

# A Checklist for Health Literate Organisations

## Acknowledgement

This resource has been adapted from:

- Brach, C., et al., Ten Attributes of Health Literate Health Care Organizations. 2012, Institute of Medicine
- AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.
- The Gippsland Guide to becoming a Health Literate Organisation, Gippsland Primary Care Partnerships, 2015.

The Northern NSW Health Literacy Project is a collaboration between the Northern NSW Local Health District and North Coast Primary Health Network.



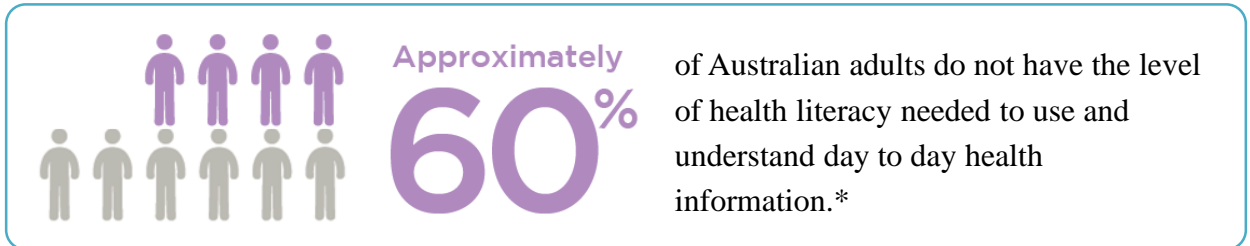
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# A Checklist for Health Literate Organisations

**Health literacy** is about how people understand information about health and health care, and how they apply that information to their lives. It's important because it shapes people's health, safety, and quality of care. Good health literacy contributes to better health outcomes.



In 2014, the Australian government released the *National Statement on Health Literacy*. This urged people to take action on health literacy by:

- Embedding health literacy into programs
- Ensuring effective communication
- Integrating health literacy into education

It explains that in order for people and health care teams to work together for better health, everyone needs to be able to give and receive, interpret and act on information such as treatment options and plans. When we get this right, we can begin to improve the safety and quality of health care, and even reduce health disparities and increase equity.

## What does health literacy look like?



### Individual health literacy

The skills, knowledge, motivation and capacity of a person to access, understand, appraise and apply information to make effective decisions about health and health care and take appropriate action.



### Environmental health literacy

The infrastructure, policies, processes, materials and people that make up the health system and have an impact on the way that people access, understand, appraise and apply health-related information and services.

\*Source: Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care

# The Ten Attributes of a Health Literate Organisation

## Health Literacy Universal Precautions

Experts recommend taking a universal precautions approach to health literacy. This means recognizing that it is not possible to know a person's level of individual health literacy by looking at them. Therefore, it is important to assume that there will be barriers to understanding and to reduce the complexity of information and service provided for all health consumers.

Only 40 per cent of Australian adults have the health literacy skills needed to manage the demands of our complex health care system. People's ability to absorb and use health information can also be impacted by stress or illness. Like with blood safety, universal precautions should be taken to address health literacy because we don't know who is challenged by health care information and tasks at any given time.

Health literacy universal precautions are a way to:

- Simplify communication with and confirm comprehension for all people, so that the risk of miscommunication is minimised.
- Make the office environment and health care system easier to navigate.
- Support people's efforts to improve their health.

## The Ten Attributes

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ASCQHC) recommends using the Ten Attributes Of A Health Literate Organisation to address health literacy. These elements help services identify ways to implement Health Literacy Universal Precautions.

Organisations can also use these attributes to identify opportunities to improve their health literacy.

**Use the checklist in this book to check your Organisational Health Literacy. There are also lots of ideas to start you on the path to health literacy.**

# The Ten Attributes of a Health Literate Organisation

- 1 Has leadership that makes health literacy integral to its mission, structure and operations.
- 2 Integrates health literacy into planning, evaluation measures, patient safety, and quality improvement.
- 3 Prepares the workforce to be health literate and monitors progress.
- 4 Includes consumers in the design, implementation and evaluation of health information & services.
- 5 Meets the needs of consumers with a range of health literacy skills while avoiding making assumptions about individual health literacy levels.
- 6 Uses health literacy strategies in interpersonal communications and confirms understanding at all points of contact.
- 7 Provides easy access to health information, services and navigation assistance.
- 8 Designs and distributes print, audio visual and social media content that is easy to understand and act upon.
- 9 Addresses health literacy in high risk situations, including care transitions and communications about treatment and medicines.
- 10 Communicates clearly the costs that funding schemes may cover (e.g. Medicare, private health insurance) and what individuals may have to pay for services.

