

# **Impact of Strategic Communications on implementing Affordable Care Act for organizations**

**Priyanka Taranekar**

## **Abstract**

Large-scale, far-reaching policy initiatives like the Affordable Care Act present a significant compliance and change management challenge for all organizations. Strategic communications play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of such regulations for organizations navigating the complexities of ACA compliance. Strategic communications and Change Management serve as the foundational instruments for organizations to embark on the journey of change that involves aligning and engaging stakeholders, assessing and mitigating risks, and ensuring compliance while leveraging the stipulations of the regulation to update and drive strategy.

This paper, *"Impact of Strategic Communications on Implementing Affordable Care Act for Organizations,"* explores how structured communication strategies can address the challenges of interpreting, adopting, and operationalizing ACA mandates. It highlights the importance of transparent, multi-channel messaging to educate internal and external stakeholders, foster trust, and drive engagement.

Through case studies and actionable insights, the paper demonstrates how organizations have leveraged strategic communication to clarify policy objectives, address resistance, and implement changes efficiently. Specific focus is placed on tailoring messages to diverse audiences, establishing feedback loops, and integrating communication plans with change management strategies.

The economic benefits of strategic communication are also examined, including improved compliance rates, reduced operational disruptions, and increased employee satisfaction.

Organizations can not only meet ACA requirements but also build a culture of collaboration transparency and adaptability, by adopting the frameworks and best practices outlined in this paper, paving the way for long term continued organizational success in the rapidly evolving healthcare landscape of America.

**Keywords: Strategic Communication**

## **Introduction**

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) changed healthcare forever and organizations had to make way for the new regulations and mandates that marked a remarkable shift for various organizations in how they operate. This has been a difficult journey for organizations - although the act aims to increase affordability and healthcare accessibility, the complexity and nuances pose significant challenges for organizations required to comply with its mandatory provisions. Navigating these complexities demands

more than operational adjustments; it requires a comprehensive strategic communication approach to ensure understanding, alignment, and execution across all levels of an organization.

This paper, *"Impact of Strategic Communications on Implementing Affordable Care Act for Organizations,"* examines the critical role of communication in addressing the challenges associated with ACA compliance. Effective communication serves as the backbone of successful implementation, bridging gaps between regulatory requirements and organizational workflows. By ensuring clarity, fostering trust, and addressing concerns proactively, strategic communication enables organizations to align their workforce, mitigate risks, and maintain operational efficiency during transitions.

The paper highlights key communication strategies, such as tailoring messages for diverse audiences, leveraging digital tools, and fostering two-way dialogue to address questions and resistance. As organizations continue to adapt to ACA mandates, strategic communication not only facilitates compliance but also strengthens organizational resilience, collaboration, and trust in the face of evolving regulatory landscapes.

