharmaceutical companies
Research that has been published in scientific journals. This is called <b>peer-reviewed literature</b>	Projects and initiatives that have not been published in scientific journals but are described in other sources of information, such as news articles. This is called <b>gray literature</b>	Global websites of pharmaceutical companies

Overall, we found 18 peer-reviewed articles and 10 gray literature articles that met our criteria, and we reviewed them in full to find out more.

## What were the results of this study?

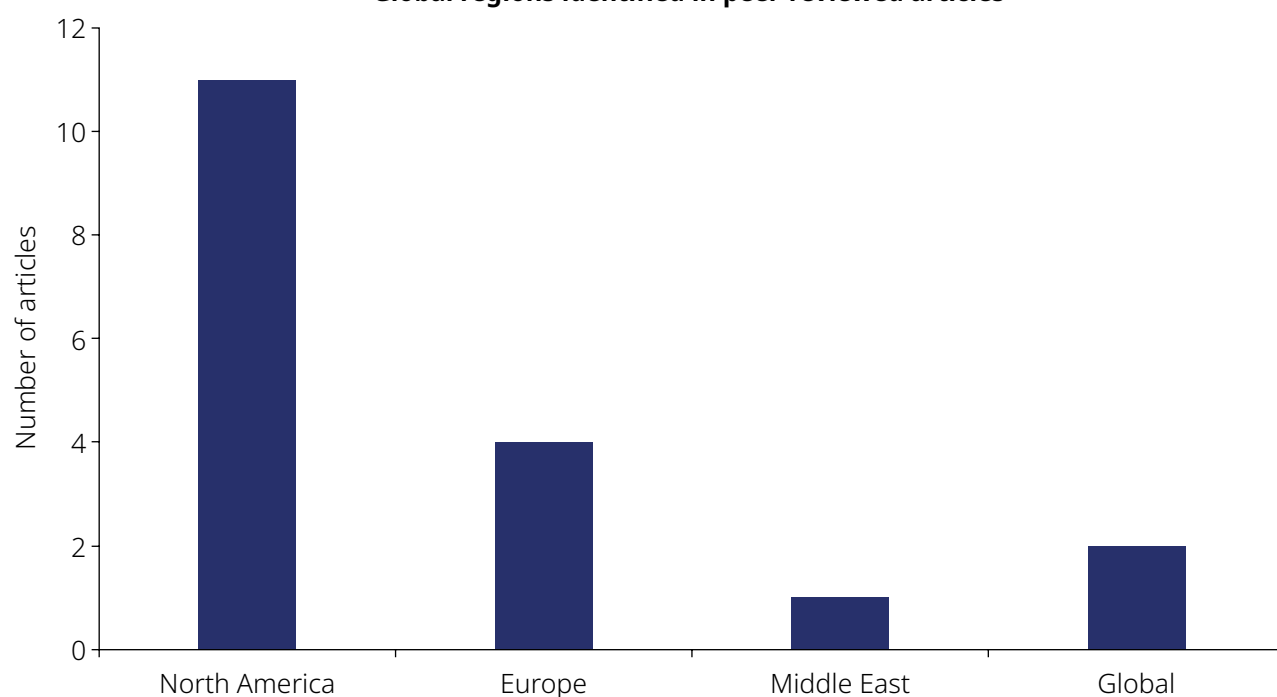
There has been an increase in health inequalities research since 2018. Of the peer-reviewed and gray literature articles, 23 out of 28 were published from 2018 onwards.



Research is typically focused on the more developed global regions. Of the 18 peer-reviewed articles, 11 included North America as the global region of research focus or study population.

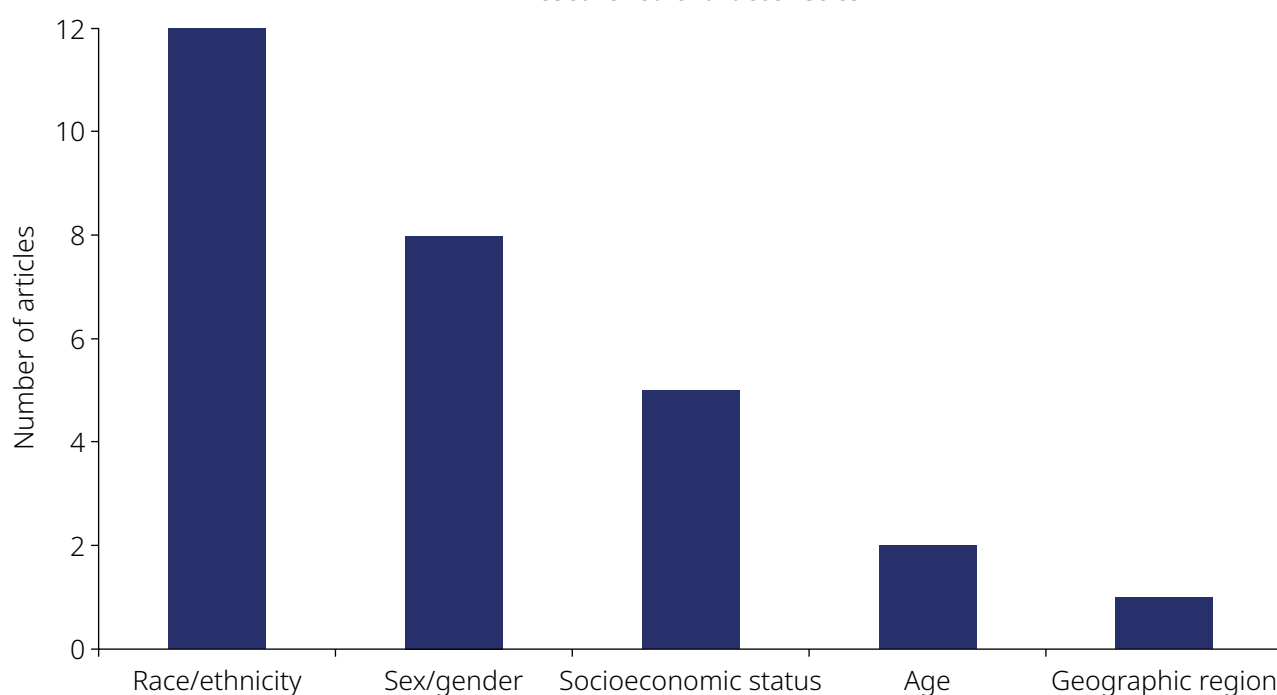
The research for these more developed global regions also covered more diseases than the research focusing on less developed global regions.

