

Northern NSW Health Literacy Framework

2022 - 2025



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters where we work and live.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians' living culture, their connection to Country and their contribution to the life of this region.

We pay our respects to the Ancestors and Elders of these Nations, and to all Aboriginal people past, present and future.

This Framework was co-designed by health professionals and consumers.

It was endorsed by Northern NSW Local Health District and Healthy North Coast in August 2022.

The Health Literacy Northern NSW project is co-funded by the NSW Government and Healthy North Coast through their North Coast PHN Program.

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Foreword

We acknowledge the importance of health literacy for people to achieve and maintain control of their health in their day-to-day lives.

More importantly, we recognise that the responsibility is on health services to make sure our care is responsive to people's health literacy needs. Our organisations must provide care that meets the needs of our community.

Both Northern NSW Local Health District and Healthy North Coast are dedicated to serving and improving the health of our shared communities. People in our region expect and deserve a high standard of care, regardless of where it is provided. We know that health literacy is relevant for the whole health journey and is essential to providing safe, quality, person-centred care. That is why both our organisations are committed to working in partnership, along with other service providers and our community, to continue addressing health literacy.

The vision of this Framework, 'for all people in Northern NSW to have better health outcomes, care experiences and satisfaction with care' aligns with the core values of our organisations.

This Framework has been developed in response to the recognition of health literacy as a key priority at a national, state and local level. It was developed and reviewed by a panel of health staff and consumers. It builds on the health literacy achievements we've made since 2016 and provides a plan for our continued leadership in health literacy improvement.

We look forward to working together with all our partners to achieve our health literacy vision.

Wayne Jones,
Chief Executive, Northern NSW Local Health District

Monika Wheeler,
Chief Executive, Healthy North Coast

What is health literacy?

Individual health literacy is a person's skills, knowledge, motivation and capacity to access, understand, appraise and apply information to make effective decisions about health and health care and take appropriate action [1].



How well someone can:

- find or get access to health information or health care services
- understand information about health and how health services work
- work out which information and services are relevant for their own situation
- make the best health decisions for themselves and do what they need to do to improve or maintain their health.