### **Problem Statement**

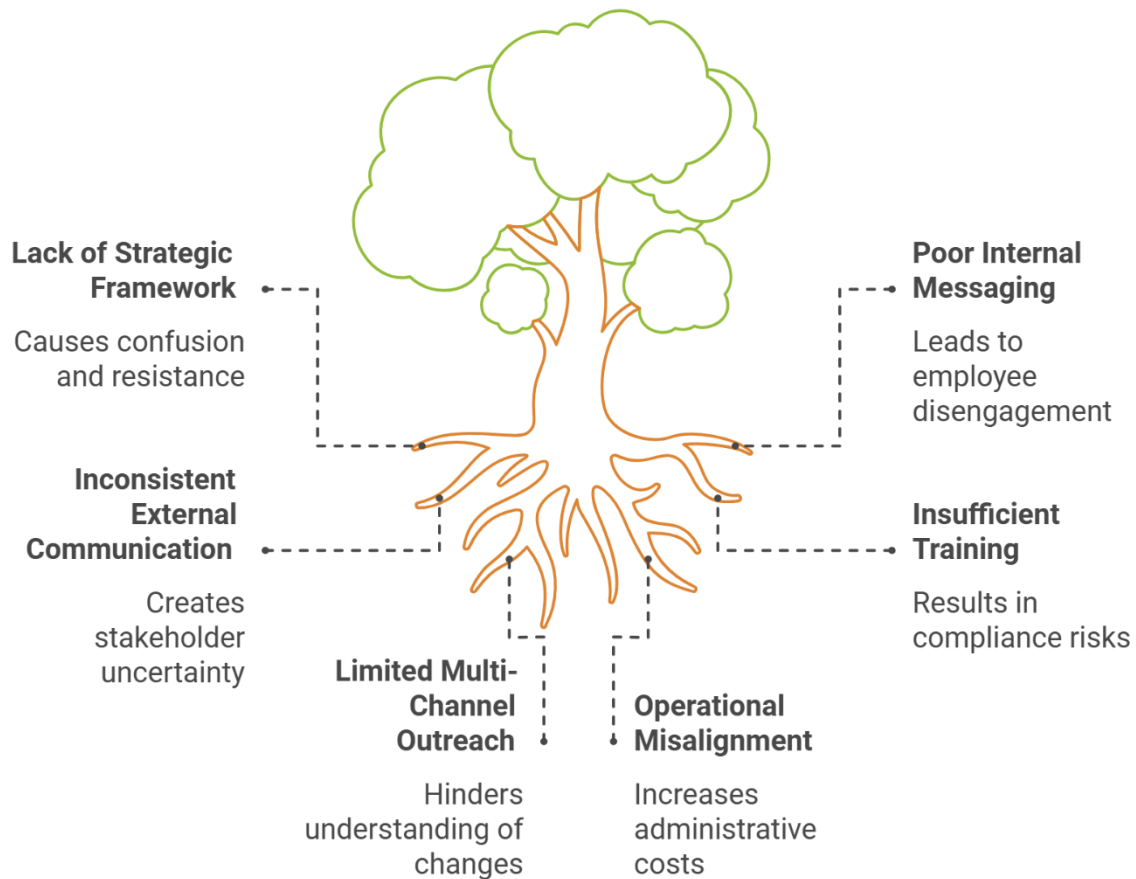
The Affordable Care Act (ACA) introduced sweeping changes to the healthcare landscape. These changes required organizations to adapt to new and often difficult-to-implement regulatory mandates. The implementation process has been fraught with challenges for organizations as they navigate struggle to interpret the legislation's nuances, align their operations with new requirements, and effectively communicate the implications to their stakeholders.

The lack of a strategic communication framework exacerbates these issues, leading to confusion, resistance, and operational inefficiencies. Employees often lack clarity on how the changes impact their roles, while external stakeholders may perceive inconsistencies or uncertainty in messaging. This misalignment results in compliance risks, employee disengagement, and increased administrative costs.

To address these challenges, organizations must adopt a structured, transparent, and multi-channel communication strategy that bridges gaps in understanding, fosters trust, and ensures smooth implementation of ACA mandates while maintaining organizational efficiency.

Organizations must proactively communicate with both internal stakeholders such as employees and suppliers and external stakeholders such as patients, insurers, and community partners to develop a common understanding and foundational support for changes that affect care delivery and coverage options. This outreach can mitigate confusion and enhance patient satisfaction by ensuring stakeholders are well-informed about their rights and responsibilities under the new regulations.

