

# **Evolving Health Literacy Policy & Practice in Ireland**

**Inez Bailey, NALA**



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**N National Adult Literacy Agency**  
Ái: Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

# 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



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# What is Health Literacy?

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

Your treatment is...

I can't believe I have...

Expectations, preferences and skills of **individuals seeking** health information and services

meet

Expectations, preferences and skills of **those providing information and services**



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.

# Adult Skills Survey 2013

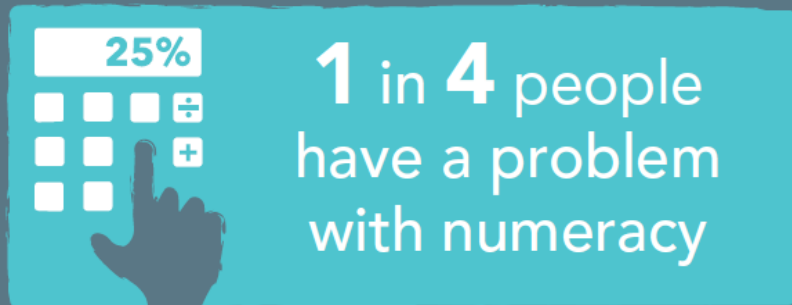


**1 in 6** people have a literacy difficulty in Ireland

15 out of 24 countries

**18%** of Irish adults are at or below level 1 of literacy – 521,550 people

**25%** of Irish adults are at or below level 1 of numeracy – 754,000 people



18 out of 24 countries

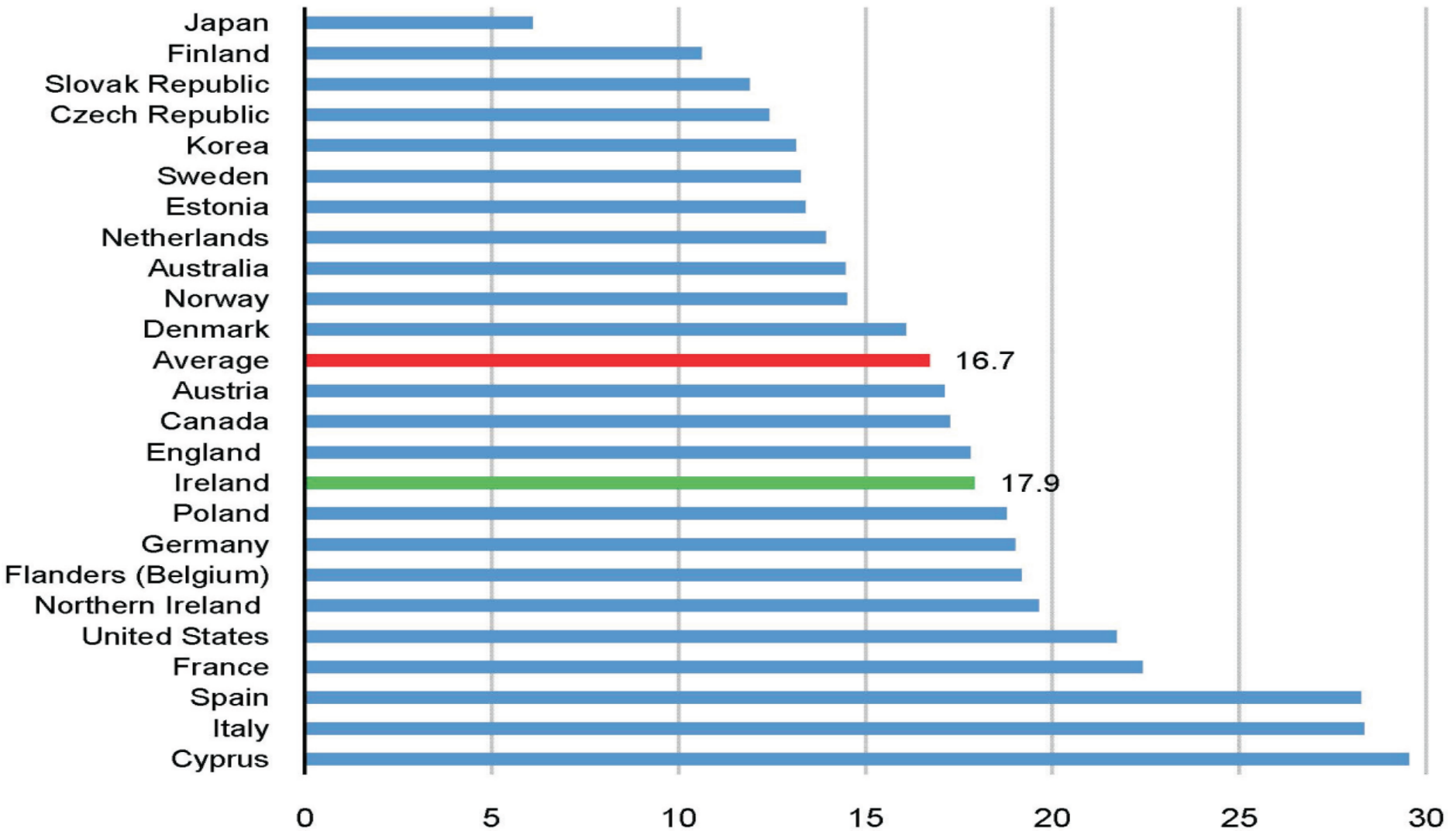


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# Results for literacy

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



# Example

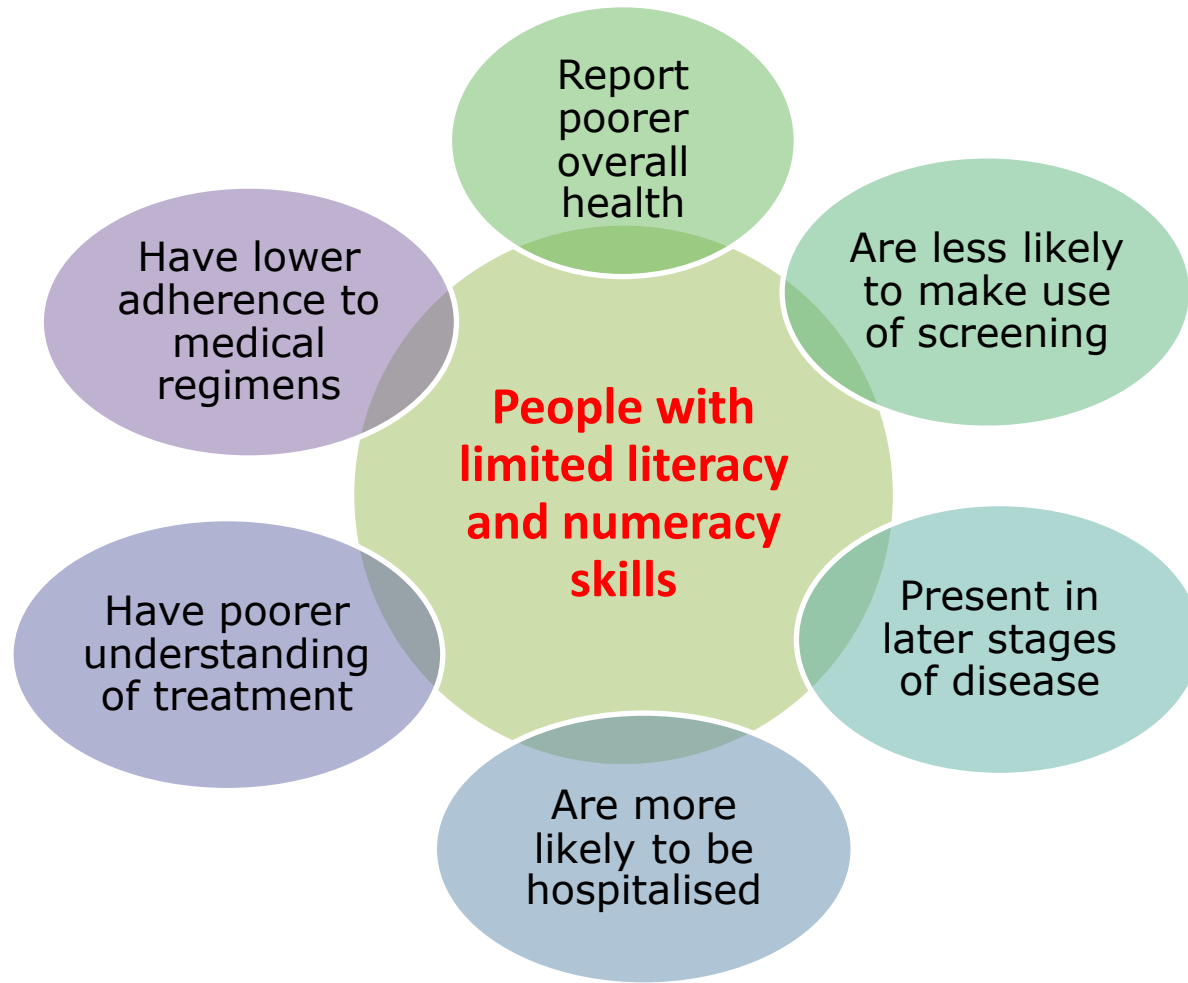
How much  
sugar is in  
this pot of  
yogurt?