# 1 Does your leadership make health literacy integral to its mission, structure and operations?

	Never	Sometimes	Always	Improvement opportunity
Do you commit to Health Literacy in your mission statement, policies or plans?				
Does leadership prioritise clear and effective communication across the entire organization? This includes between colleagues and between health professionals and consumers.				
Do you place equal value on professional and consumer perspectives?				
Do you have trained Health Literacy Champions active in your organisation?				
Do you allocate financial or human resources to improve health literacy in your organisation?				

## Ideas

- Include a commitment to Health Literacy in your mission statement, policies, plans and procedures.
- Conduct an Organisational Health Literacy assessment.
- Review how your organisation values consumer perspectives and input.
- Assign and train Health Literacy Champions with the responsibility and resources to improve health literacy in your organisation.
- Establish a Health Literacy Working group to bring together Champions from different departments or organisations.

## 2 Do you integrate health literacy into planning, evaluation, safety and quality improvement?

	Never	Sometimes	Always	Improvement opportunity
Do you utilise your quality improvement data to create and/or review consumer information and resources?				
Do you collect data to measure the success of these resources?				
Do you design consumer surveys that are clear and easy to read, with health literacy principles in mind?				
Do you provide assistance to consumers to complete surveys?				
Do you allow enough time in appointments, and flexible timing to ensure consumers can get the information they need?				

### Ideas

- Use the [Checklist for designing consumer-friendly health information](#) to help design consumer surveys.
- Train staff to always offer assistance to consumers when filling out forms or surveys.
- Ask consumers if appointment length is satisfactory. If not, book a longer appointment for that person the next time they visit.
- Use a health literacy approach when designing or redesigning systems and services. For example, considering signage and wayfinding when planning new buildings.
- Consider health literacy factors when reviewing services that are not meeting KPIs e.g. are people able to easily locate the service? Does the signage and web presence clearly explain the purpose of the service?

### 3 Do you prepare the workforce to be health literate and monitor progress?

	Never	Sometimes	Always	Improvement opportunity
Do you have a person responsible for identifying workplace health literacy needs and developing, implementing and resourcing strategies to address these needs?				
Do you conduct health literacy training for all your staff members and in new staff orientation?				
Do you include knowledge and understanding of health literacy in position descriptions?				
Do you incorporate health literacy into other types of training eg consumer safety, cultural competence, person-centred care?				
Do you support staff to attend internal and external health literacy training?				
Do you train staff to create consumer information using the Northern NSW Health Literacy eLibrary?				

#### Ideas

- Appoint a Health Literacy Champion (or Champions).
- Include Health Literacy training in new staff orientation.
- Provide opportunity for staff to attend Health Literacy training.
- Include Health Literacy activities in staff meetings or development days.
- Train staff to access and use spoken and written language resources including assistance services, interpreters and translators.
- Offer training on how to convey complex information using plain language and how to effectively and respectfully communicate with all service users.



## 4 Do you include consumers in the design, implementation and evaluation of health information and services?

	Never	Sometimes	Always	Improvement opportunity
Do you have a consumer advisory group who you consult for feedback on your service?				
Do you collaborate with members of consumer groups when designing, implementing and evaluating new programs or projects?				
Do you collaborate with members of consumer groups when designing, implementing and evaluating new consumer health information or other materials?				

### Ideas

- Use the Health Literacy Consumer Feedback form to check if your current information resources are meeting consumer needs.
- Enlist a group of consumers to help you develop new consumer information or update existing resources.
- Provide an opportunity for consumer feedback after each visit. E.g. send an email or text message with a link to an online survey, or provide a kiosk near the exit where consumers can stop and answer three quick questions about their care.
- Identify a group of consumers who visit your service frequently and ask them for feedback on the reasons they visit and how you can support them to make their visits easier or less frequent.

## 5 Do you meet the needs of consumers with a range of health literacy skills and avoid making assumptions about health literacy?