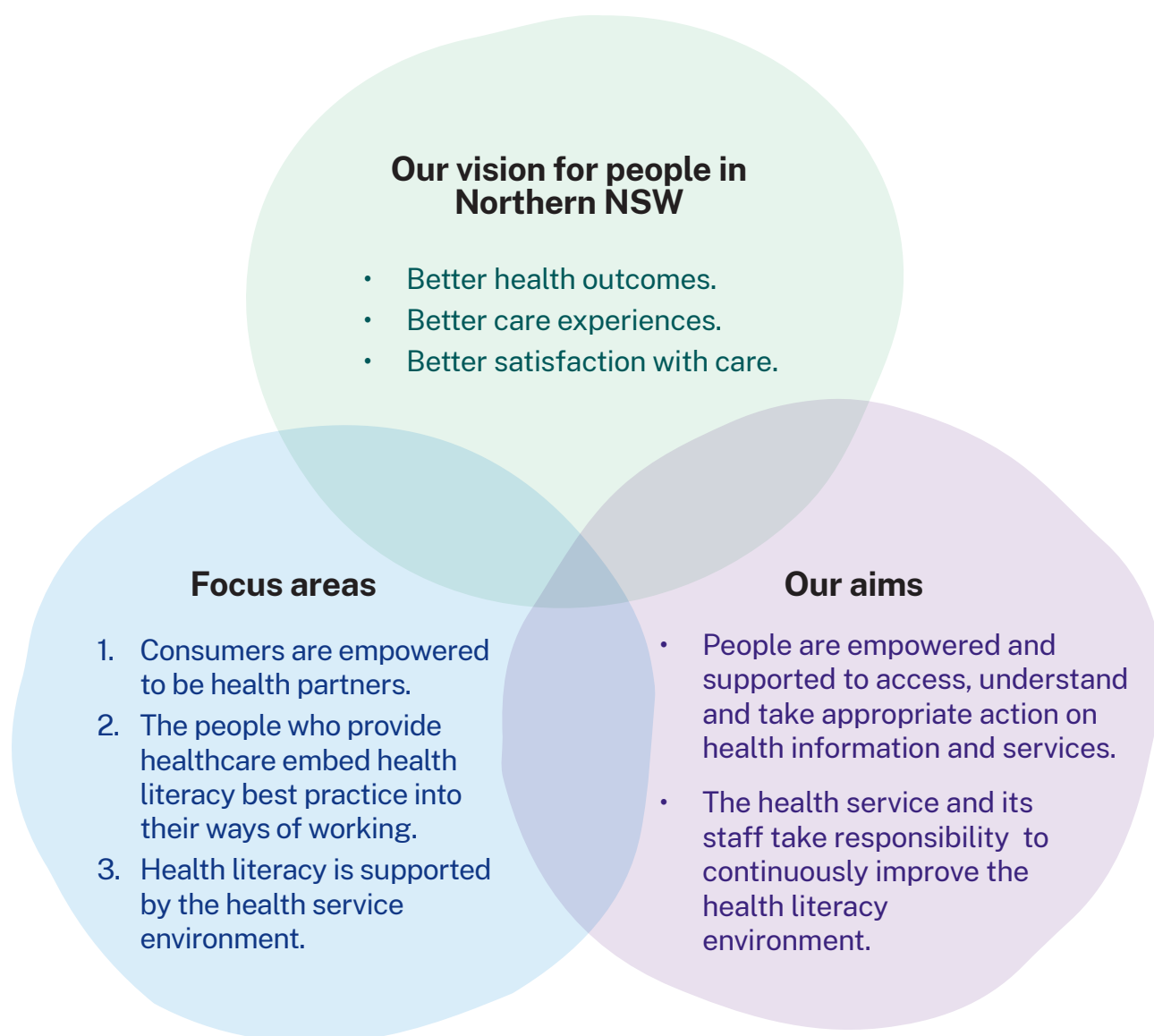
The **health literacy environment** is the infrastructure, policies, processes, materials, people and relationships that make up the health system and have an impact on the way in which people access, understand, appraise and apply health-related information and services [1].



How well the health service and its staff:

- communicate
- organise their services so they are easy to navigate
- integrate care across services
- embed health literacy principles into the way their services work.

Framework Summary



“Health literacy is an opportunity with every interaction, every day. It’s a way of doing things” – Health Literacy Ambassador.

Our Framework is in line with the quadruple aim of value-based health care to deliver care that improves:

- health outcomes that matter to patients
- experiences of receiving care
- experiences of providing care
- effectiveness and efficiency of care.

The Framework recognises that those working in health have the ultimate responsibility to meet the health literacy needs of people we serve.

Why is health literacy important?

Health literacy shapes people's long-term health outcomes and the safety, quality and cost of the care they receive [1].

Health literacy helps us to:



follow directions, understand and act on health information such as procedures and medication instructions



navigate the healthcare system, including locating services and providers and coordinating multiple services



communicate and share information about our own health with healthcare providers



fill out complex health forms and give informed consent



ask questions and make health decisions



make and attend appointments



manage long-term health conditions



recognise when to seek care



understand public health messages



take preventive health measures such as cancer screening, immunisation and keeping up a healthy lifestyle



advocate for improved health conditions and care for ourselves, families and our community



find and identify health information that is accurate and reliable [3] [4] [5] [6].

Health literacy is influenced by health experience, age, culture, language, social networks and socio-economic factors.

Health literacy is also determined by personal skills and the context in which those skills are applied. A person may have a high level of health literacy in one situation and a low level in another.

Health literacy can also be considered a state, not a trait; our health literacy can be affected day to day by stress or feeling unwell.



