



National Medicines Symposium
31 May 2022 Virtual Event



National Medicines Symposium Toolkit

There are many tools to help you put health literacy into action and improve the quality use of medicines.

This kit has the key tools shown at the National Medicines Symposium – and some others that we like.

Health literacy

Low health literacy is common. It affects 60% of the Australian population.¹ Low health literacy is linked to poorer health results, and more medicine errors and hospital visits.

The World Health Organization has described health literacy as:²

“Personal **knowledge** and **competencies**, and available **organizational structures** and **resources** which enable people to access, understand, appraise and use information and services in ways which promote and maintain good health and wellbeing for themselves and those around them.”



That sounds complicated, so let’s break it down.

Health literacy involves a person’s skills, and the demands of the health system (see **Figure 1**).

Individual health literacy is the skills, knowledge, motivation and capacity of a person. Being able to use these skills to access, understand, appraise and use information. To make choices about health and health care, and take action.

Health system demands are the infrastructure, policies, processes, materials, people and relationships that make up the healthcare environment. These affect the way people gain access to, understand, appraise and use health-related information and services.

Also, people should be able to get (access), understand, judge (appraise) and use information and services (see **Figure 2**).

- ▶ **Access:** Skills for getting information and services for health. For example, using technology, doing internet searches and find their way around websites. It is also skills for seeking or checking information, advice and/or services.
- ▶ **Understand:** Literacy (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and numeracy skills as they relate to health information.



Figure 1: A mix of individual skills and system demands affect health literacy.

- ▶ **Appraise:** Skills to interpret and judge health information. This involves being able to weigh up how much the health information relates to their own situation.
- ▶ **Use:** Be able to act on health information, instructions, or advice, to their own situation. It also involves being able to make choices about health and the social or physical environment.

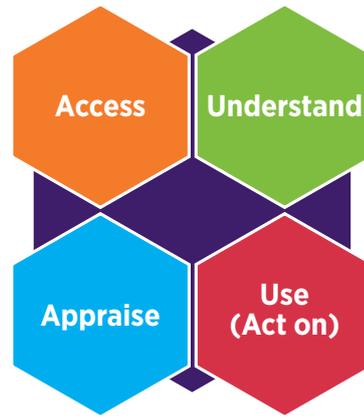


Figure 2: The four individual health literacy skills.

How to use this kit

The tools in this kit link to each of the three *National Medicines Symposium 2022* themes:

- ▶ [Organisational health literacy](#) (see page 4)
- ▶ [Medicines literacy](#) (see page 7)
- ▶ [Supporting vulnerable communities](#) (see page 10)

Each resource has an icon to show if the tool builds individual skills, lowers system demands or both. See the key below:

Builds individual skills	Lowers system demands	Builds individual skills AND lowers system demands
		

Key tools

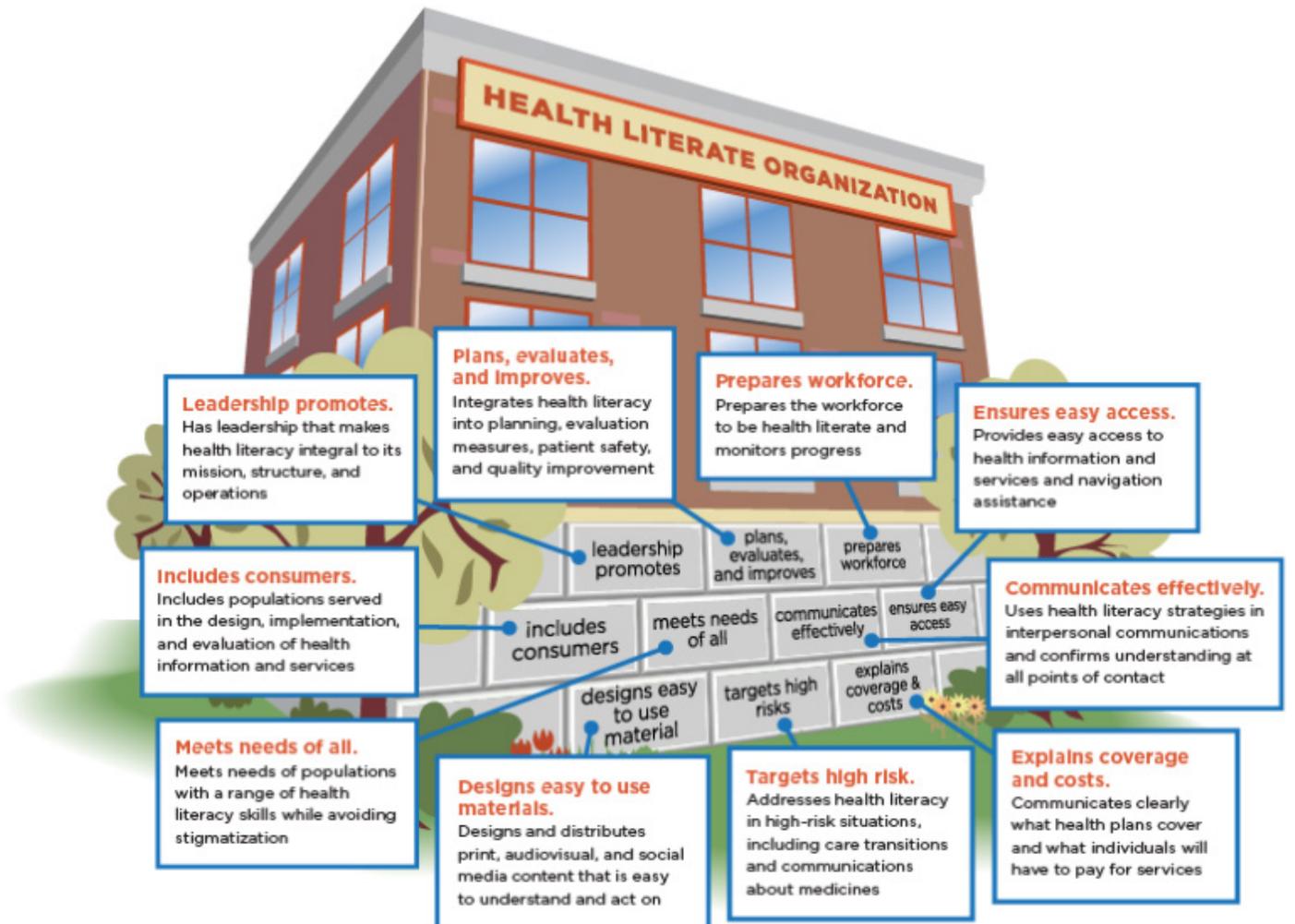
The key tools for each theme are:

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission)		
The Commission has taken a leadership role in improving health literacy. Its website has information on health literacy, how it affects safety and quality of care, and key actions.		
https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/patient-and-consumer-centred-care/health-literacy		
Organisational health literacy	Medicines literacy	Supporting vulnerable communities
Organisational Health Literacy Self-Assessment Tool Health Literacy Editor	NPS MedicineWise Choosing Wisely Australia Home Medicines Review	Reading Writing Hotline Health My Way

Organisational health literacy

A health literate organisation:³

- ▶ puts health literacy at the centre of its mission, structure, and how it works
- ▶ makes health literacy part of planning, evaluation and patient safety
- ▶ prepares workers to be health literate and tracks progress
- ▶ works with the community to design, run and review health information and services
- ▶ meets the needs of people with different health literacy skills
- ▶ checks understanding
- ▶ makes health information and services easy to find
- ▶ designs and sends content that is easy to understand and act on
- ▶ works on health literacy in high-risk situations (such as medicines)
- ▶ clearly talks about the cost of services for patients.



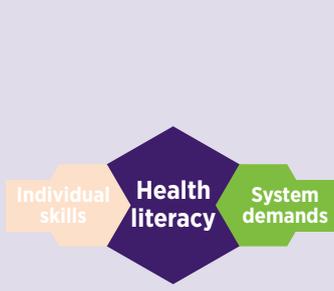
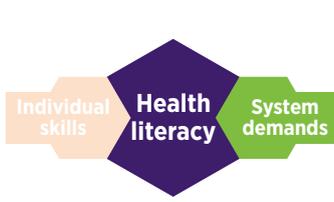
This graphic reflects the views of the authors of the Discussion Paper "Ten Attributes of Health Literate Health Care Organizations" and not necessarily of the authors' organizations or of the IOM. The paper has not been subjected to the review procedures of the IOM and is not a report of the IOM or of the National Research Council.

Image used with permission from Institute of Medicine of the National Academies³

Key tools to build organisational health literacy

 	<h3>Organisational Health Literacy Self-Assessment Tool</h3> <p>This tool gives five ways to be a health literate organisation. It guides you through five steps and has two tools to help you become a health literate organisation.</p> <p>https://cbrhl.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/HealthWest_Make-it-Easy_web.pdf</p>
 	<h3>Health Literacy Editor</h3> <p>The Health Literacy Editor helps you create health materials that are easy to read and understand.</p> <p>https://sydneyhealthliteracylab.org.au/the-shell-editor/</p>

Other tools

	<h3>Partnering with Consumers Standard</h3> <p>These standards describe a level of care people can expect from health service organisations. It aims to create health service organisations where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ consumers are partners in planning, design, delivery, measurement and evaluation of systems and services ▶ patients are partners in their own care, to the extent that they choose. <p>https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/standards/nsqhs-standards/partnering-consumers-standard</p>
	<h3>Patient Education Material Assessment Tool</h3> <p>A tool to measure how easy education material is to understand and use. You can use this tool with print and audio-visual resources.</p> <p>https://www.ahrq.gov/health-literacy/patient-education/pemat.html</p>