	Never	Sometimes	Always	Improvement opportunity
Do you provide accessible information to every service user that can be understood by people of all levels of health literacy?				
Is your physical environment welcoming and easy to navigate?				
Do you provide assistance to people who need help to find their way around?				
Do you design your physical spaces to support effective communication? E.g. privacy for confidential conversations”?				
Is it easy for people to look up the phone number and address of your organisation?				
Is it easy for people to find and contact the health professional they need to see e.g. specialist, visiting doctor?				

### Ideas

- Use the Health Literacy eLibrary to update or develop new consumer information.
- Conduct a health literacy environmental audit. This includes a walkthrough of your service with consumers and a ‘First Impressions’ activity. Tools such as The Health Literacy Environment Activity Packet can help with this (see p17 for link).
- Ask consumers to conduct random tests to get information from your website or over the phone.
- Engage consumers in the planning and design of new programs, building or projects.

## 6 Do you use health literacy strategies in all communication and confirm understanding at all points of contact?

	Never	Sometimes	Always	Improvement opportunity
Do you build a culture that promotes the importance of verifying consumer understanding?				
Do you ensure that staff are trained in these strategies?				
Do you use simple written information or visual resources to reinforce spoken communication?				
Do you keep on hand high quality education materials in a variety of formats (e.g. audio visual, print, 3-D models, photos, cartoon illustrations etc.)?				
Do you use multiple channels to distribute these (e.g. face-to-face, electronic portals, website).				
Do you ensure adequate time is given to each interaction?				
Do you implement campaigns to educate and empower consumers to ask questions of their health care providers?				

### Ideas

- Train staff in Teach-Back and monitor use of this method of confirming understanding.
- Hold a 'Drop the Jargon Day' in your service
- Develop consumer-friendly written information
- Teach consumers to 'Ask Me Three'

## 7 Do you provide easy to access health information, services and navigation assistance?

	Never	Sometimes	Always	Improvement opportunity
Do your facilities have signs with consistent, easily understood language and symbols to help people find their way?				
Do you provide staff to assist consumers with scheduling appointments with other service providers and completing forms and documents?				
Do you support consumers to understand services and programs that are available to them and the benefits of their participation?				
Do you respond to navigational queries patiently and effectively without assuming map reading skills or car ownership?				
Do you support consumers to set up and use their My Health Record?				
Do you use My Health Record to share consumer health information with relevant health professionals to provide coordinated, best practice health care?				

### Ideas

- Conduct a wayfinding walkthrough with some consumers who use your service.
- Train staff to always offer assistance with filling in forms.
- Include a map or directions to your service with appointment letters, including public transport options.
- Review your intake/care coordination practices to see how well these help people navigate the service, understand the options available to them and empower people to choose the most appropriate services for their need.
- Increase use of My Health Record.

## 8 Do you design and distribute print, audio-visual and online content that is easy to access, understand and act on?

	Never	Sometimes	Always	Improvement opportunity
Do you develop consumer information that is easy to understand, accessible, current, and meets the best practice health literacy requirements?				
Do you involve consumers in the design and testing of all resources?				
Do you audit and update consumer information based on best practice health literacy requirements?				
Do you use the Northern NSW Health Literacy eLibrary to develop consumer materials?				
Do you provide high quality consumer information in a variety of formats to meet consumer needs? E.g. printed information, web, email and SMS content, photos, videos etc.				
Do you provide easy access to documents that are available for reading or downloading in languages other than English?				

### Ideas

- Include a Plain-English, Drop the Jargon, or Developing Consumer Information activity in staff meetings.
- Review existing consumer information using the [Checklist for designing consumer-friendly health information](#).
- Invite consumers to provide feedback on existing and new consumer information.
- Ask consumers how they would prefer to receive information, and provide it in this format.

## 9 Do you address health literacy in high risk situations, including care transitions and when discussing treatments and medicines?

	Never	Sometimes	Always	Improvement opportunity
Do you identify high risk communication situations and implement safeguards and processes to ensure no miscommunication in these situations? E.g. medication self-management, hospital admission and discharge.				
Do you value and practice meaningful informed consent and support your staff to focus on a process of information about the benefits and risks and verify understanding, not just to gain a signature on a form?				
Do you consider communication failures as service user safety issues and track or investigate to find and address the sources of error?				
Do you educate individuals and their caregivers and confirm understanding throughout their consult, treatment or hospital stay? E.g. end of life care decisions, pre- and post surgery, newly diagnosed chronic or terminal illness, self management education, person centered discharge planning.				