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
Serving Size 30 g	
Servings Per Container 1	
<b>Amount Per Serving</b>	
<b>Calories</b> 15	Calories from Fat 0
<b>% Daily Value*</b>	
<b>Total Fat</b> 0g	<b>0%</b>
Saturated Fat 0g	<b>0%</b>
<i>Trans</i> Fat 0g	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	<b>0%</b>
<b>Sodium</b> 35mg	<b>1%</b>
<b>Potassium</b> 0mg	<b>0%</b>
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 2g	<b>1%</b>
Dietary Fiber 0g	<b>0%</b>
Soluble Fiber 0g	
Insoluble Fiber 0g	
Sugars 1g	
<b>Protein</b> 2g	
Vitamin A 0%	• Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0%	• Iron 0%

\* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.



# Why is health literacy important?



**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**



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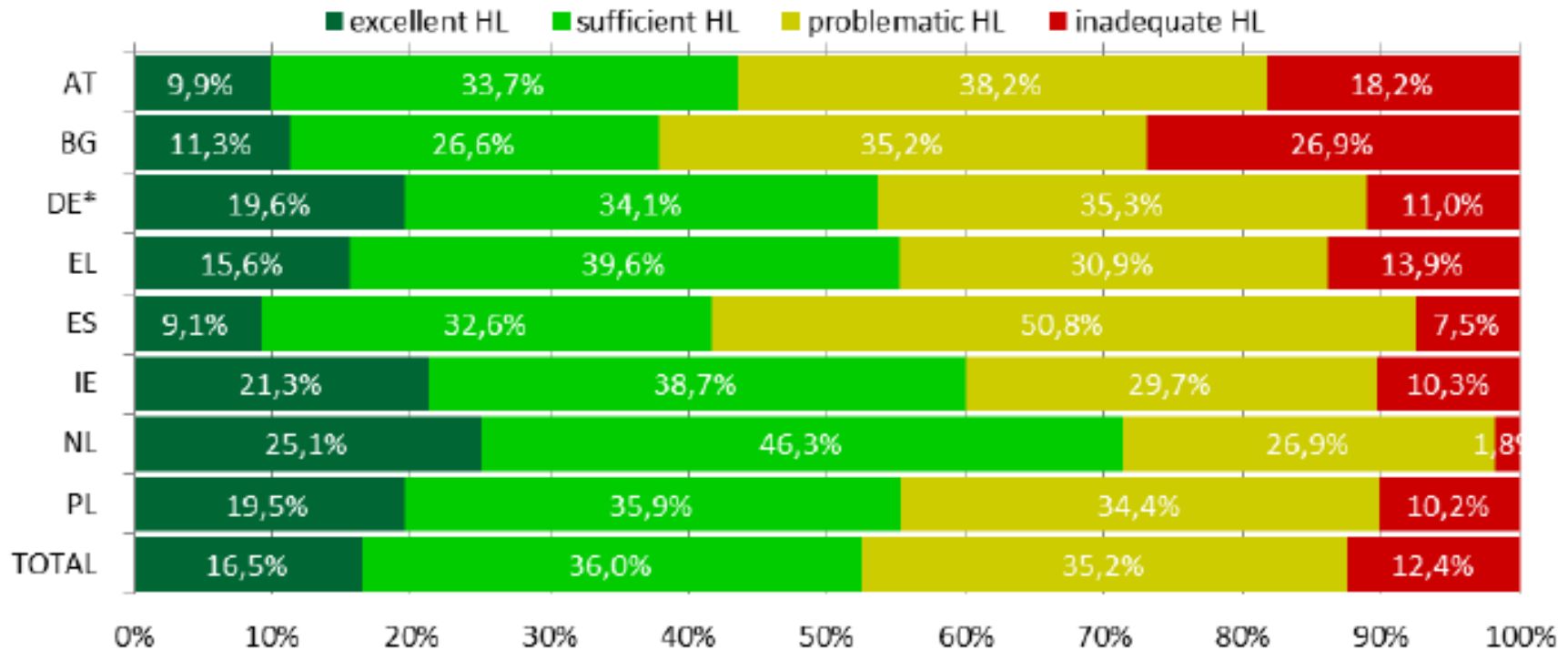
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# History

