Evolving Health Literacy Policy in Ireland & The Challenge of Implementation

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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 and Numeracy?

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

It is about mutual understanding.
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
**Adult Skills Survey 2013**

1 in 6 people have a literacy difficulty in Ireland.

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.

1 in 4 people have a problem with numeracy.

15 out of 24 countries.

18 out of 24 countries.
Results for literacy

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak Republic</td>
<td>10.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>14.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>15.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>16.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>17.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>18.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>19.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>20.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>21.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>23.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flanders (Belgium)</td>
<td>24.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>29.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
- Have lower adherence to medical regimens
- Have poorer understanding of treatment
- Are more likely to be hospitalised

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)
10.3% had inadequate health literacy
29.7% had problematic health literacy
Limited health literacy rate 40%
Health Literacy Advisory Panel

The Panel 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
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
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
Becoming literacy-friendly

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

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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Email: ibailey@nala.ie

Website: www.nala.ie

Crystal Clear Audit Tool: www.nala.ie/crystalclear

Plain English: www.simplyput.ie

Family: www.helpmykidlearn.ie

http://facebook.com/nalaireland
http://twitter.com/nalaireland

http://www.youtube.com/user/nationaladultliterac
Please – no more jargon, small print or gobbledygook!

Sign our petition at www.nala.ie

Dear Taoiseach,

Both citizens and governments benefit from clear information, written in plain English. Citizens are more likely to understand their rights and governments are more likely to make better use of their resources.

That’s why we recommend that all public information produced by Government and its agencies is written in plain English.

Our petition calls for public information such as letters, forms and documents to be written in plain English. This means:

● using everyday words where possible;
● explaining specialised words if they can’t be avoided;
● keeping sentences to about 15 to 20 words; and
● using a readable font type and size.

Inez Bailey
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National Adult Literacy Agency