

# Health Literacy Policy & Procedure

## **Policy Statement:**

Health literacy is increasingly being recognised as an important component of safe and high quality health care. Health literacy plays an important role in enabling effective partnerships. In order for partnerships to work everyone involved needs to be able to give and receive, interpret and act on information such as treatment options and plans.

When these conditions exist, there is the potential to improve the safety and quality of health care but also to reduce health disparities and increase equity.

Echuca Regional Health understands that health literacy is fundamental if people are to successfully manage their own health and improve health outcomes. This requires a range of skills and knowledge about health and health care including;

- Finding, understanding, interpreting and communicating health information
- Seeking appropriate care and making critical health decisions

Echuca Regional Health staff take into consideration the two aspects of health literacy:

- Individual health literacy
- Health literacy environment

## **Definitions:**

*Health literacy:* is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as the 'cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand and use the information in ways which promote and maintain good health,' (WHO 1998).

*Individual health literacy:* is the skills, knowledge, motivation and capacity of a person to access, understand, appraise and apply information to make effective decisions about health and health care and take appropriate action (Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, 2014).

*Health literacy environment:* is the infrastructure, policies, processes, materials and relationships that make up the health system and have an impact on the way that people access, understand, appraise and apply health-related information and services (Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, 2014).

*Plain English:* means analyzing and deciding what information our consumers need to make informed decisions, before words, sentences or paragraphs are considered. A plain English document uses words economically and at a level the audience can understand. Its sentence structure is tight. Its tone is welcoming and direct. Its design is visually appealing. A plain English document is easy to read and looks like it's meant to be read.

## **Personnel to which this policy applies:**

All staff

## Procedure:

- Echuca Regional Health consumers are involved in the development of health information materials to ensure the information is relevant, readable and understandable. Aim to maximize the readability of written material using '*Improving Readability: guidelines for producing written material*' as a guide (refer to Patient Information Publications Policy & Procedure).
- All key consumer documents are assessed in line with National Standard 2.4.1 using the 'Consumer Checklist for consumer publications' (refer to Patient Information Publications Policy & Procedure).
- Echuca Regional Health promotes the use of plain English in all documents and communications designed for consumers
  - Putting essential information first
  - Using visual and videos where appropriate
  - Reducing the reading level of information provided
  - Using illustrations
  - Personalise written health information
  - Combine written and verbal information to reinforce health messages.
- Staff use a person focused approach to interpersonal communication as a key strategy to ensure consumer engagement, participation and adherence to care plans.
- Staff will recognize the needs and preferences of individual consumers and tailor their communication style to the person's situation.
- Staff will encourage consumers to ask questions, read through information and answer questions ensuring they understand. Verbal information will be provided in common every day language, short sentences and avoiding jargon and acronyms.
- Staff will provide consumers with information about, and if necessary referral to appropriate services when required.
- Staff will use strategies such as the 'teach back' method to confirm that they have explained to the consumer what they need to know in a manner that the consumer understands.
- Staff will participate in improvement projects aimed at reducing barriers to health literacy within the healthcare organisation's physical environment.

## References

Health Literacy: Enabling communication and participation in health (DoH, Vic)  
<http://health.vic.gov.au/consumer/health-literacy.htm>

Consumers, the health system and health literacy: Taking action to improve safety and quality (ACSQHC)  
<http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/patient-and-consumer-centred-care/health-literacy/>

National Statement on Health Literacy: Taking action to improve safety and quality, ACSQHC, 2014.

Centre for Culture, Ethnicity & Health – Health Literacy  
<http://ceh.org.au/resources/publications>



### **Linked documents**

[Patient Information Publications Policy & Procedure](#)

[Consumer Participation Policy & Procedure](#)

[Person Centred Practice Policy & Procedure](#)

### **Alternate Key Search Words:**

Brochure, information, fact, sheet, pamphlet, Consumer, Participation

### **Accreditation Framework and relevant section**

National Safety and Quality Health Service Standard 2 Partnering with Consumers

### **Revision History:**

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