- 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%**



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# 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)



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# 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>



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# HSE Healthy Ireland Implementation Plan 2015-17

## 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.



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

You can download the HSE's plan on this link:

<http://www.hse.ie/eng/health/hl/hi/HIDocs/SummaryofActions.pdf>

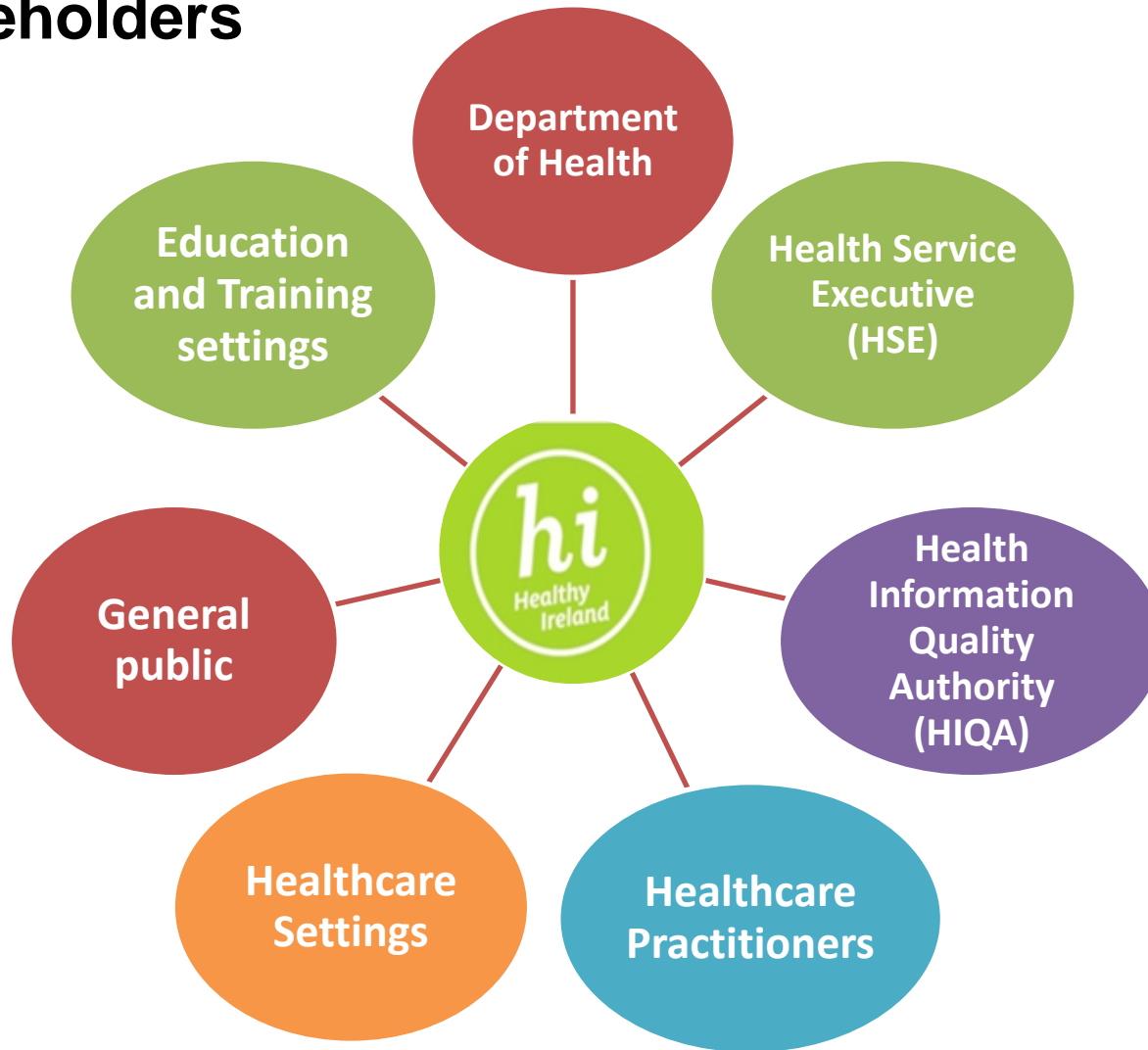


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# Health Literacy Action Plan

## 7 stakeholders



# 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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# Becoming literacy-friendly



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.



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# 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



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# 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



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Plain English: [www.simplyput.ie](http://www.simplyput.ie)

Family: [www.helpmykidlearn.ie](http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie)



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<http://twitter.com/nalairland>



<http://www.youtube.com/user/nationaladulterac>



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