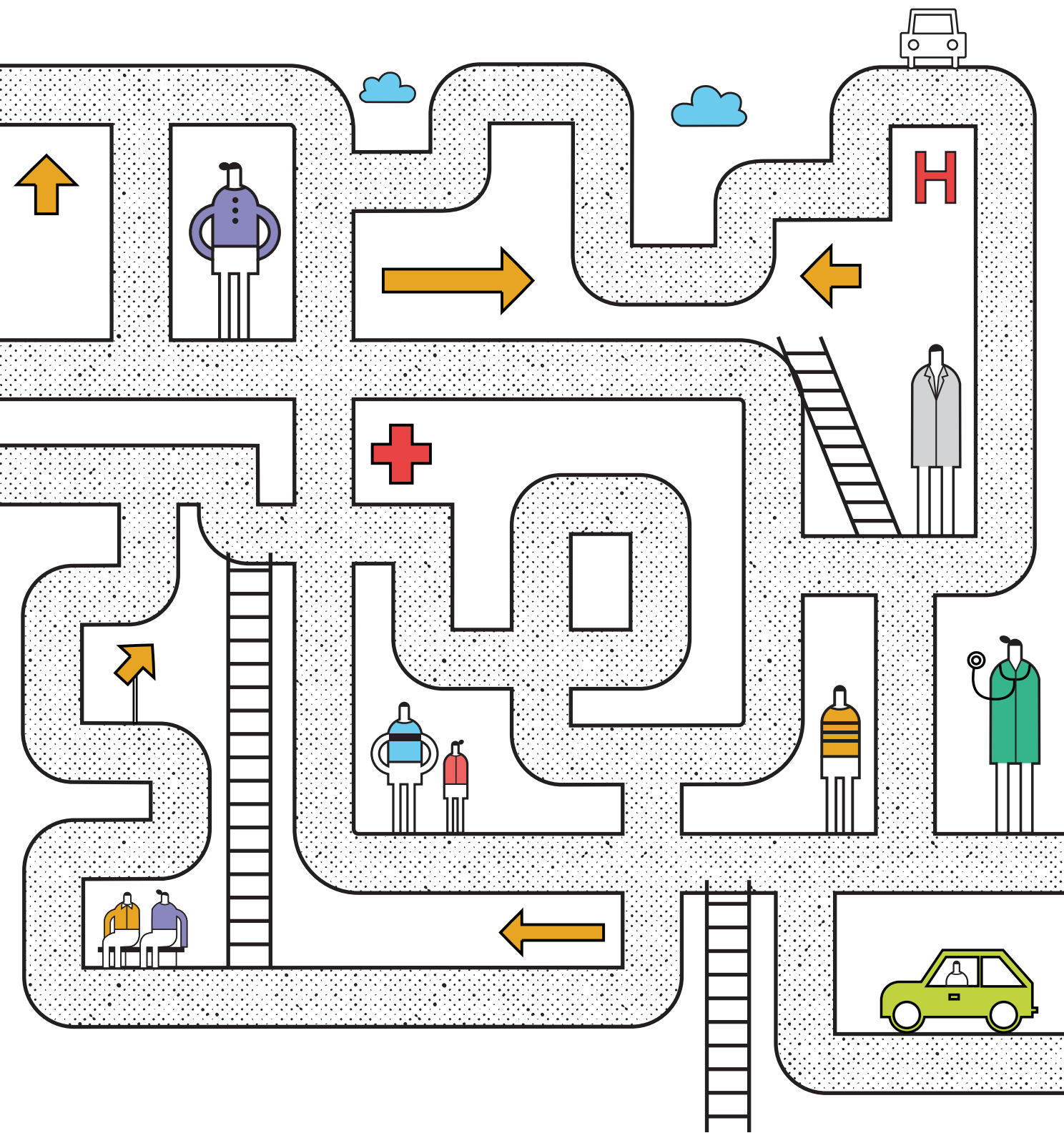


# Healthcare Wayfinding

Simplifying the patient experience in healthcare environments



# An Easier Hospital

Can better wayfinding improve the patient, visitor, and staff experience in healthcare settings?

Wayfinding is an important yet often underperforming aspect of many healthcare environments, potentially hindering the patient, visitor, and staff experience.