Approximately
6 in 10

Australian adults do not have the level of health literacy needed to understand and use day-to-day health information.

I'm always seeing health professionals with my mum, who has diabetes, but this is my first baby. I'm not sure what I need to do or ask!



This is my third baby. I feel confident making decisions about my pregnancy care and know what questions to ask based on my experience.



To improve health literacy, we need to make it easier for people to feel empowered to take charge of their health.

We can support this by:

- making systemic changes to improve the health literacy environment and reduce the demands placed on people by an increasingly complex health system
- empowering and supporting people to be able to take a more active role in their health, taking into account individual, environmental and social factors [2].

Why is health literacy important?

Higher health literacy is associated with:

- higher levels of empowerment to improve and feel in control of your health
- more active involvement in shared decision-making, discussions with health professionals and in treatment
- better decision-making skills
- greater self-efficacy and self-management
- positive health behaviours, like healthier diets, physical activity and immunisation
- better health outcomes and quality of life
- developing social networks to support health
- more satisfaction with care
- lower risk of multiple health conditions
- lower risk of emergency care and preventable hospital admissions
- lower health care costs [7] [8] [9] [10] [11].

Interventions that use health literacy best practice result in:

- better health outcomes
- improvements in motivation, knowledge, empowerment and self-confidence
- better recall, positive attitudes and more informed decision-making [8].

Improving health literacy is also beneficial for the health system, helping to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of care.

Low health literacy is associated with poorer health outcomes and experiences [1]. Low health literacy adds approximately 3-5% to existing healthcare costs [1]. The cost of low health literacy in one Australian local government area was estimated at \$15 million per year [12].

Those with high levels of health literacy are more likely to participate in screening programs for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer [30].

Communication is one of the top 3 factors leading to serious adverse events in NSW Health services [29].

Our region

Northern NSW has a diverse population with a range of health literacy, health and social needs. There is an increased need after recent natural disasters. Our region has an over-representation of people that are most at risk of low health literacy:



There are 3 areas that are among the top 10 most disadvantaged in the state.



1 in 4 people are aged over 65 years, and this is expected to grow.



There is 3 times the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the population compared to NSW.



Higher rate of poor mental health and suicide than the state average. 2 in 5 people rated their own mental health as poor or fair, and this increased to 3 in 5 for Aboriginal people.



Lower median income than NSW and a lack of affordable and social housing. 1 in 4 low-income households is in financial stress due to housing.



High rate of long-term illness, with the burden of kidney, lung and heart diseases, arthritis, asthma and back pain among some of the highest in Australia.



1 in 5 households in Northern NSW do not have access to the internet, where health information and care are increasingly being accessed [13].

Health literacy improvement must address the needs of priority and vulnerable populations. People who may face particular challenges in accessing appropriate health information and services includes:

- older people
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander populations
- people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds
- people of low socio-economic status
- people who completed lower levels of schooling and education.

Focus area 1:

Consumers are empowered to be partners in health

Objectives

Patients, families and carers are supported and empowered to:

- access, understand, appraise and apply health information
- be involved as active partners in their care
- patients, families, carers and community are partners in designing, implementing, evaluating and improving our health system so that it meets the health literacy needs of individuals and the community.

Actions

- Provide co-design and partnering with consumers training and support for people working in health.
- Provide consumers with plain language health information tailored to their individual needs and health literacy levels.
- Provide health skills and self-management workshops to consumers.
- Support implementation of innovative ways of developing and delivering health literate consumer information and education.

Initiatives we'll continue

- 'Taking Charge of Your Health' Workshops form part of cardiac rehabilitation programs. These workshops support patients to find reliable health information, ask questions of their health providers and be active partners in their health care.
- GoShare is an online platform that allows health professionals to send tailored health information packages to people via email or SMS. Health information can also be sent at certain intervals to avoid information overload. Integrated Care services have been trialling GoShare and love the ability to tailor information to people's needs.