**Ineffective Communication in ACA Implementation**



**Figure 1: Ineffective Communication in ACA Implementation**

**Literature Reviews**

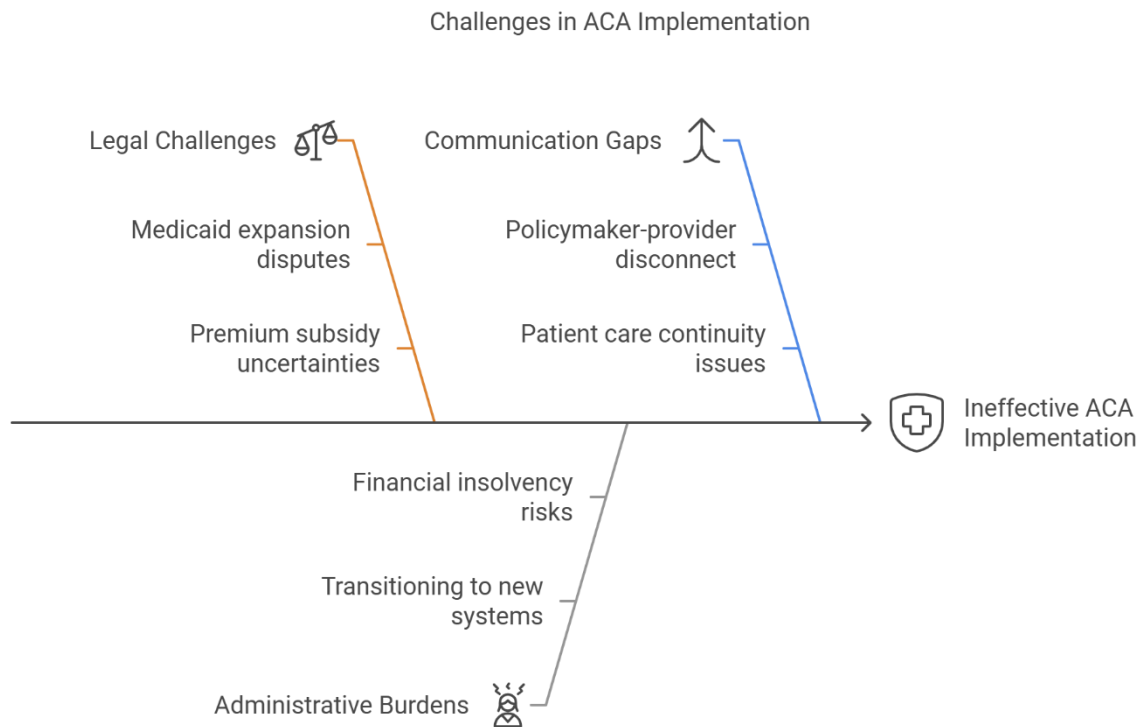
**Understanding ACA Implementation Challenges**

The implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) for healthcare organizations has faced multiple challenges over the years of implementation. Despite best intentions from lawmakers, organizations have faced barriers in the form of legal, administrative, and communication challenges to various degrees of severity based on the context and situation of an organization on a case-by-case basis.

*Primary Barriers to ACA Implementation*

1. **Legal Challenges:** The ACA has faced numerous legal challenges, including disputes over Medicaid expansion and premium subsidies, which have created uncertainty and hindered implementation efforts (Rosenbaum, 2014).
2. **Administrative Burdens:** Transitioning to new healthcare systems, such as Medicaid managed care, has increased administrative burdens for clinics and providers, potentially leading to financial insolvency and reduced quality of care as cited in a study for reforms in the state of California (Hazelton et al., 2014).

3. **Communication Gaps:** There are significant gaps in communication between policymakers, providers, and patients, which can disrupt continuity of care and hinder effective implementation (Hazelton et al., 2014), (Kreuter et al., 2014).



**Figure 2: Challenges in ACA Implementation**

*Effects on Operational Efficiency and Compliance*

1. **Operational Efficiency:** The administrative and communication challenges can lead to inefficiencies in healthcare delivery, as providers struggle to adapt to new systems and maintain patient care continuity (Hazelton et al., 2014), (Kreuter et al., 2014).
- **Compliance Outcomes:** Legal uncertainties and administrative complexities can result in inconsistent compliance with ACA mandates, affecting the overall success of the law's implementation (Rosenbaum, 2014).