**Global regions identified in peer-reviewed articles**

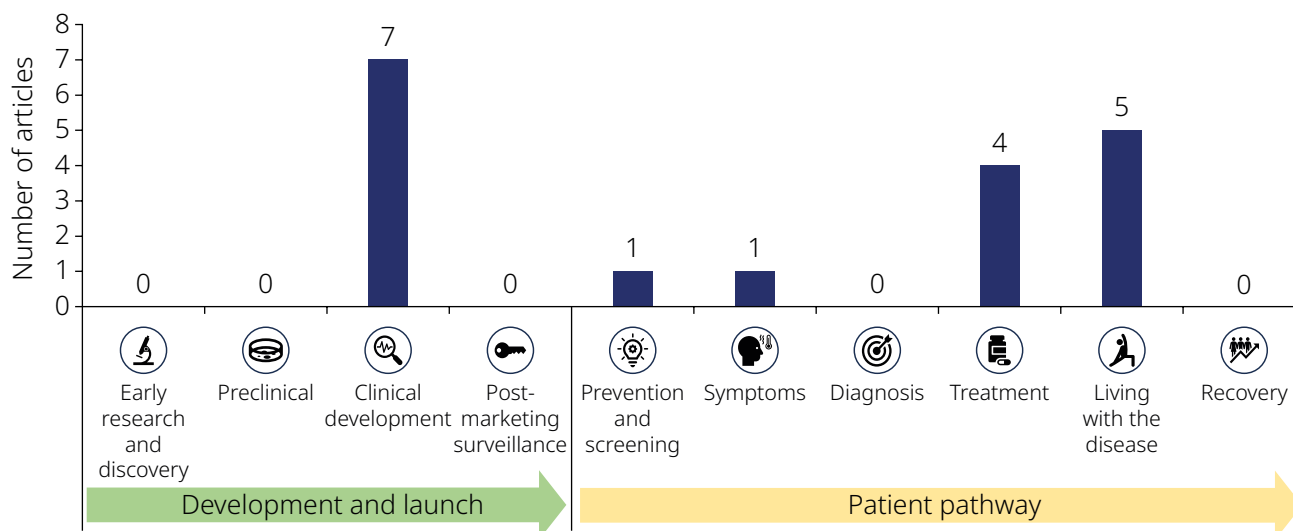


Race and ethnicity were the most frequently researched characteristics of health inequality in the 18 peer-reviewed articles. Some articles researched more than 1 characteristic. Peer-reviewed articles found that some diseases were more common and more severe in Black people than in people of other races or ethnicities.

**Researched characteristics**



The medicines and vaccines development process and the patient pathway can be broken down into different stages of activity, such as the clinical development stage or when people receive their treatment. The largest focus of the 18 peer-reviewed articles was on the lack of diversity of the people taking part in clinical trials, which are part of the clinical development stage. This lack of diversity was also a focus of the gray literature articles.



## Key learnings

- Health inequalities research involving pharmaceutical companies has increased in recent years. Most of the identified articles were published after 2018.
- Many of the articles focused on the more developed global regions of the world. These articles covered a wider variety of diseases than articles in less developed global regions, which focused more on infectious diseases. It is important that health inequalities research does not overlook diseases that are more common in less developed regions than in more developed regions.
- Race and ethnicity, sex and gender, and socioeconomic status are the most frequently studied characteristics in health inequalities research.
  - Inequalities in these factors have important implications across different stages of the medicines and vaccines development process. For example, participants of female sex or from ethnic minority groups were less likely to join and to stay in a clinical trial until it finished.
  - It is important that clinical trials funded by pharmaceutical companies include participants who accurately represent the population with the disease (for instance, by including people of different socioeconomic status and who live in different countries). This will help to give researchers a better understanding of how a medicine or vaccine will perform in the real world.

## Conclusions

- Overall, we found that pharmaceutical companies are increasing their involvement in research and initiatives trying to reduce health inequalities. This change supports the increased focus on disease prevention and early diagnosis.
- There remains a lot of work to do in health inequalities to ensure that people with an unmet need are not being overlooked and that healthcare resources are available to people who need them. For instance, pharmaceutical companies can use new approaches to understand how their medicines and vaccines are being used in the real world.
- Future efforts to reduce health inequalities should rely on collaboration between pharmaceutical companies and public organisations, such as the National Health Service in the UK. The efforts of pharmaceutical companies should also be informed by working with patients to identify their unmet needs.

## More information

You can read the full article that this plain language summary is based on for free here: [doi.org/10.1080/03007995.2025.2465618](https://doi.org/10.1080/03007995.2025.2465618). This study was funded by Pfizer Ltd. Medical writing support was provided by Oxford PharmaGenesis, Oxford, UK, also funded by Pfizer Ltd. Additional author competing interests and contributions and a data availability statement are detailed in the full article.