

****Under Media Embargo until 17/01/2024 09:00****

Open letter to:

Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly

Minister for Education, Norma Foley

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Simon Harris

Minister of State, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Anne Rabbitte

11th December 2023

Dear Ministers Donnelly, Foley, Harris and Rabbitte

We at Patients for Patient Safety Irelandⁱ are calling on you to implement a single national framework on health literacy across all healthcare, education and community programmes. This initiative is supported and endorsed by many of the largest patient advocacy groups in Ireland as well as the International Society for Quality in Healthcare – ISQua.

We urge you to include health literacy in education from an early age to empower people to engage and be active partners in their own care. Health Literacy is fundamental to improved health outcomes through an inclusive, safer, more effective, and efficient health service.

We acknowledge existing initiatives on health literacy in education and in the community and are calling on our Government to implement a joined-up approach to health literacy across our healthcare and education systems and in our communities.

When a person is ill, they may not be in an emotional state to absorb information about their condition. Health literacy is a life skill and essentially the corner stone of how people get the most out of healthcare information. This includes accessing our own health information and understanding how to use it for our own benefit. Everyone has a duty to be as informed as possible on their own health and wellbeing, so that we can engage in our own care and those we support.

According to the World Health Organisation, Health Literacy refers, broadly, to empowering people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to be an active partner and advocate for their own care. A health literate individual has the ability to gain access to, understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Research by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), and confirmed by international reports has shown that patients who understand health information are:

- better informed about their health,
- have more effective consultations with their health care provider,
- are better informed about the medicines they are prescribed and
- have improved health outcomes.

However, the European Health Literacy Population Survey 2019-2021 showed that 43% of people in Ireland have limited health literacy. This has serious implications for the nation's health and makes health literacy a key component in delivering a quality service that has patient safety at its core.



We urge you, our government ministers to educate people to give them a voice, the knowledge, skills, and confidence to safeguard good health. Help us to help ourselves and thus take some of the burden off healthcare services.

Yours sincerely,

Bernie O'Reilly

Chair, Patients for Patient Safety Ireland

Ashling O'Leary

Co-Chair, Patients for Patient Safety Ireland

<https://patientsforpatientsafety.ie/contact-us/>

ⁱ Patients for Patient Safety Ireland (PFPSI) was formed 11 years ago under a World Health Organisation programme <https://www.who.int/initiatives/patients-for-patient-safety>.

We are a group of volunteers who aim to engage and empower people in Ireland and facilitate their partnership with health professionals and policy-makers to make health care services safer. The patient is the only one person gone through his/her entire care process: Her/his and family voice should be heard fully.