

Introduction

Over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids are a newer option for people with hearing loss. While they promote access, users must choose and fit devices without help from a licensed audiologist. To do so, many rely on online information to select, use, and manage the device.

Aim 1: Assess readability, understandability, actionability of online materials

Aim 2: Examine whether users are more likely to recommend materials with stronger plain language qualities

Methods

Website selection

- Search engines: Google, Safari, Firefox, Bing
- Search terms:
 - "Over-the-counter hearing aids"
 - "What are over the counter hearing aids?"
 - "Cheap hearing aids"
- Top websites identified (N=22)

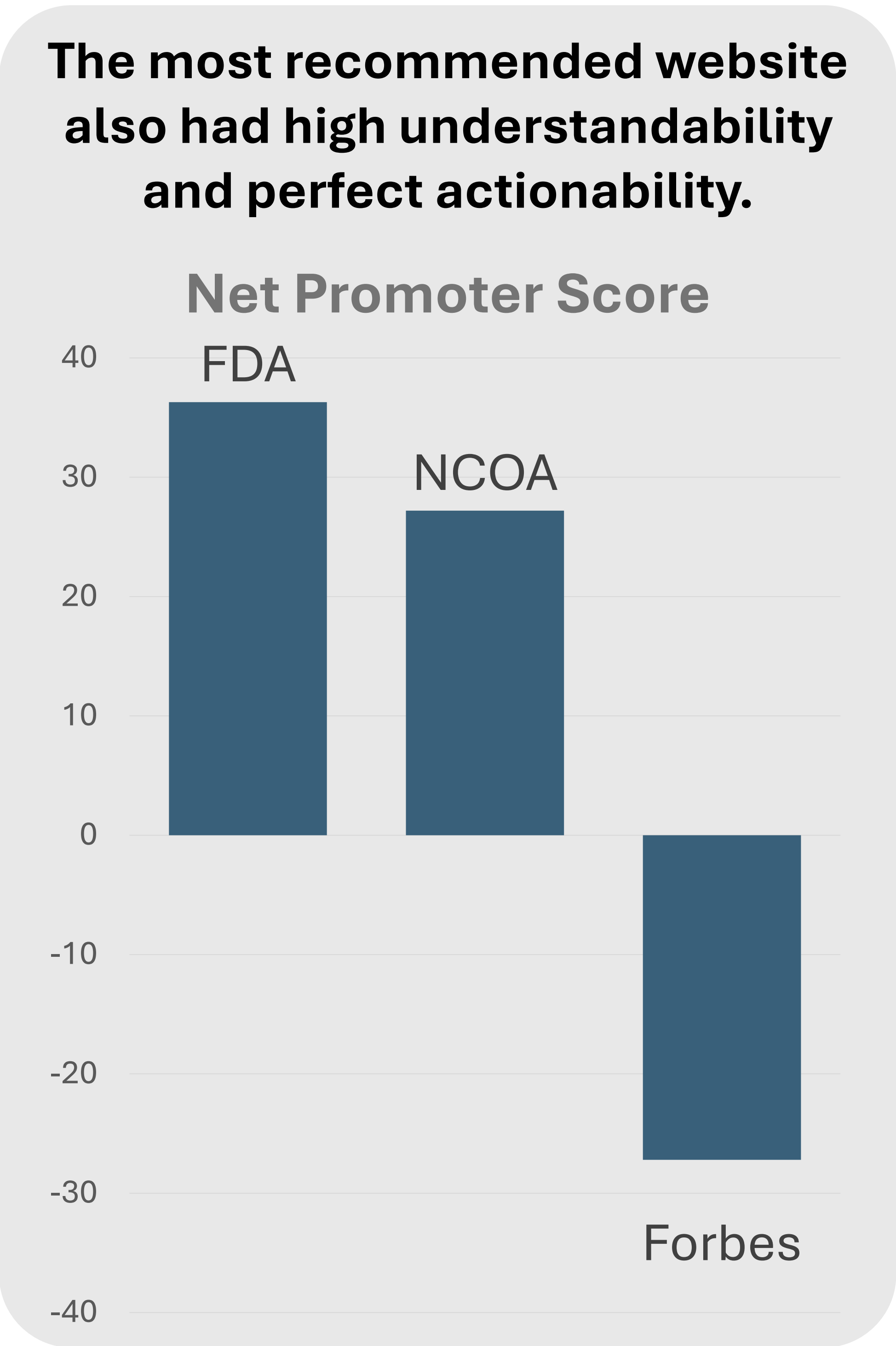
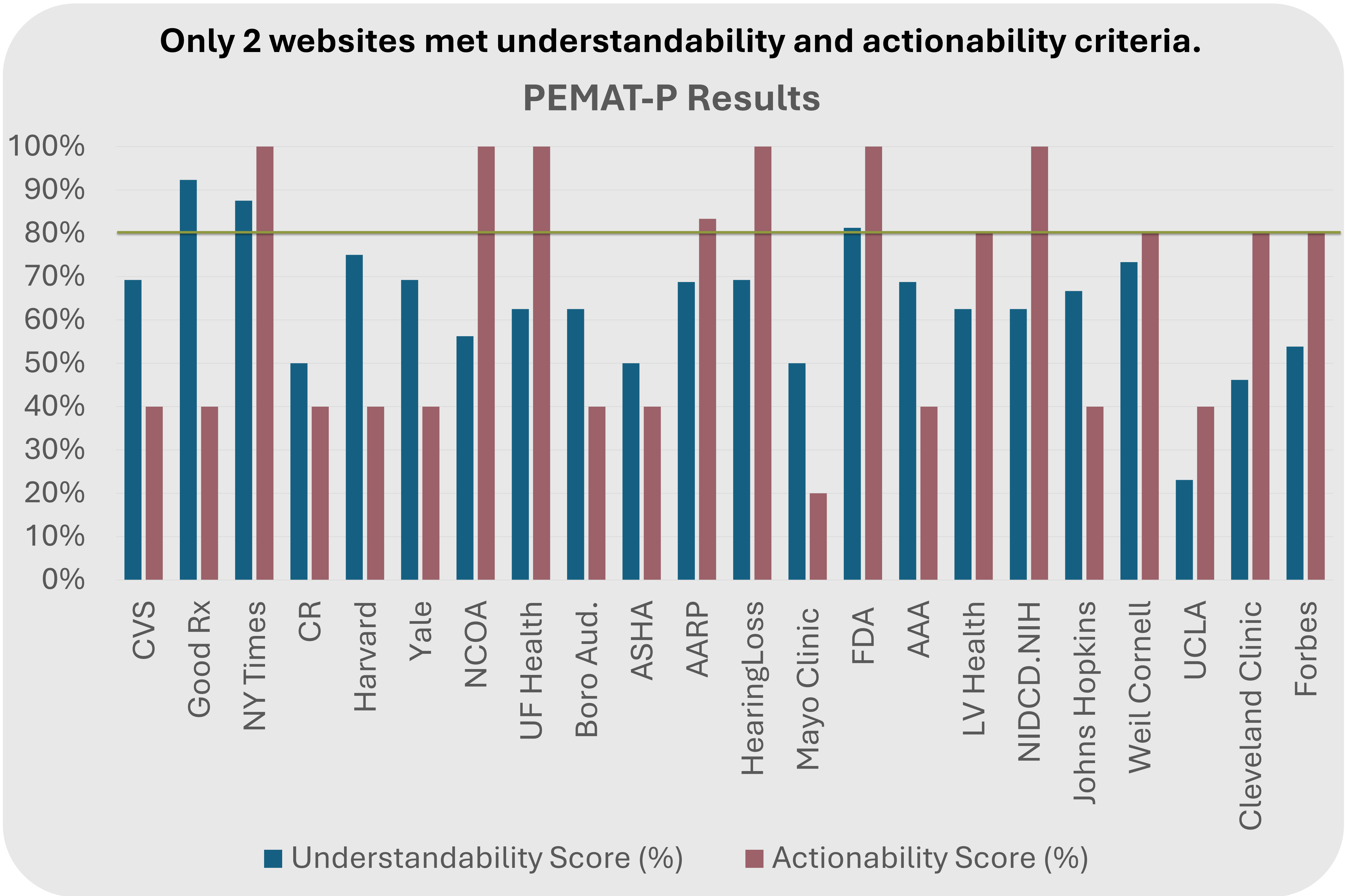
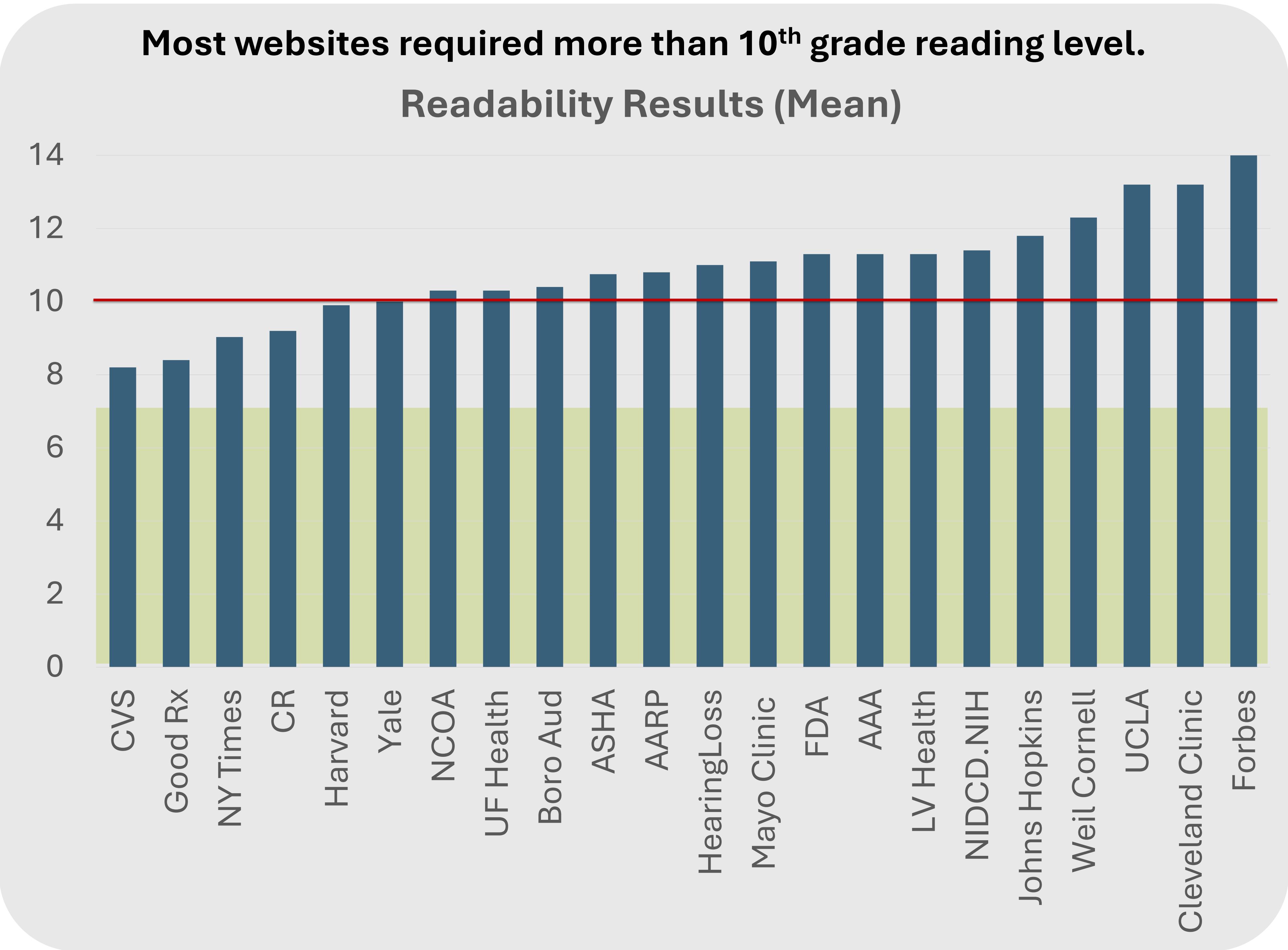
Expert evaluation

- Experts:
 - 1 audiology student
 - 2 plain language experts
- Readability formulas:
 - Flesch-Kincaid
 - SMOG
 - Fry Graph
- Understandability and actionability: PEMAT-P¹

User evaluation

- Participants: N=11
 - Ages 21-59
 - Reported high health and digital literacy
- Reviewed 3 most frequently appearing websites: Forbes, FDA, NCOA
- Measure: Net Promoter Score (likelihood to recommend)

Results



Conclusions

- These findings highlight the need for clearer, consumer-friendly online information to support informed decision-making.
- Even users with strong health and digital literacy preferred websites that used plain language.

References

1. Shoemaker, S. J., Wolf, M. S., & Brach, C. (2014). Development of the Patient Education Materials Assessment Tool (PEMAT): a new measure of understandability and actionability for print and audiovisual patient information. *Patient education and counseling*, 96(3), 395–403.