Health literacy and numeracy in Ireland

Health literacy and numeracy has two elements:

- **Health services** communicate clearly and take account of possible health literacy and numeracy needs.
- **People** understand health information correctly and can make an informed decision.

**Why is this important?**

The EU Health Literacy Survey (2012) showed that 4 in 10 Irish adults had limited health literacy.

Research shows that people with high levels of health literacy live longer lives.

**Limited health literacy and numeracy could mean:**

- I don’t fully understand my condition and treatment.
- I might make a mistake when taking medicines.
- I am more at risk of going to hospital.
- I might visit the emergency department more frequently.
- I am less likely to go for screening.
- I could die younger.

**Health literacy and numeracy is everybody’s business.**

**Having strong health literacy and numeracy means...**

- I am more confident to ask questions.
- I understand how to manage chronic health conditions.
- I make sound health decisions.
- I can follow medicine instructions.
- I give informed consent to treatment.
- I find my way around health services.

**Delivering a literacy friendly health service means...**

- You provide a quality service where the person fully understands their condition and what they need to do.
- You are more effective and efficient.
- You have fewer misunderstandings and complaints.
- You save time and money.
Health literacy and numeracy tips

Tips for the public

I am prepared for meeting with health service providers. I think about any concerns beforehand and write my questions down.

I ask questions. When I don’t understand a medical term or concept, I ask for it to be explained to me more simply.

I check that I understand what has been said to me. I repeat back to the healthcare provider what I think they said and what I must do.

I make sure I know the answers to these 3 questions before I leave the meeting:
1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?
(Taken from Ask Me 3 Campaign: www.npsf.org/askme3)

Tips for the service

Communicate using plain English and follow design standards. See www.simplyput.ie for advice.

Give clear, easy to follow verbal information. Explain any medical terminology.

Check that people understand what you have said. Ask people to repeat back to you:
1. What is their main problem?
2. What do they need to do?
3. Why is it important they need to do this?
(Taken from Ask Me 3 Campaign: www.npsf.org/askme3)

The layout and signage is clear and easy to follow. There is a map and floor plan at the main door. There are clear direction signs.

All staff are aware of literacy and numeracy issues and how to respond appropriately and sensitively. For example, staff offer help with reading information and or filling in a form.