

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



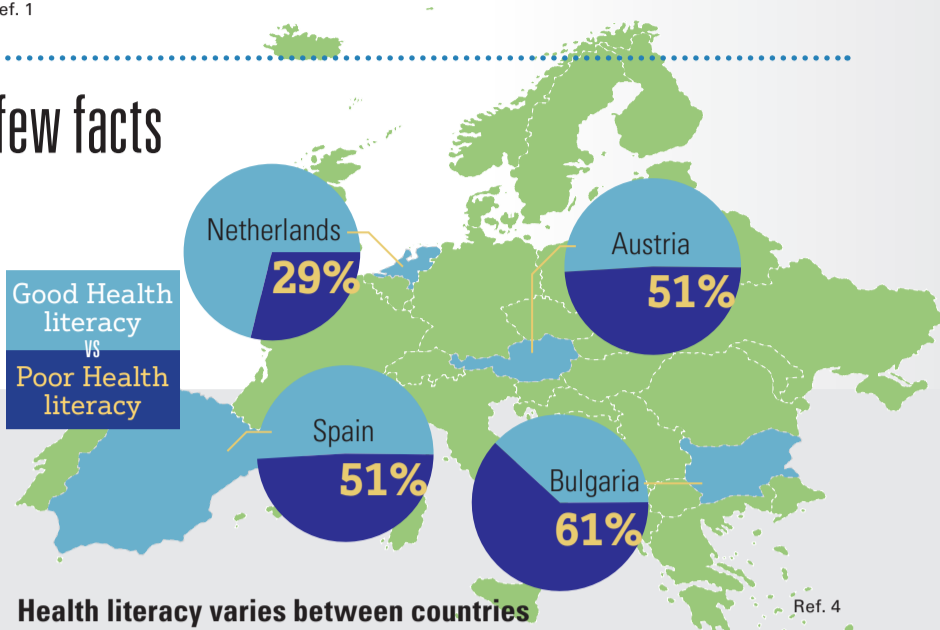
6 out of 10

Europeans have used the internet to retrieve health information. Ref. 2

Health literacy is a challenge for **1 out of 2** people Ref. 5



Good Health literacy vs Poor Health literacy



Health literacy varies between countries

Even people with advanced education and reading skills can face health literacy challenges. Ref. 3



Vulnerable groups include:

elderly

people with low education

people with low income Ref. 3

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

Low health literacy is a cause for...



Unnecessary hospital visits



Poor health outcomes including early death



Inefficient health care spending Ref. 3

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 Ref. 3

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 Ref. 5

References:

- Ref. 1: This definition of health literacy is based on the one of Kickbusch and Maag, see: Kickbusch I and Maag D Health Literacy. In: Kris Heggenhougen and Stella Quah, editors International Encyclopedia of Public Health, Vol 3. San Diego: Academic Press; 2008. pp. 204-211
- Ref. 2: See DG Connect (2014), Europeans becoming enthusiastic users of online health information; <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/news/europeans-becoming-enthusiastic-users-online-health-information> (20/04/2016)
- Ref. 3: WHO Europe (2013), Health Literacy. The solid facts; edited by Ilona Kickbusch, Jürgen M. Pelikan, Franklin Apfel and Agis D. Tsouros; <http://www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/health-literacy-the-solid-facts> (20/04/2016)
- 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
- Ref. 5: EPF, Health Literacy Europe, CPME, University of Maastricht, MSD Europe (2016), Making health literacy a priority in EU policy. Health Literacy Consensus Paper; <http://www.eu-patient.eu/whatwedo/Policy/Health-Literacy/> (20/04/2016)