### Ideas

- Review your informed consent documents for readability.
- Create a reader friendly one page summary sheet to go with your informed consent package.
- Train staff in Teach-Back.
- Select a case of communication lapse to discuss and review with your team.

# 10 Do you communicate clearly the costs that funding schemes may cover and what individuals may have to pay for services?

	Never	Sometimes	Always	Improvement opportunity
Do you ensure staff understand whether a treatment is covered by a funding scheme and can provide clear, correct information about out-of-pocket expenses and private health insurance item numbers?				
Do you communicate out of pocket expenses to the consumer in advance of any procedures or service provision?				

## Ideas

- Ensure staff know the costs of services and available rebates and can explain these clearly.
- Provide written information that clearly explains costs and rebates.
- Train staff to clearly discuss costs and options with consumers and confirm understanding using Teach-Back.

# A checklist for designing consumer-friendly health information

	✓ / ✗
1. The text is between Grade 6 and Grade 8 reading level. *Use the Readability Checking tools at <a href="http://healthliteracy.nswlhd.health.nsw.gov.au">healthliteracy.nswlhd.health.nsw.gov.au</a>	
2. Plain language is used and any technical terms, jargon or acronyms are replaced or clearly explained.	
3. Blocks of text are aligned to the left and not justified (the ends of lines are left jagged). Stand alone titles can be centred.	
4. One font is used for the whole document. We recommend using a plain serif or sans serif font. Font is Size 12 or bigger. Important information is in <b>bold</b> , not CAPITALS or <i>italics</i> .	
5. The purpose of the resource is clearly stated at the beginning - in the title or introduction. Main points appear first and there is a summary of main points.	
6. The main information is about desirable patient behaviour rather than facts e.g. 'Drink less water' instead of 'Excess fluid can build up in your body'	
7. The resource only contains important or essential information directly related to the purpose.	
8. The words 'you', 'we' and 'us' are used instead of 'the patient' or 'hospital staff'.	
9. Text is broken up into small chunks by Question & Answer headings or dot point lists. Lists have just three to five items each. Ensure there is only one idea per dot point.	
10. Pictures are relevant, simple and help understanding by visually representing the text or replacing text. There are captions where needed. *Ask the Health Literacy Project Officer for access to a library of approved images.	
11. There is plenty of white space on the page. The resource is printed in black ink on white paper or high contrast dark ink on light background. Colours are used to support understanding, and don't distract the reader.	
12. The resource has been tested with at least 5 consumers and is culturally appropriate.	

## Target: to meet at least 85% of the requirements.

If your resource ticks at least 10 of these boxes you have met the Health Literacy criteria for developing consumer-friendly health information.

*Adapted from SAM: Suitability Assessment of Materials Score Sheet.*



# Resources to help design consumer-friendly health information.

## **Northern NSW Health Literacy Website**

[healthliteracy.nswlhd.health.nsw.gov.au](http://healthliteracy.nswlhd.health.nsw.gov.au)

## **Designing consumer friendly health information**

The Tasmanian Government has created a more detailed checklist:

[http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/about\\_us/health\\_literacy/health\\_literacy\\_toolkit/suitability\\_assessment\\_of\\_material\\_score\\_sheet](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/about_us/health_literacy/health_literacy_toolkit/suitability_assessment_of_material_score_sheet)

## **Checking readability**

This website gives you a list of sentences to rewrite to aid readability:

[https://www.online-utility.org/english/readability\\_test\\_and\\_improve.jsp](https://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp)

This website gives you an average readability score using a few different formulas:

<http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php>

This website highlights sentences you can change to improve readability:

<http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>

## **Plain language**

Everyday words for Public Health Communication:

<http://www.cdc.gov/other/pdf/everydaywords-060216-final.pdf>

## **Multilingual resources**

Health Translations has links to reliable Australian health information in languages other than English:

<http://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/>

Cancer Council Victoria has developed a printable Multilingual Appointment Card:

<https://www.cancervic.org.au/multilingual-card>

## **Assessing the health literacy environment**

<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy/practice/environmental-barriers/>