Evolving Health Literacy Policy & Practice in Ireland
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Outline

Health Literacy in Ireland
- Definition of health literacy
- Why is it important
- Government Commitment: Healthy Ireland

NALA’s role
- Promoting health literacy
- Health Literacy Advisory Panel
- Health Literacy Action Plan

Implementation and challenges
- Literacy Audit for Healthcare Settings
- Literacy-aware guidelines
- Strategies to promote health literacy
**What is Health Literacy?**

Health literacy is the ability to read, understand and act on health information.

| Expectations, preferences and skills of **individuals seeking** health information and services | **meet** | Expectations, preferences and skills of **those providing information and services** |

Your treatment is...

I can’t believe I have...

It is about mutual understanding

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Why is health literacy important?

One in five Irish people are not fully confident that they understand the information they receive from their healthcare professional (HCP).

43% of people would only sometimes ask their HCP to clarify the information if they did not understand something they had said.

One in 10 people have taken the wrong dose of medication because they didn’t understand the instructions.

66% of people have difficulty understanding signs and directions in Irish hospitals.

2007 Irish Health Literacy Research (MSD)
Adult Skills Survey 2013

- **25%** of Irish adults are at or below level 1 of numeracy – 754,000 people
- **18%** of Irish adults are at or below level 1 of literacy – 521,550 people

**1 in 6 people have a literacy difficulty in Ireland**

**1 in 4 people have a problem with numeracy**

**15 out of 24 countries**

**18 out of 24 countries**

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Results for literacy

Figure 2.1
Percentage of adults (16-65) at or below Level 1 of literacy proficiency

- Japan
- Finland
- Slovak Republic
- Czech Republic
- Korea
- Sweden
- Estonia
- Netherlands
- Australia
- Norway
- Denmark
- Average
- Austria
- Canada
- England
- Ireland
- Poland
- Germany
- Flanders (Belgium)
- Northern Ireland
- United States
- France
- Spain
- Italy
- Cyprus

16.7
17.9
Example

How much sugar is in this pot of yogurt?
Why is health literacy important?

People with limited literacy and numeracy skills:

- Report poorer overall health
- Are less likely to make use of screening
- Present in later stages of disease
- Are more likely to be hospitalised
- Have poorer understanding of treatment
- Have lower adherence to medical regimens

Reference: Rima Rudd, NALA Health and Literacy Conference, 2002
NALA’s HL role

Promoting health literacy in policy & practice 2000

Health Literacy Advisory Panel 2010

Health Literacy Action Plan 2013 - 2016
History

• Health Promotion Strategy 2000-2005 acknowledges impact of poor literacy skills on access to health information and services
• 300 HCP trained in literacy awareness & PE
• DoH funded NALA to produce Health Literacy Policy and Strategy (2002)
• Health literacy teaching packs (2004)
• Awards & research sponsored by MSD (2007)
• Health Literacy Audit with HSE (2009)
**EU Health Literacy Survey**

10.3% had inadequate health literacy

29.7% had problematic health literacy

**Limited health literacy rate 40%**
Health Literacy Advisory Panel

The Panel (suspended since 2015) consists of organisations working in healthcare who are interested in advancing actions and strategies to improve health literacy in their own organisation and influencing a national health literacy policy.

Members include:
- the HSE Health Promotion and Improvement and Social Inclusion Units
- Irish Cancer Society
- Irish Hospice Foundation
- Temple Street Children’s University Hospital
- University College Cork and University College Dublin
- Merck Sharpe and Dohme (MSD)
Government Commitment

Healthy Ireland is a new national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of our country over the coming generation (2013 – 2025). Supported by HI Council.

It contains the first ever Government commitment to health literacy:

“Address and prioritise health literacy in developing future policy, educational and information interventions”

Framework is available here: http://bit.ly/1i1tFCv
4. Health Literacy

Action 45 – Promote and provide national tools for training, resource development, and health literacy audits in services to raise standards of health literacy among patients, service users, and carers.

You can download the HSE’s plan on this link:
Health Literacy Action Plan

7 stakeholders

- Department of Health
- Health Service Executive (HSE)
- Education and Training settings
- General public
- Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA)
- Healthcare Settings
- Healthcare Practitioners

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Strategies to promote health literacy

Capacity building / awareness raising

- Train healthcare workers at all levels
- Use plain English, numbers and speaking
- Use the right medium to communicate
- Produce tailored, targeted programmes to promote health literacy

Knowledge development

- Develop the idea of health literacy
- Improve how we measure health literacy levels and promote that information
- Identify best practices in health literacy
- Conduct more cost benefit studies of health literacy

Building partnerships and cooperation

- Integrating health literacy into all national health campaigns and screening projects – cancer screening
- Development of strategic partnerships

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Step 1: Planning

Step 2: Literacy Audit

Step 3: Action Plans

Step 4: Implement Action Plans

Step 5: Monitor and Evaluate

A literacy audit is a snapshot of your organisation and how it addresses literacy issues in policies and procedures, communications and staff training and development.

A literacy audit looks at:

- What you already do to support people who have literacy and numeracy difficulties; and
- What you could do better to support them.
Current work

Training for healthcare professionals (HCPs)

Since 2014, we have facilitated health literacy workshops for:

• HSE nursing staff
• Irish Pharmacy Union – four sessions in Dublin, Cork and Limerick
• South Dublin County Council Health and Wellbeing Week
• Royal College of Physicians of Ireland – May and October
• HIQA – guidance documents and video
• ICGP CPD Programme
• HSE Primary Care Centre staff
• St James’ Hospital
• Irish Heart Foundation nursing staff
• Healthy Waterford

Literacy Audits – now online and simplified

• Tolco Clinic (HSE Addiction Services Treatment Clinic)
• Irish Cancer Society – research project
• Crystal Clear Pharmacy and GP programme sponsored by MSD
Conclusion

• New (ish) concept in Ireland
• Most activity to date at practice level
• New policy context – action plan exists
• Challenge remains how this will be realised within the HSE roll out
• Lobbying for policy and its implementation is a trajectory and needs to be critically followed
Further information

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