



Health literacy: What is it and what are we doing about it?

AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

Herbert Down
Partnering with Consumers
326 February 2021

Overview

- Who is the Commission?
- What do we mean by health literacy?
- Why is it a problem?
- What is being done?
- Where to next?

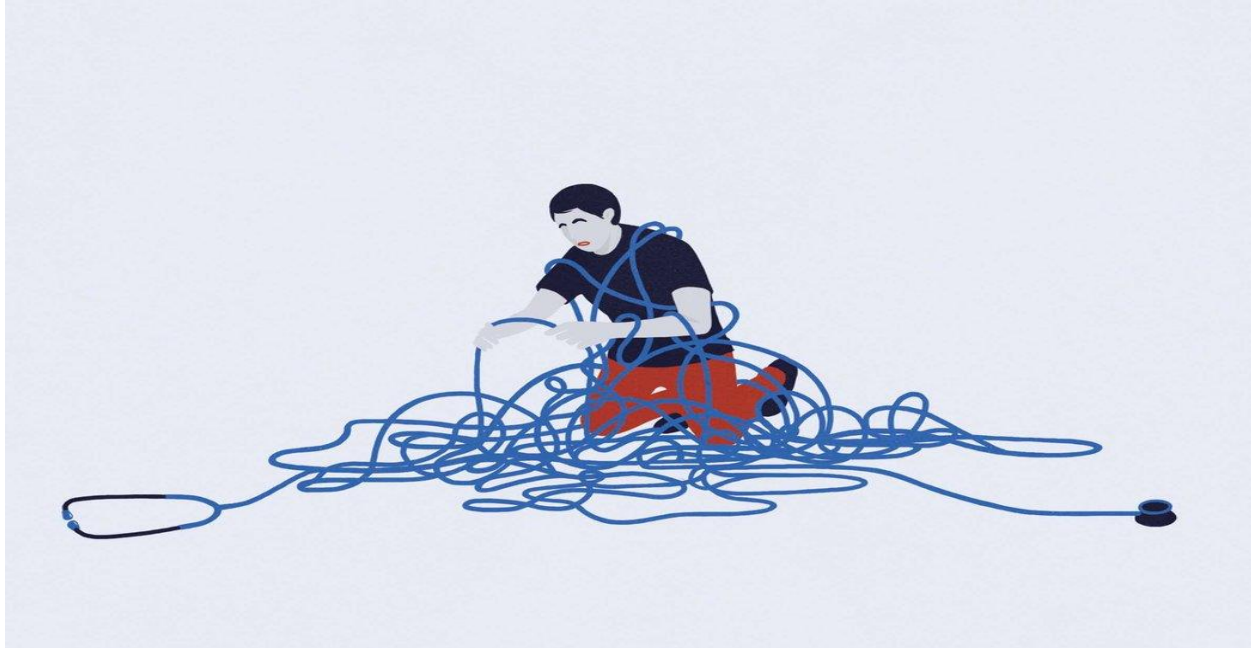
The Commission

- National government organisation
- Funded by Commonwealth and all states and territories
- Leading and improving safety and quality in health care
- Strategic priorities are in the areas of:
 - patient safety
 - partnering with patients, consumers and communities
 - quality cost and value
 - supporting health professionals to provide safe and high-quality care.

What is health literacy?



Our complex health system



How the Commission sees health literacy...

Individual health literacy

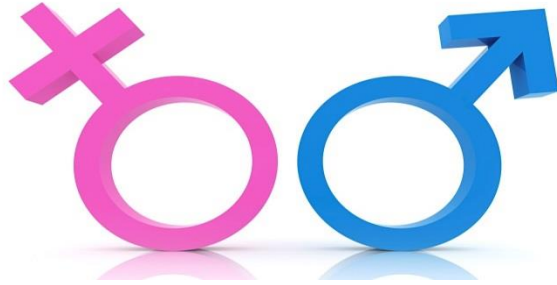
Health literacy environment



Individual health literacy in Australia

- 59% of Australians have a level of individual health literacy that is below the “minimum required for individuals to meet the complex demands of everyday life”
- For those who spoke English as a second language it was around 75%

Factors that can influence....



Why does it matter?