Focus area 2:

People working in health embed health literacy best practice into their ways of working

Objectives

- Health staff have the skills and tools to communicate effectively with consumers and other health professionals.
- Partnering with consumers is a regular part of how people work.
- People working in health undertake health literacy quality improvement at the service level.

Actions

- Deliver and improve the Health Literacy Ambassador Program.
- Implement the Health Literacy Ambassador Grants Program.
- Review and develop health information resources with health professionals.
- Support health professionals to make health literacy improvements in health projects and services.
- Provide health Literacy and co-design training for health professionals.
- Expand and improve the NNSW Health Literacy Website.

Initiatives we'll continue

- Training for health professionals teaches skills in best practice communication techniques. Over 1000 health professionals in the Northern NSW region have done health literacy training.
- The Health Literacy Ambassador Program provides more comprehensive training to support health professionals to embed health literacy into their own practice and improve the health literacy environment of their service.

Focus area 3:

Health literacy is supported by the health service environment

Objectives

- Health policies and procedures embed health literacy into health systems.
- Health literacy guides how health care is delivered in all areas, for all consumers, especially groups and individuals more at risk of low health literacy.
- The places we provide care are easy to access and navigate.
- Health services monitor and evaluate health literacy improvement.

Actions

- Implement an electronic system for developing and reviewing health information resources in Northern NSW Local Health District.
- Embed health literacy principles into health policies, processes and services.
- Provide advice and support to health services to embed health literacy strategies into service delivery models.
- Monitor and evaluate health literacy environment improvements.
- Advocate for health literacy and co-design to improve access and navigation.
- Respond to emerging national, state and local health literacy priorities.
- Expand and improve the NNSW Health Literacy Website.

Initiatives we'll continue

- Short assessments are in development to track improvements in the health literacy environments of our services over time.
- Northern NSW Local Health District has a guideline in place that governs the development and review of health information resources to make sure they meet health literacy standards.

How will we achieve these priorities?

Annual work plans will be developed in consultation with the Health Literacy Steering Group. These will include more detail on activities that support the priorities in this Framework.

Developing annual work plans allows the Health Literacy Project to respond to emerging needs and health priorities for our region.

For each major project, the Health Literacy Team will apply the below principles.

1. Projects will help achieve the priorities in this framework.
2. Planning, implementation and evaluation will engage all stakeholders, including consumers.
3. Projects will be guided by health literacy evidence.
4. Projects will have support from consumers, health professionals and health leaders.
5. Resources and information about our work will be shared with our partners.

Background

The Northern NSW Health Literacy Project is shared by the Northern NSW Local Health District (NNSWLHD) and Healthy North Coast. It supports both organisations' commitment to an integrated health system and person-centred care.

Health literacy was identified as a top priority in the Northern NSW Integrated Care Strategy 2014-2015. In 2016, NNSWLHD and the North Coast Primary Health Network (now trading as Healthy North Coast) committed to developing a joint Health Literacy Framework.

The Framework focused on people with chronic conditions and complex care needs, including people with mental illness. It included 5 key strategies to improve health literacy:

1. Establish an online health literacy e-library
2. Recruit, train and support health professionals to be Health Literacy Champions
3. Health professionals support health consumers to engage in self-management
4. Increase consumer participation in health consultations
5. Identify opportunities to embed health literacy into health systems

Since 2016, the Health Literacy Project has been working to improve health literacy across all areas of care. It has been recognised in NSW, nationally and internationally for its achievements.

This Health Literacy Framework 2022 was developed by a panel of health staff and consumers. It builds on the achievements and lessons learned in six years of implementing the Health Literacy Project in Northern NSW as well as taking into consideration:

- Growing Australian and international evidence base on health literacy.
- Growing emphasis on the importance and impact of organisational health literacy.
- New local, state and national policies supporting health literacy.