**Strategic Communication in Policy Implementation**

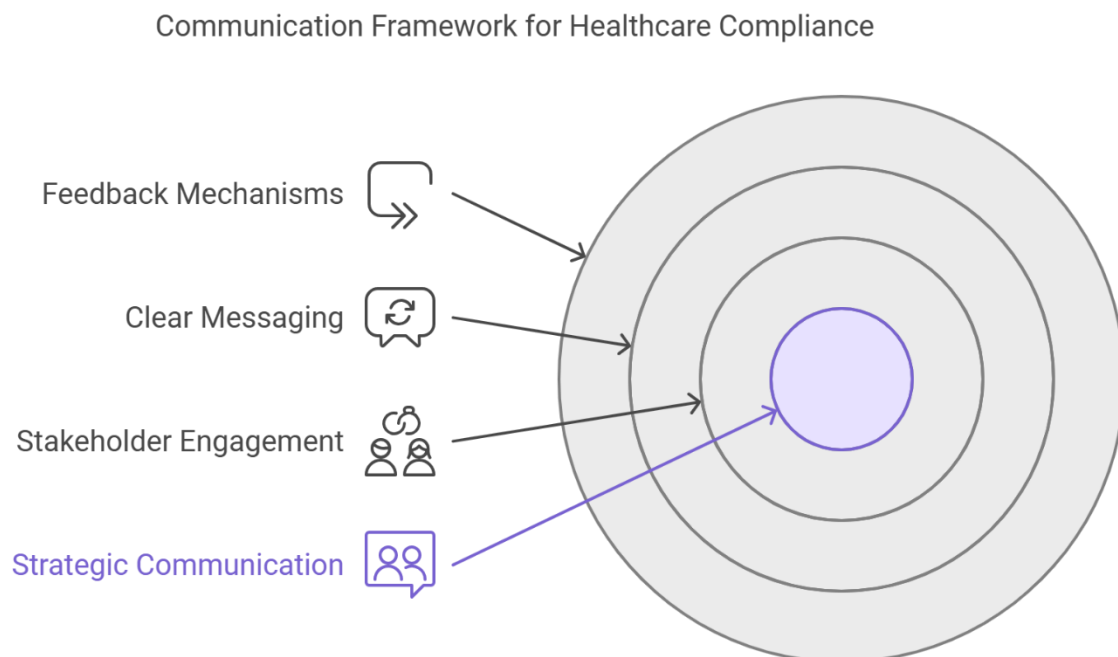
For effective implementation of any policy or ruling leading to compliance in healthcare, strategic communication has a very important role to play. Strategic communication generally involves clear frameworks to understand and address resistance to change while deploying functional strategies to guide policy implementations like the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

*Key Components of an Effective Communication Framework for Regulatory Compliance*

1. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Engaging stakeholders through interviews and consultations ensures that their perspectives and concerns are addressed, fostering a sense of ownership and cooperation. Strategic communication should pave a path to provide the strategy for continuous

engagement which will result in sustainable relationship building with strategic stakeholders, as well as short-term, secondary stakeholder engagement on the basis of working relationships (Slabbert, 2018).

2. **Clear Messaging:** Developing clear, consistent, and transparent messages that articulate the benefits and necessities of compliance can help in aligning organizational goals with regulatory requirements. Clarifying the value of a policy is crucial for professionals to willingly implement it, as they may resist implementing policies due to perceived meaninglessness for society or their clients (Tummers, 2011).
3. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Establishing channels for feedback allows for continuous improvement and adaptation of strategies based on stakeholder input and changing circumstances. A study propagates the theory that feedback loops are integral to strategic communications, allowing organizations to adapt and respond to changes in the digital environment. The concept of a "corporate nervous net" highlights the importance of real-time feedback loops in decentralized strategic communication. This approach leverages digital tools like AI, Big Data, and IoT to create a self-organizing, bottom-up communication strategy that can quickly adapt to changes and utilize local knowledge effectively (Knebel & Seele, 2019).



**Figure 3: Communication Framework for Healthcare Compliance**

#### Integrating Communication with Change management

Strategic communication during organizational change can create positive outcomes and reduce resistance, with power and resistance playing a role in communication strategies and outcomes (Steyn, 2004). Strategic communications can effectively implement organizational change and improve health outcomes (Fort & Price, 2016). For instance, organizations that conducted readiness assessments and

established feedback loops reported higher engagement and smoother transitions to ACA-compliant processes.

This literature review establishes the foundation for understanding how strategic communication can bridge the gap between regulatory mandates and operational success, ensuring compliance and fostering collaboration.

Proposed Approach: Steps on creating Strategic Communications for implementing the Affordable Care Act for healthcare organizations

**1. Conduct Stakeholder Analysis and Segmentation**

Identify all impacted stakeholders, such as employees, patients, insurers, and regulators, and segment them based on their specific roles and information needs.  
*Example:* A hospital categorizes stakeholders into employees (HR, clinicians, administrators) and external partners (insurance companies, vendors) to deliver tailored communication addressing ACA's impact on each group.