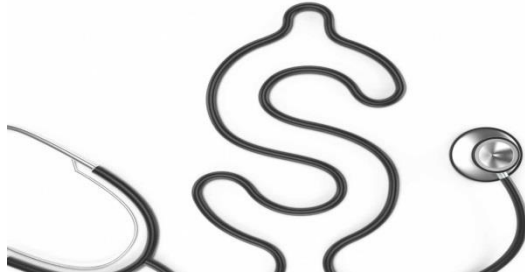
- People with low levels of individual health literacy:
 - more likely to have poorer outcomes
 - less likely to use preventive services
 - more likely to be hospitalised
 - poorer medication adherence
 - poorer knowledge and understanding of their own condition
 - less likely to attend appointments
 - for older people – poorer overall health status and higher risk of death

Berkman et al. *Health Literacy Interventions and Outcomes: An Updated Systematic Review*, 2011

Bush et al. *Advancing Health Literacy Through Primary Health Care Systems*, 2010

Why does it matter?

- Potential economic impact of lower health literacy:
 - at a system level: an increase of 3-5% of total health spending
 - at an individual level: between US\$143 – US\$7798 increased spending per person



Evolution of national policy

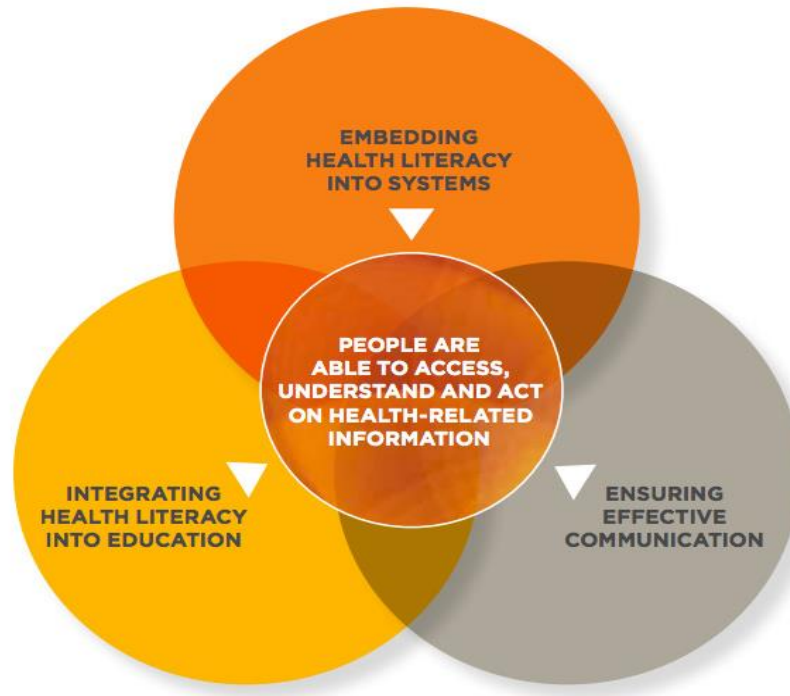
- Early 1990's – conceptual policy, goals and targets
- Mid 2000's - National survey (ABS)
- Late 2000's - increasingly referenced in policy reform and processes
- Early 2010's – stronger focus on person-centred care and requirement for health literacy action
- Research on concept, measurement and tools growing in parallel to policy

What's happening nationally?



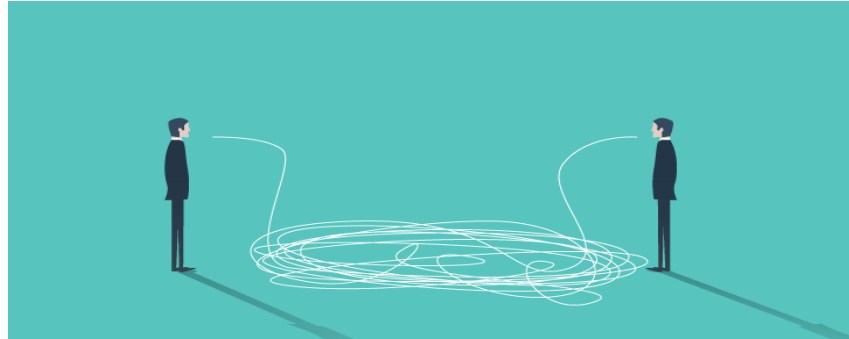
- Raising awareness
- Discussing the concept and related issues
- Advocating for a coordinated approach
- Outlining the role that different individuals and organisations can play
- Describing actions that can be taken