	<p>Australian Government: Style Manual The guide gives advice for creating accessible and inclusive content. It also helps with writing and designing content. https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content</p>
	<p>Drop the Jargon Day Drop the Jargon is a day for health professionals, community services and local government to use plain language. https://www.dropthejargon.org.au/</p>
	<p>Counting Culture: Towards a standardised approach to measuring and reporting on workforce cultural diversity in Australia This guide supports organisations to ‘count culture’. It helps them measure the degree and range of cultural diversity in their workforce and community. https://www.dca.org.au/sites/default/files/dca_counting_culture_2021_synopsis_online_final.pdf</p>
	<p>Health Literacy Tool Shed An online database of health literacy measures. https://healthliteracy.bu.edu/</p>

Medicines Literacy

Health literacy affects all parts of medicine selection, use and adherence.

Medicine problems cause 250,000 hospital admissions in Australia each year and an extra 400,000 presentations to emergency departments. About half of this harm can be avoided.⁴

People with low health literacy are more likely to have medicine errors and worse health results.

A recent NPS MedicineWise survey⁵ measured consumer awareness, knowledge and health literacy of quality use of medicines:

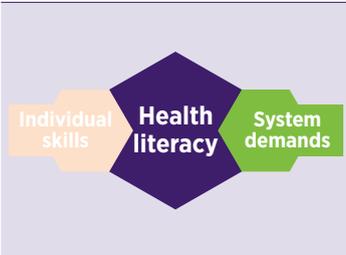
- ▶ Fewer than half knew what an active ingredient was. One-third knew the active ingredients in their own medicines.
- ▶ Keeping a medicines list was not a common practice.
- ▶ Many did not know about key safety aspects of taking medicines such as safe disposal, taking medicines after the expiry date and sharing prescribed medicines with others.
- ▶ People were mostly unsure about the possible problems of medical tests. They were not aware they could cause harm or lead to treatment they did not need.

Key tools to build medicines literacy

	<p>NPS MedicineWise home page Independent. Not-for-profit. Evidence based. Consumer-centred organisation aiming to improve the health of Australians through the safe and wise use of medicines. Information and education for health professionals and consumers. https://www.nps.org.au/</p> 
	<p>Medicines Line Telephone service where consumers can speak with an NPS MedicineWise pharmacist. Medicines Line (1300 633 424) gives information on prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines. https://www.nps.org.au/medicines-line</p> 
	<p>MedicineWise app Keep track of medicines and find important health information on a smartphone anytime and anywhere, especially in emergencies. https://www.nps.org.au/consumers/medicinewise-app/</p> 

	<p>Medicine Finder Find the Consumer Medical Information (CMI), or Product Information (PI) for health professionals. More than 5000 complementary, over-the-counter and prescription medicines are in the database.</p> <p>https://www.nps.org.au/medicine-finder</p> 
	<p>5 questions to ask your doctor or other health professional before you get a test, treatment or procedure The Choosing Wisely Australia program helps consumers start important conversations about unnecessary and sometimes harmful tests, treatments and procedures. Choosing Wisely helps consumers ask questions and make informed decisions in partnership with their healthcare team.</p> <p>https://www.choosingwisely.org.au/resources/consumers-and-carers/5questions</p> 
	<p>Home Medicines Review This program supports the quality use of medicines and helps to lower medicine problems. It helps people to better understand and manage their medicines. Accredited pharmacists do the review in the patient's home.</p> <p>https://www.ppaonline.com.au/programs/medication-management-programs/home-medicines-review</p>

Other tools

	<p>Medication Safety Standard This standard aims to make sure the right medicine is prescribed and given, and monitored. It also aims to make sure that people know about their own medicine needs and risks.</p> <p>https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/standards/nsqhs-standards/medication-safety-standard</p>
	<p>National Standard for Labelling Dispensed Medicines Medicine labels are important for sharing key medicine information with consumers. The design and content of information on a medicine label affects how well people understand it.</p> <p>This standard guides health professionals to dispense medicines with clear and consistent labels.</p> <p>https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/publications-and-resources/resource-library/national-standard-labelling-dispensed-medicines</p>