**2. Develop a Clear Communication Strategy and Objectives**

Outline the goals of the communication plan, such as increasing awareness, minimizing resistance, or ensuring compliance. Establish timelines, channels, and key performance indicators.

*Example:* A healthcare system sets a goal to achieve 95% employee understanding of new ACA reporting requirements within three months using a mix of email campaigns and training sessions.

**3. Craft Audience-Specific Messages**

Customize messages to address the concerns and priorities of each stakeholder group while maintaining consistency in tone and intent.

*Example:* For clinicians, focus on how ACA mandates affect patient care delivery, while for administrative staff, emphasize changes to billing processes and compliance reporting.

**4. Leverage Multi-Channel Communication**

Use a mix of communication channels to ensure reach and accessibility, such as email, intranets, town halls, and digital dashboards.

*Example:* A healthcare organization uses intranet articles, video tutorials, and live webinars to explain ACA updates to employees and provide opportunities for Q&A.

**5. Establish Feedback Loops and Monitor Engagement**

Create mechanisms to gather feedback and assess the effectiveness of communication, allowing for continuous improvement.

*Example:* Implement employee surveys after each town hall or training session to measure comprehension and identify areas requiring further clarification.

**6. Integrate Communication with Change Management Efforts**

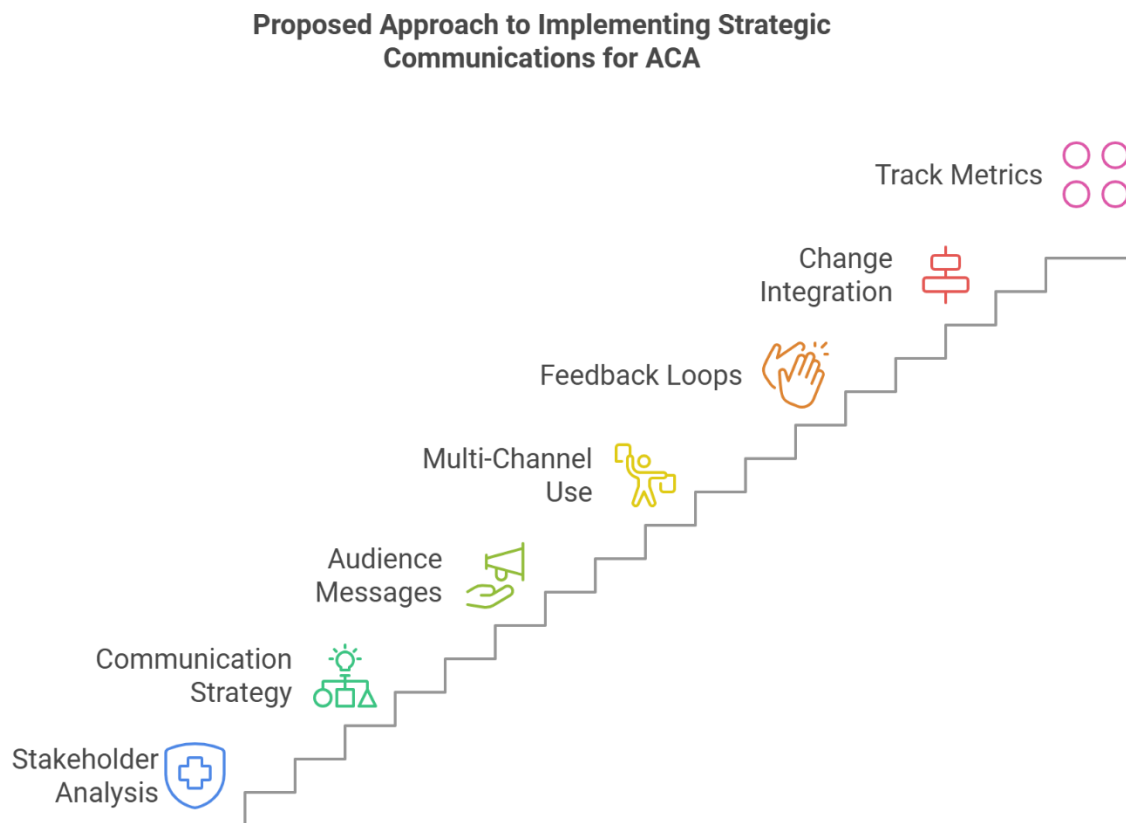
Align communication with broader change management initiatives to ensure seamless adoption of ACA-related processes.