A coordinated and collaborative approach to addressing health literacy



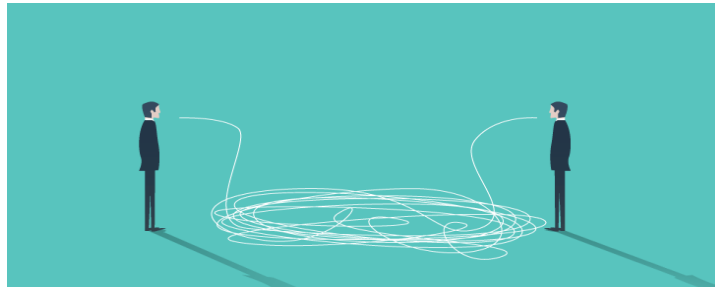
Ensuring effective communication

- Understandable information available when people need it, and in the form that they need it
- Effective interpersonal communication – education and recall, shared decision-making



Ensuring effective communication

- Examples
 - service-wide processes for developing new information in collaboration with consumers
 - development of tools and resources to support communication
 - use of teachback and other coaching techniques to share information and confirm understanding



Integrating health literacy into education

- Education and training for consumers about health and health literacy – children and adults
- Education and training about health literacy for healthcare providers – needs vary depending on role
- Education and training to improve communication



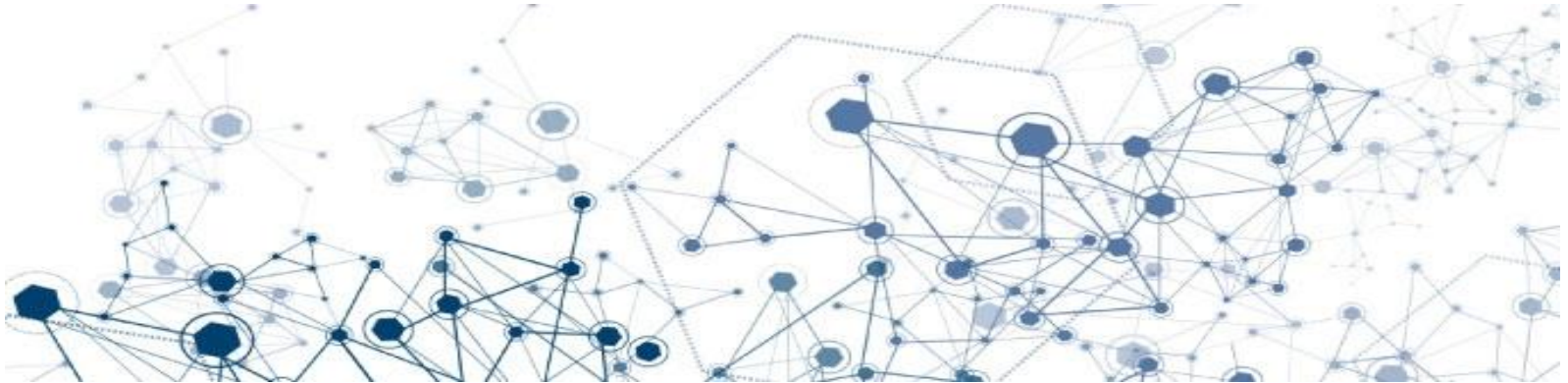
Integrating into education

- Examples
 - developing health promotion frameworks that include a focus on health literacy
 - delivering health promotion programs
 - educating and training staff in communication techniques and strategies



Embedding health literacy into systems

- High level systems
- Organisational policies and procedures



Embedding in systems

- Example:
 - Integrating health literacy and health education into school curricula
 - Including communication education requirements in clinical curricula
 - Having organisational policies to address health literacy
 - Increasing the focus in the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards (second edition)



Embedding into systems



Clinical Governance



Partnering with Consumers



Preventing and Controlling
Healthcare-associated Infection



Medication Safety



Comprehensive Care



Communicating for Safety



Blood Management



Recognising and Responding to
Acute Deterioration



NSQHS Standards - Version 2

Health literacy overtly included:

- **Standard 1** – easy to use signage and wayfinding
- **Standard 2** – health literacy criterion including understanding community need, providing easy to understand information, confirming understanding and sharing decisions, involving support people
- **Standard 5** – sharing decisions, goal-directed care planning, involving support people

Criterion 3: Health literacy

Health literacy

Health service organisations communicate with consumers in a way that supports effective partnerships.

Item	Action
Communication that supports effective partnerships	2.8 The health service organisation uses communication mechanisms that are tailored to the diversity of the consumers who use its services and, where relevant, the diversity of the local community
	2.9 Where information for patients, carers, families and consumers about health and health services is developed internally, the organisation involves consumers in its development and review
	2.10 The health service organisation supports clinicians to communicate with patients, carers, families and consumers about health and health care so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Information is provided in a way that meets the needs of patients, carers, families and consumersb. Information provided is easy to understand and usec. The clinical needs of patients are addressed while they are in the health service organisationd. Information needs for ongoing care are provided on discharge

What can you do?