More information about the Health Literacy Project can be found at healthliteracy.nswlhd.health.nsw.gov.au

Policy informing the Framework

National, state and local policies and strategies prioritise health literacy improvement.

Document	Reference
National	
National Statement on Health Literacy Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC), 2014 [1]	“Strategies are needed both to build the capacity of people to understand the choices they have, make decisions about their health and health care; and to build the capacity of the health system to support and encourage this to occur.”
The National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards, Second edition ACSQHC, 2017 [14]	Standard 2: Partnering with consumers. Actions 2.8 to 2.10 are specific to health literacy and require health service organisations to communicate with consumers in a way that supports effective partnerships.
National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030 Australian Government Department of Health, 2021 [15]	Strategy aims to partner with consumers to improve health literacy and develop and implement a national health literacy strategy.
State	
NSW Health Literacy Framework: a guide to action 2019-2024 NSW Clinical Excellence Commission, 2019 [16]	Identifies four priority areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consumers are active partners in care 2. Staff communication 3. Sustainable and reliable health systems 4. Facility access and navigation.
Elevating the Human Experience: Our guide to action for patient, family, carer, volunteer and caregiver experiences NSW Health, 2020 [17]	<p>Priority Initiative 5: Information and Communication tasks health services to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop human-centred communications aligned to ‘moments that matter’ • implement initiatives to improve health literacy for patients, carers and caregivers • continuously improve patient communication to be easy to understand and engage with. <p>At the time of writing, NSW Health was planning the roll out of the NSW Health Literacy Hub.</p>
NSW Future Health 2022-2032 NSW Health, 2022 [18]	<p>Key objectives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with patients and communities to make decisions about their own care • Drive greater health literacy and access to information • Partner with consumers in co-design and implementation of models of care.

Policy informing the Framework (continued)

National, state and local policies and strategies prioritise health literacy improvement.

Document	Reference
Local	
NNSWLHD Strategic Plan 2019-2024 NNSWLHD, 2019 [19]	Key objective to improve health literacy. “We will improve our communication and empower people to better understand and manage their health care. We will replace medical jargon with plain language, and encourage people to ask questions at all times.”
Healthy North Coast Strategic Plan Healthy North Coast, 2021 [20]	Health literacy enables HNC to meet its strategic aims: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Co-design solutions to local issues• Meeting the needs of all stakeholders• Improving the quality of primary care.

Glossary

Carer

A person who provides ongoing personal care, support and assistance to another person who needs care due to chronic illness, disease, disability or who is frail and aged [16].

Chronic conditions/long-term conditions

Health conditions which are long-lasting and have persistent effects. The most common chronic conditions referred to in Australia are arthritis, asthma, back problems, cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and mental health conditions. People can often have more than one of these conditions at once [16].

Empowerment

Feeling of control over health decision-making and a sense of confidence in carrying out necessary actions to achieve and maintain health [25].

Health Consumer

People who use health services, as well as their family and carers. This includes people who have used a health service in the past or who could potentially use the service in the future [16].

Health Professional

Anyone working in the health system, including doctors, nurses and allied health [16].

Navigating the health system

Navigation includes physical location and layout of services, as well as being able to find information like phone numbers and clinicians quickly and easily. It also covers health pathways, knowing what you have to do next, and advocating for your or another person's health or health care.

Patient

A person receiving health care in a hospital or community setting [16]. The word 'patient' has historically implied a person who receives care without necessarily taking part in decision-making.

Self-efficacy

A person's belief in their ability to perform health behaviours or take health actions. This is needed for health behaviour change [26].

Self-management

The ability of an individual, in partnership with family, community, and health professionals, to manage symptoms, treatments, and lifestyle changes. Low health literacy may affect behaviours needed for the development of self-management skills [27].

Quality of Life

A person's perception of their life, not just in health but across all areas of life, including things like Independent Living, happiness, mental health, coping, relationships, self-worth, pain, senses [28].

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