## WHAT WE DID

We conducted a comprehensive audit of third-party research related to wayfinding in healthcare settings to identify potential areas that could benefit from improved wayfinding strategies. Based on our initial studies, we formulated several hypotheses on where strategic interventions could improve the patient, visitor, and staff experience through wayfinding. We then surveyed 25+ healthcare professionals to test and verify our hypotheses. The surveys and supporting research informed the development of our *The Value of Comprehensive Wayfinding in Healthcare* guidebook, a resource for healthcare system operators, planners, and architectural designers to create best-in-class hospital wayfinding systems.

## THE CONTEXT

Healthcare settings are often large, complex environments that for many are visited infrequently, and often in times of physical or emotional stress. Many health systems have traditionally focused their resources on impacting the efficiency of medical care delivered. As a result, hospitals have not focused resources on the visitor, or staff, experience—which includes, but is not limited to, wayfinding. Too often this results in a discrepancy between the quality of care delivered and the overall quality of the experience, a situation that can negatively impact patient satisfaction levels, as well as the perceptions of visitors and community members. Faced with increased competition and an eye on improving patient outcomes and satisfaction levels, hospitals and medical systems are increasingly looking to improve the patient and visitor experience as a differentiator in the marketplace.



## THE RESULTS

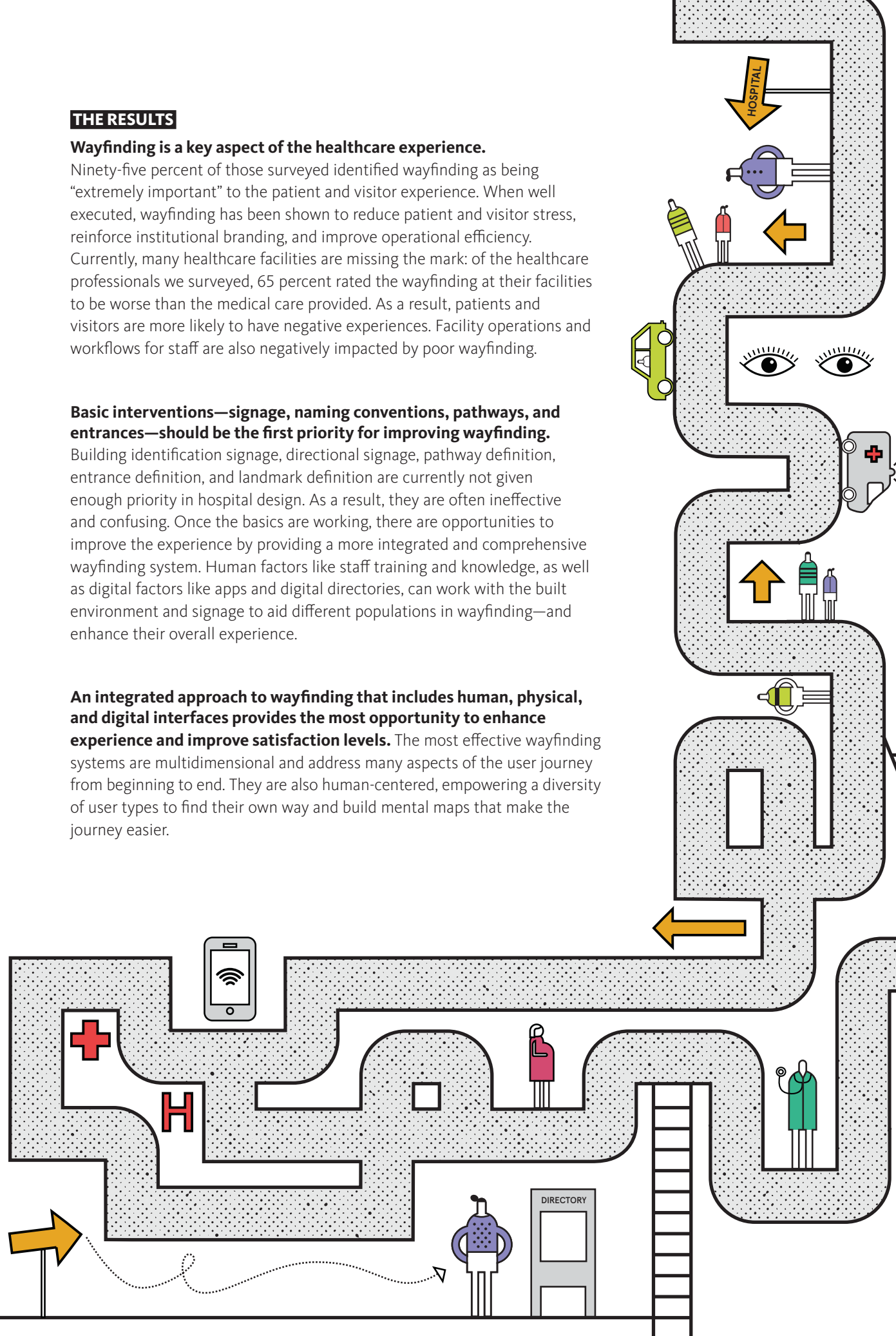
**Wayfinding is a key aspect of the healthcare experience.**