	<p>Teach-back Teach-back is a simple communication tool used by health professionals to check understanding. This tool is very useful for checking medicine instructions. http://teachback.org/</p>
	<p>Check-back Patients, carers and family members forget up to 80% of the information given to them at medical appointments. Check-back is a communication tool for consumers to check understanding. https://checkback.org/</p>
	<p>Tips for safe health care Resource for consumers to use when talking with their doctor and other healthcare providers. https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/partnering-consumers/top-tips-safe-health-care</p>
	<p>Finding good health information Good health information can help consumers make choices. These resources have tips to help find good health information online. https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/consumers/finding-good-health-information-online</p>
	<p>Identify goals of care Resources that describe different ways to agree goals of care. https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/comprehensive-care/essential-elements-comprehensive-care/essential-element-2-identifying-goals-care</p>
	<p>Trust it or Trash it? Free online tool for consumers to weigh up the value of information. It asks three basic questions: Who said it? When did they say it? How did they know? http://www.trustortrash.org/</p>

Supporting vulnerable communities

There are many communities in Australia at high risk of poor health literacy and medicines use.⁶

Vulnerable groups at greater risk of low health literacy are:

- ▶ **Older people (aged 65 years and over):** higher risk due to chance of more than one health condition and medicine. Changes to the body and mind also come with ageing.⁷
- ▶ **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:** there is no national data on the health literacy skills of this group. Greater risk likely due to many factors. Such as, lower socioeconomic status, more health problems, challenges getting culturally safe care and communication with health professionals.⁷
- ▶ **Culturally and linguistically diverse communities:** one in four migrants from a mainly non-English speaking country achieved health literacy levels similar to people born in Australia.⁸
- ▶ **People with low literacy levels:** 43% of people do not have the reading, writing or numeracy skills they need to look after their health.⁹
- ▶ **People who are digitally excluded:** one in four people in Australia cannot access the digital world. Those affected are the same people with higher rates of chronic disease and worse healthcare outcomes.¹⁰



Key tools to support vulnerable communities

	<p>Reading Writing Hotline Australia’s national telephone referral service for adult literacy and numeracy. It has literacy resources for literacy trainers, for example a workbook on going to the doctor and reading medicine labels. https://www.readingwritinghotline.edu.au/</p>
	<p>Health My Way A program run with community organisations by The Good Things Foundation. It supports adults to gain key digital skills and confidence to look after their health. https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au/what-we-do/our-projects/health-my-way/</p>

Other tools

	<p>Medication: It’s your choice A series of resources to help people make choices about the medicines they take. Resources are available in multiple community languages. https://opan.org.au/support/support-for-older-people/yourchoice/</p>
	<p>Understanding your rights Information for patients and carers about their rights when getting health care. https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/consumers/understanding-your-rights</p>
	<p>Australian Indigenous Health/InfoNet A free online library of resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. https://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/</p>
	<p>Health Translations A free online library of high-quality translated Australian health and wellbeing information. https://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/</p>
	<p>Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission resource library A library of resources for consumers including videos, posters and fact sheets. https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/resource-library?resources%5B0%5D=audience%3A56</p>
	<p>Translated information Key resources for consumers in multiple languages. https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/consumers/translated-information</p>

References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Health Literacy, Australia. Canberra: ABS, 2006. [https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/73ED158C6B14BB5ECA2574720011AB83/\\$File/42330_2006.pdf](https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/73ED158C6B14BB5ECA2574720011AB83/$File/42330_2006.pdf) (accessed 5 May 2022).
2. World Health Organization. Health Promotion Glossary of Terms 2021. Geneva: WHO, 2021. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240038349> (accessed 5 May 2022).
3. Brach C, Keller D, Hernandez LM, et al. Ten attributes of health literate health care organizations. Discussion paper. Washington D.C. USA: National Academy of Sciences, 2012. https://nam.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/BPH_Ten_HLit_Attributes.pdf (accessed 5 May 2022).
4. Pharmaceutical Society of Australia. Medicine Safety: Take Care. Canberra: PSA, 2019. <https://www.psa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/PSA-Medicine-Safety-Report.pdf> (accessed 2022).
5. NPS MedicineWise. National Consumer Survey 2021 Report. Sydney: NPS MedicineWise, 2021.
6. Consumers Health Forum of Australia. Health literacy and quality use of medicines in Australia: a rapid review of the literature. Canberra: CHF, 2020. https://www.nps.org.au/assets/Final-Literature-Review-Report_at.pdf (accessed 5 May 2022).
7. Consumers Health Forum of Australia. Consumer Health Literacy Segmentation and Activation Research Project. Final Report. Canberra, CHF, 2020. https://www.nps.org.au/assets/Consumer-Segmentation-and-Activation-Project_FINAL-Report-28-January-2021.pdf (accessed 5 May 2022).
8. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Health Literacy , Australia, 2006. Canberra: ABS, 2008. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4233.0> (accessed 5 May 2022).
9. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Programme for the international assessment of adult competencies, Australia. Canberra: ABS, 2013. <https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/UrX1CXLW67SAkg0t6z-m1?domain=abs.gov.au> (accessed 5 May 2022).
10. Good Things Foundation Australia. The digital divide. Sydney: Good Things Foundation, 2022. <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au/the-digital-divide/> (accessed 5 May 2022).