Health Literacy
What you need to know

ability to access, understand, appraise and apply health information

Definition
Health literacy is the capacity to make sound health decisions in the context of every day life – at home, in the community, at the workplace, in the health-care system, in the market place, and in the political arena.

Ref. 1

Health literacy in Europe — a few facts

6 out of 10
Europeans have used the internet to retrieve health information.

Ref. 2

Health literacy is a challenge for
1 out of 2 people

Ref. 5

Why is health literacy important?

Low health literacy makes it difficult for you to ...

Ref. 3

understand doctor’s advice

read a package leaflet with information about the medicine

maintain a healthy life style

find the right treatment

follow a vaccination chart

fill out complex forms

Vulnerable groups include:
elderly
people with low education
people with low income

Ref. 3

Even people with advanced education and reading skills can face health literacy challenges.

Ref. 1

Health literacy varies between countries

Netherlands
29%

Austria
51%

Spain
51%

Bulgaria
61%

Ref. 4

Europeans have used the internet to retrieve health information.

6 out of 10

Ref. 2
Health literacy skills...

1. Help people prevent diseases at the right time
2. Help manage chronic diseases like diabetes
3. Reduce medical mistakes because patients are better informed
4. Make healthcare more effective and efficient - thanks to active citizens and patients who follow a healthier lifestyle

Low health literacy is a cause for...

1. Unnecessary hospital visits
2. Poor health outcomes including early death
3. Inefficient health care spending

Promoting health literacy requires a multi-stakeholder approach

What needs to happen next:

1. Develop a European strategy on Health Literacy
2. Set defined health targets for improvement on health literacy levels across Europe
3. Develop a monitoring process to evaluate health literacy levels across Europe

References:

Ref. 4: See Sorensen K et al. (2015), Health literacy in Europe: comparative results of the European health literacy survey (HLS-EU); Eur J Public Health. 25(6):1053-8

This infographic has been created by the Health Literacy Coalition (European Patients’ Forum (EPF), Health Literacy Europe, MSD Europe Inc., Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) and University of Maastricht) and is intended for use by policy makers within the European Union.