Ninety-five percent of those surveyed identified wayfinding as being “extremely important” to the patient and visitor experience. When well executed, wayfinding has been shown to reduce patient and visitor stress, reinforce institutional branding, and improve operational efficiency. Currently, many healthcare facilities are missing the mark: of the healthcare professionals we surveyed, 65 percent rated the wayfinding at their facilities to be worse than the medical care provided. As a result, patients and visitors are more likely to have negative experiences. Facility operations and workflows for staff are also negatively impacted by poor wayfinding.

**Basic interventions—signage, naming conventions, pathways, and entrances—should be the first priority for improving wayfinding.**

Building identification signage, directional signage, pathway definition, entrance definition, and landmark definition are currently not given enough priority in hospital design. As a result, they are often ineffective and confusing. Once the basics are working, there are opportunities to improve the experience by providing a more integrated and comprehensive wayfinding system. Human factors like staff training and knowledge, as well as digital factors like apps and digital directories, can work with the built environment and signage to aid different populations in wayfinding—and enhance their overall experience.

**An integrated approach to wayfinding that includes human, physical, and digital interfaces provides the most opportunity to enhance experience and improve satisfaction levels.** The most effective wayfinding systems are multidimensional and address many aspects of the user journey from beginning to end. They are also human-centered, empowering a diversity of user types to find their own way and build mental maps that make the journey easier.



## PERSPECTIVES

**“Hospitals are realizing they have a design problem as patients and visitors struggle to navigate the maze of the modern medical complex. Confusing layouts and signage add to patients’ anxiety at a time when many are feeling ill and are coming to the hospital to undergo tests and procedures.”**

– “A Cure for Hospital Design,” Laura Landro, *The Wall Street Journal*

### WHAT THIS MEANS

A reprioritization to focus on designing, implementing, and maintaining effective wayfinding systems can reduce patient stress and anxiety, improve facility operations and workflows, and have profoundly positive impacts on the confidence and well-being of patients and visitors.

**Make destination points easily identifiable.**

The use of medical terminology in signage can overwhelm patients. For example, a parent taking their child for treatment of an inner-ear infection may not understand what the Otolaryngology Department is, but will understand “Ear, Nose, and Throat.”

**Identify important locations with distinctive design cues.** This could be a unique entryway, piece of furniture, or storefront. It should be clearly visible and easily described—for instance, by having a recognizable color, shape, or object.

**Clearly mark pathways and reinforce navigational cues.** Visual cues include creative naming signage, directional signage, graphics, landmarks, and view corridors. They must occur frequently along a path to provide reassurance to people as they navigate, making reorientation easy and seamless.

**Multiple forms of communication (visual, verbal, and digital, for example) should be integrated into an optimal wayfinding strategy.** Interactive kiosks or visitor help desks can supplement pathways and signage by providing directional printouts, or they can be sent to a patient's or visitor's smartphone.

## WHAT'S NEXT

We continue to use our publication, *The Value of Comprehensive Wayfinding in Healthcare*, as our primer on how to understand and design wayfinding systems for healthcare environments. The guide provides a recommended methodology for beginning a new wayfinding project or refreshing an existing system. It can also help healthcare organizations begin to think about their wayfinding earlier in the design process of a new building or renovation project. Ultimately, this guide will enable critical conversations about what is important to a successful wayfinding experience and also provide a basic tool list and an approach for creating those experiences.

Team

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