- Recognise needs and preferences of individuals
- Tailor communication style to the individual
- Assume most people will have difficulty understanding and applying complex health information
- Use a range of techniques to confirm understanding
- Use evidence based ways of communicating risk

Other resources to help...

AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

An introduction to improving health literacy in your organisation

A fact sheet for quality managers

This fact sheet provides an introduction to health literacy, and how your organisation's environment affects how people understand and use your information and services. Taking steps to make your organisation's environment more accessible will also help you meet some of the requirements of the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards.

Key points

- Health literacy is an important part of safe and high-quality health care
- Improving your organisation's health literacy environment involves supporting consumers to understand and use your information and services effectively
- Improving health literacy may help improve experiences, outcomes and reduce the risk of adverse events for consumers

What is health literacy?

Health literacy is about the way consumers find, understand, use, and act on information about health and health care. This can be verbal, written or online information, information embedded into the environment (such as signage and wayfinding), or information embedded in systems and processes of health care.

Health literacy info can be separated into two parts:



Guide

Health Literacy

Introduction

Gap Analysis

Recruiting Consumer Advisors

Comments and Feedback

Basics of Health Literacy

Background Information

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

AHRQ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
Advancing Excellence in Health Care

Topics Programs Research Data Tools Funding & Grants News About

Home Program Quality & Patient Safety Quality Measure Tools & Resources

Clinicians & Providers
Education & Training
Hospitals & Health Systems
Prevention & Chronic Care

Quality & Patient Safety

AHRQ's Healthcare-Associated Infection Program
Hospital Survey on Patient Safety Culture
Anti-Quality Indicators
Nursing Home Survey on Patient Safety Culture
Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems

AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit
2nd edition

The AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit, 2nd edition, can help primary care practices reduce the complexity of health care, increase patient understanding of health information, and enhance support for patients of all health literacy levels.

What Are Health Literacy Universal Precautions?

Health literacy universal precautions are the steps that practices take when they assume that all patients may have difficulty comprehending health information and accessing health services. Health literacy universal precautions are aimed at:

- Simplifying communication with and confirming comprehension for all patients, so that the risk of miscommunication is minimized.
- Making the office environment and health care system easier to navigate.
- Supporting patients' efforts to improve their health.

HEALTH LITERACY:
A summary for Clinicians

Health literacy is important to the safety, quality and effectiveness of the health care you deliver.

More than half of your patients do not have the level of health literacy they need to make well-informed healthcare decisions and act on them.

If your patients do not understand the information and services you are providing, then they may be at higher risk of experiencing poor health outcomes.

There are many things that you can do to help your patients better understand their health and health care.

AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

Top Tips for Safe Health Care



What you need to know for yourself, your family or someone you care for.

Health literacy for managers

60% PEOPLE **LOW** **LEVEL OF HEALTH LITERACY**

Having low Health Literacy means consumers don't have the knowledge they need to find, understand and use information about their health and health care. You can help change this.

How can I CREATE A GOOD HEALTH LITERACY ENVIRONMENT within my organisation?

BE A LEADER
Use your influence to create a health literacy friendly culture. Focus on the strategic importance of health literacy.

PUT SYSTEMS IN PLACE
KEY MESSAGE: Make patient-centred care and health literacy a key focus within the strategic framework of your organisation.
USE EXAMPLES: Use patient stories to demonstrate how health literacy efforts impact people's health and healthcare.
CLARIFY COMMUNICATION: Make clear and effective communication a priority across all levels of the organisation.
LANGUAGE: Use easily understood language and symbols on information and signage.

PARTNER WITH CONSUMERS
KEY MESSAGE: Involve consumers in the design, development and evaluation of health literacy materials, services and facilities.
CO-DESIGN: Develop and implement shared decision-making processes which embed health literacy considerations into working processes.
CONSUMER SUMMARY: Have processes in place to provide support for consumers with additional needs - interpreters, accessible info, etc.

AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

www.safetyandquality.gov.au

Summary

- Health literacy is a safety and quality issue
- Good communication is critical – and particularly important for people from diverse cultures and backgrounds
- We all have a responsibility reduce the barriers to health literacy

AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE



safetyandquality.gov.au



twitter.com/ACSQHC



youtube.com/user/ACSQHC