

(Draft for sector feedback)

Position Statement: A framework for health literacy: a health system response

Health literacy is the capacity to find, interpret and use information and health services to make effective decisions for health and wellbeing. Evidence shows the impact that health literacy has on health outcomes. Health literacy is supported by a health system focus on: services being easy to access and navigate, effective health worker communication, and clear and relevant health messages that empower everyone to make informed choices.

This framework provides guidance for the health and disability system to:

- ensure that health organisations and health practitioners are organised in a way that improves spoken and written communication and supports self-management and empowerment for everyone - regardless of their level of health literacy (termed a universal precautions approach)
- embed health literacy improvement into the core business of health

Implementation requires a direct focus on building leadership and knowledge of health literacy to ensure that the health system has a long-term and sustainable commitment to improving health literacy.

This framework includes possible actions to support implementation. However, progress on health literacy should not be limited to these suggested actions alone.

A framework for health literacy: a health system response

	LEADERSHIP Championing awareness raising of health literacy and taking the lead on behaviour change	KNOWLEDGE Building our knowledge of health literacy to help us achieve health equity	COMMITMENT TO CHANGE Being committed to both behaviour change and culture shift so that health literacy improvement is embedded at all levels of the health system
Health System	Health system leadership is about setting the expectation that good health literacy policy and practice contribute to individuals living longer, healthier, more independent lives.	The health system continues to grow the evidence base for influencing attitude and behaviour change in organisations and among workers.	The health system is committed to building health care environments and programmes that enhance health literacy.
	<p>Success looks like: Health system leadership by the Ministry of Health and district health boards (DHBs) is expressed through raising awareness and setting the strategic direction for health literacy. This includes providing advice on health literacy to the Government.</p> <p>Health literacy is embedded in all levels of the health system. This includes legislation, policies, strategies, planning, work programmes, resourcing and reporting mechanisms.</p> <p>The Ministry of Health and DHBs champion clear and effective spoken and written communication that supports self-management and empowerment for everyone - regardless of their level of health literacy (ie: a universal precautions approach).</p> <p>Health literacy underpins innovation in both the development and use of technology to improve health outcomes.</p>	<p>Success looks like: Knowledge about health literacy is sought and provides the evidence base for developing effective interventions that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address health literacy in the New Zealand context • measure, monitor and achieve health equity <p>Collaboration in health literacy research is developed along with the sharing of information and programmes between government and other agencies. These include, for example, the Health Quality and Safety Commission (HQSC) and the Health Research Council (HRC) as well as research and practice communities.</p> <p>New and emerging technologies are evaluated for their suitability in improving health literacy, especially those that support health practitioners to help improve health outcomes and support consumer empowerment.</p>	<p>Success looks like: The health system addresses the findings of “Kōrero Mārama”¹ and has a long-term comprehensive approach to addressing health literacy. This includes a commitment to shifting the health system’s focus from raising awareness of health literacy and the health literacy levels of individuals to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a health system response that includes a universal precautions approach at all levels • deliberate and sustained action to improve health literacy <p>Health literacy is an integrated component of safety and quality improvement programmes.</p> <p>Health literacy interventions contribute to improved health and wellbeing for individuals and whānau and a reduction in health-related costs across the whole of the system.</p> <p>The health system is organised and care provided in a way that makes it easier for individuals and whānau to navigate, understand, make decisions and take action on their health.</p>