*Example:* A healthcare provider integrates communication with a training program for HR staff, combining process updates with interactive workshops to improve understanding and retention.

**7. Track Metrics and Report on Progress**

Monitor key metrics such as compliance rates, employee participation, and engagement levels to evaluate the success of the communication plan. Share results with leadership to demonstrate impact and adjust strategies as needed.

*Example:* A hospital tracks employee attendance in ACA training sessions and correlates this with the accuracy of compliance reporting, reporting progress in monthly leadership updates.



**Figure 4: Proposed Approach to Implementing Strategic Communications for ACA Implementation**

By following these steps, healthcare organizations can implement strategic communications that ensure smooth ACA compliance while fostering engagement and collaboration across all stakeholder groups.

### The Impact of Deploying Strategic Communications While Implementing the Affordable Care Act for Organizations

Strategic communication is not just an enabler of effective implementation; it is a critical driver of economic value for organizations navigating Affordable Care Act (ACA) compliance. A well-executed communication strategy can significantly reduce the financial and operational costs associated with regulatory transitions while maximizing compliance rates and stakeholder alignment.

For example, organizations without clear communication frameworks often face increased administrative costs due to errors, misinterpretations, and redundancies in compliance efforts. Studies show that effective communication can reduce these costs by up to 20% ([5 Reasons Why Effective](#)

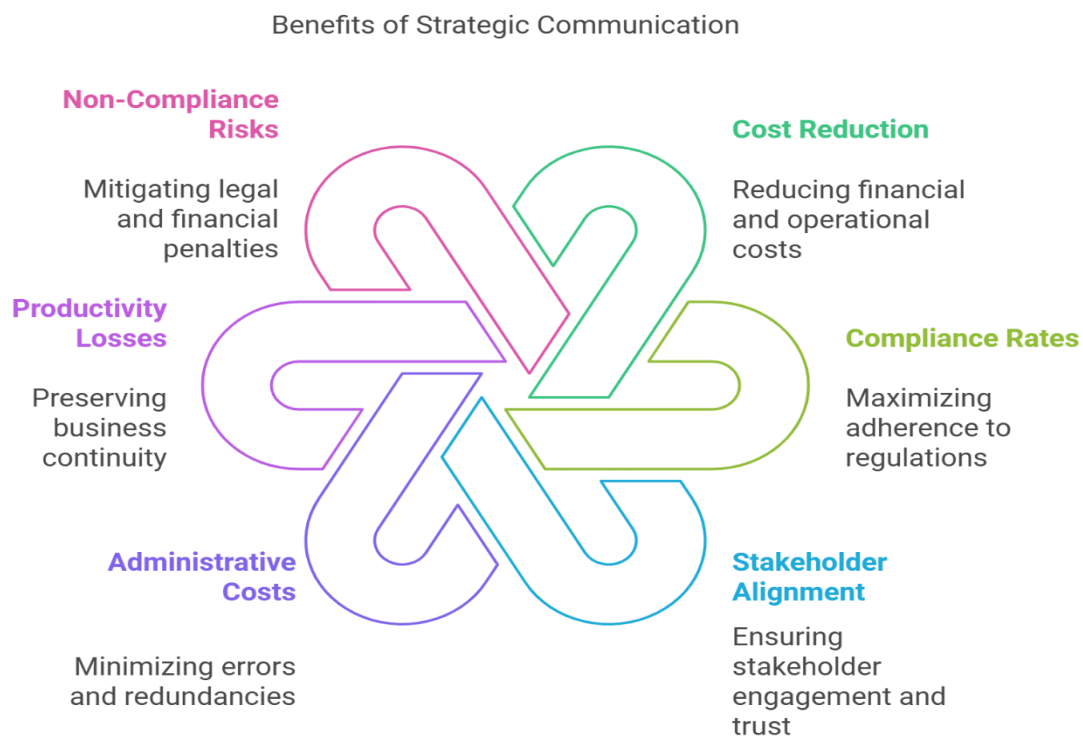
Internal Communications Reduces Turnover, 2020), saving mid-sized organizations millions annually. Furthermore, streamlined communication minimizes productivity losses by ensuring that employees understand their roles in the transition, preserving business continuity.

Depending on the size of the organization and the nature of violations the risk of non-compliance penalties can range from thousands to millions of dollars and a proactive communication approach can help largely mitigate this risk.

By providing clarity and guidance to employees and external stakeholders, organizations can avoid costly legal repercussions.

Moreover, transparent and consistent communication fosters trust among employees, increasing engagement and reducing turnover rates. With the average cost of replacing an employee estimated at 33% of their annual salary, reducing turnover translates to significant savings (Avoidable Turnover Costing Employers Big, 2017).

Strategic communication during ACA implementation delivers measurable economic benefits, enhancing compliance while preserving organizational stability and efficiency.



**Figure 5: Benefits of Strategic Communications**

## Conclusion

The implementation of the Affordable Care Act represented a significant challenge for the healthcare ecosystem and presented strong challenges for organizations across the board. A comprehensive strategic communication approach is required to ensure successful change management and adoption of the ACA ultimately leading to compliance. This paper demonstrates that strategic communication serves as more than just a support function—it is a critical driver of economic value and organizational success



in ACA implementation. By following the proposed seven-step framework for strategic communications, organizations can better navigate the complexities of ACA compliance while maintaining operational efficiency and stakeholder engagement. The economic benefits of strategic communication, including reduced administrative costs, improved compliance rates, and decreased turnover, underscore its importance in successful ACA implementation. As healthcare regulations continue to evolve, organizations that prioritize strategic communication will be better positioned to adapt to changes while maintaining organizational stability, effectiveness, and stakeholder engagement. Future research can focus on measuring long-term impacts of communication strategies on ACA compliance and exploring emerging communication technologies that can enhance implementation success for such far-reaching regulations.

## References

1. Rosenbaum, S. (2014). Once more into the breach: the future of subsidies in the federal health insurance exchange. *The Milbank Quarterly*, 92(4), 644–647. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0009.12081>
2. Hazelton, P., Steward, W., Collins, S., Gaffney, S., Morin, S., & Arnold, E. (2014). California’s “Bridge to Reform”: Identifying Challenges and Defining Strategies for Providers and Policymakers Implementing the Affordable Care Act in Low-Income HIV/AIDS Care and Treatment Settings. *PLoS ONE*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0090306>
3. Kreuter, M., McBride, T., Caburnay, C., Poor, T., Thompson, V., Alcaraz, K., Eddens, K., Rath, S., Perkins, H., & Casey, C. (2014). What can health communication science offer for ACA implementation? Five evidence-informed strategies for expanding Medicaid enrollment. *The Milbank Quarterly*, 92(1), 40–62. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0009.12040>
4. Slabbert, Y. (2018). From monologue to dialogue: Key considerations for an approach to multiple stakeholder engagement.
5. Tummers, L. (2011). Explaining the willingness of public professionals to implement new policies: a policy alienation framework. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 77, 555–581. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852311407364>
6. Knebel, S., & Seele, P. (2019). Conceptualizing the “Corporate Nervous Net”: Decentralized Strategic Communication Based on a Digital Reporting Indicator Framework. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13, 418–432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118x.2019.1637878>
7. Steyn, B. (2004). From strategy to corporate communication strategy: A conceptualisation. *Journal of Communication Management*, 8, 168–183. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13632540410807637>
8. Fort, T., & Price, K. (2016). Mission Shift: Using and Evaluating Strategic Communications to Implement Organizational Change. *The Foundation Review*, 8(5). <https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1324>
9. *5 Reasons Why Effective Internal Communications Reduces Turnover*. (2020). NPA Worldwide. <https://npaworldwide.com/blog/2020/11/17/5-reasons-why-effective-internal-communications-reduces-turnover/>
10. *Avoidable Turnover Costing Employers Big*. (2017). Benefit News. <https://www.benefitnews.com/news/avoidable-turnover-costing-employers-big>