	<p>Possible actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ embed health literacy principles into research and policy to achieve health equity^{2 3} ✓ raise awareness and set direction for health literacy at governance and senior leadership levels ✓ support the design and delivery of policies, pathways and processes that reduce complexity involved in navigating the health system including across sectors and settings⁴ ✓ provide advice on health literacy to the Government 	<p>Possible actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ continue to build the evidence base for effective health literacy interventions (through targeted research?) ✓ provide training to build capacity and capability in health literacy improvement programmes ✓ implement, evaluate and share information about health literacy improvement programmes ✓ develop evaluation methods that encompass the complex nature of health literacy ✓ develop partnerships with and between research and practice communities⁵ (including the HRC and the HQSC) to build and share information on health literacy research and programmes 	<p>Possible actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ implement and monitor progress on a health literacy strategic framework ✓ fund and resource health literacy improvement programmes ✓ grow champions to support sustained effort and commitment to improving health literacy ✓ adopt a universal precautions approach to improve health literacy ✓ endorse the relationship between health literacy and safety and quality improvement ✓ redesign systems to maximise individual and whānau capacity to maintain good health, manage illness or disease, communicate effectively and make informed decisions⁶ ✓ make better use of technology to communicate evidence-based health information and support health literacy
Health Organisations	Health organisation leadership is about ensuring health literacy improvement is a core organisational value that helps drive positive health outcomes.	Health organisations must build knowledge about how their health literacy environments achieve health equity and improve health outcomes.	Health organisations must express their commitment to health literacy by creating an environment that does not create high health literacy demands.
	<p>Success looks like: Health organisations have health literacy champions at senior leadership level who lead commitment to change. Champions build the momentum for collective ownership and action to address health literacy.</p> <p>Health literacy improvement is embedded across all levels of health organisations, including governance and service delivery and is included in: policies, planning, procedures, evaluation, patient safety, and service quality improvement.</p> <p>Improving health literacy is considered business as usual and effective communication is “the way we do things”.</p> <p>Service providers address the needs of populations that have varying health literacy skills-and enable individuals and whānau to have their health literacy needs met, without stigmatisation or being labelled as having low health literacy.</p> <p>Health practitioner regulatory organisations and professional associations recognise that health literacy and cultural competence are linked and express this in their practice standards.</p>	<p>Success looks like: Health organisations review health literacy in their organisation and health care environment. Reviews inform action plans that focus on improving health literacy and achieving health equity.</p> <p>Health organisations collaborate across the health and social sectors to build knowledge on health literacy activity, including sharing strategies and lessons learnt between professions and sectors.</p> <p>Health organisations include individuals and whānau accessing services in the development and testing of strategies to improve health literacy. Mechanisms are also in place for users to express opinions and share health care experiences on an ongoing basis.</p>	<p>Success looks like: Health organisations express their commitment to health literacy through adopting a universal precautions approach. From reviewing the status of health literacy across the organisation, they develop and implement an action plan to support improvements.</p> <p>Health organisations support ongoing workforce development in effective communication among all staff, at all levels of the organisation. This includes being innovative and making the best use of technology. Initiatives to strengthen health literacy are sufficiently resourced.</p> <p>Health organisations identify ways for whānau/families to be included in service models (where appropriate), for example, the fit-for-surgery whānau health literacy project.</p> <p>‘Health literate organisations’ are where good health literacy practice”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • becomes routine • is business as usual • is integrated into safety and quality improvement initiatives

	<p>Possible actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ identify health literacy as vital to the whole organisation's purpose ✓ promote clear communication as being everyone's job, and put training in place to support the development of clear health communication skills⁷ ✓ plan in a way that supports the link between health literacy and cultural competency to ensure services find the best way to engage with patients ✓ grow health literacy leadership, cultivate champions, and delegate authority for health literacy oversight ✓ model plain language across all levels on the organisation⁸ ✓ adopt a universal precautions approach to health literacy (eg: simple terms used to explain technical medical language, such as signage for 'oncology' that is also labelled 'cancer')⁹ ✓ adopt policies that call for the use of reader-friendly print and web-based information^{10 11} 	<p>Possible actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ review the status of health literacy in the health care organisation environment¹² (tools available include, for example, the "Review of Health Literacy Environments in Hospitals and Health Clinics – guide for health organisations") ✓ following review, develop leadership and an action plan to improve health literacy and resource its implementation¹³ ✓ routinely collect data to calculate success in achieving health literacy goals and provide information for health literacy improvement^{14 15 16} ✓ provide individuals who access health services with the opportunity to give feedback on the services they receive 	<p>Possible actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ embed health literacy into all policies, planning and evaluation activities ✓ set goals for health literacy and communication improvement, provide opportunities, allocate resources and establish accountabilities¹⁷ ✓ build capacity and capability throughout the whole organisation to improve understanding of health literacy and communication ✓ ensure the health care environment is welcoming and easy to navigate with clear signage and directions¹⁸
Health Practitioners	<p>Health practitioner leadership is important in ensuring that health literacy is addressed.</p>	<p>Health practitioners can contribute to building knowledge about best-practice for addressing health literacy.</p>	<p>Health practitioners must be committed to improving health literacy as an integral component of their routine practice.</p>
	<p>Success looks like: Health practitioners raise awareness of health literacy, address behaviour change and promote best-practice. This includes keeping up to date with technology advances that support health literacy.</p> <p>Health practitioners use a universal precautions approach and work in partnership with individuals/whānau that access their services.</p> <p>Health practitioners lead by example through networking and promoting and coordinating action on health literacy improvement within their professions, organisations and across the health system.</p> <p>Health practitioners recognise the link between health literacy and cultural competency – both are driven by meeting individual and whānau needs and support the health system to achieve health equity. Practitioners encourage the use of education tools such as the Foundation Course in Cultural Competence.</p>	<p>Success looks like: Health practitioners build their knowledge base of how they can most effectively communicate, provide health information, build health literacy and support individuals to manage their own health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Health practitioners and other staff build their ability to recognise and respond to a range of different people with different backgrounds and a range of language and health needs; and they share any insight gained.</p>	<p>Success looks like: All health practitioners and other staff can readily describe how clear communication and effective patient interaction relate to quality, safety, and patient-centred care.</p> <p>Health practitioners make complex health information clear. They use a comprehensive approach to verbal communication and patient learning, for example, the PDSA cycle (Plan an intervention or communication tool; Do put the plan in place and test with intended users; Study the information gained; Act on the feedback).</p> <p>Health practitioners make good health literacy practice, such as employing the 'teach-back' method, become routine so that it is business as usual. Practitioners realise individuals and whānau may have reduced ability to process health information when they are sick and vulnerable or distressed.</p>
	<p>Possible actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ recognise the needs and preferences of individuals who access services and tailor communication style to the individual's situation^{19 20} ✓ adopt a universal precautions approach to health literacy²¹ ✓ undertake and contribute to health literacy training and raise awareness that cultural competence is linked with this²² ✓ participate in health system and organisation initiatives to address health literacy 	<p>Possible actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ undertake training in effective health literacy communication approaches (evidence-based)^{23 24} as a core component of professional development ✓ ensure resources are appropriate for the target audience and use a variety of media and approaches (including different technologies).^{25, 26} ✓ when developing resources, use "Rauemi Atawhai: A guide to developing health education resources in New Zealand"²⁷ 	<p>Possible actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ use plain language and confirm patient and family understanding of key information (through a range of best practise communication methods) ✓ create an environment where individuals can speak freely about their health care to health professionals²⁸ ✓ assume that most individuals and whānau will at times have difficulty understanding and applying complex health information, and work on ways to address this (universal precautions approach)²⁹
Individuals and Whānau	<p>Individuals and whānau are partners in actively managing their own health and wellbeing and are well supported to do this.</p>	<p>Individuals have the opportunity to build their health literacy skills and provide input to quality improvement initiatives.</p>	<p>Individuals and whānau have access to health care services that are user friendly, accessible and easy to navigate.</p>
	<p>Success looks like: Individuals and whānau are supported to maintain their own health and wellbeing, and they are partners in having any care needs met.</p> <p>Individuals and whānau are provided with information they understand on measures such as lifestyle changes that may maximise their health and wellbeing. They are empowered to ask questions of their health providers that help them manage their health effectively.</p>	<p>Success looks like: Individuals and whānau are provided with health information they can understand in a range of different formats. They know where and how to access services appropriate to their health needs.</p> <p>Individuals and whānau are empowered to act on information provided such as treatment plans and options. This includes knowing how and when to take their medication safely.</p> <p>When accessing health services, individuals and whānau are aware of their rights under 'The Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights.</p>	<p>Success looks like: All individuals and whānau accessing services are active partners in the management of their health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Individuals and whānau feel welcome when accessing services, and are able to find their way easily in the service environment.</p> <p>Individuals and whānau are involved in the planning, design and delivery of health information and services.</p>

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