

CALL FOR NATIONAL HEALTH LITERACY INITIATIVE

Talking Points

Launch Date: 18/01/2024

Issued by the Chair and Vice-Chair of Patients for Patient Safety Ireland in partnership with multiple other patient groups.

Patients for Patient Safety Ireland (a World Health Organisation programme) is calling for a **joined-up national approach to health literacy to empower everybody in Ireland with the knowledge, skills and confidence to be active partners and advocates for their own care** – an integrated approach across healthcare, education and in our communities to enable, encourage and educate people to make informed choices about their own health and have a voice in their own care.

It has long been accepted that our health service cannot sustain the current demands placed on it (<https://irishchronicle.com/politics/watt-system-unable-to-treat-increasing-patient-numbers/>). As a population we can all play our part in making informed choices, including self-care and being health aware.

While our key objective is to empower people to be active partners in their own care, thereby leading to better outcomes, higher levels of health literacy will also take some of the pressure off our health service - working with a knowledgeable population would increase more accurate uptake of advice, medication compliance (e.g. medication safety and anti-microbial resistance are big issues nationally) - and without doubt improve patient safety overall.

The health service and healthcare professionals can practise patient empowerment and patient education as a core function, alongside health promotion measures.

Please support this important initiative.

Low levels of health literacy have serious implications for the health of every person in Ireland and makes health literacy a key component in delivering a quality service that has patient safety at its core. The measures we are calling for build on existing programmes and initiatives, are cost-effective and **will contribute to overcoming one of the biggest challenges facing the country.**

Is Health Literacy Important?

Research by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), confirmed by several international studies, shows 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
- reduce the burden on the health service

Call to Action

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PfPSI believes that health literacy is a life skill that should be taught through mainstream education, in our primary and secondary schools and in our communities. Let us prepare people for healthcare conversations, decisions, making informed choices, safeguarding good health, and all things health and wellness related. Educate people to give them a voice – the knowledge, skills and confidence to safeguard good health.

We will all have to experience our health service at some point in our lives. But when a person is ill, they may not be in an emotional state to absorb information about their condition.

PfPSI welcomes the investment in existing health literacy-related initiatives in schools (e.g. SPHE), communities (e.g. Slaintecare Healthy Communities) and the health service. We are calling for these initiatives to be reviewed in order to produce a joined-up approach, including some basics, e.g.

- How to access healthcare
- How to navigate the services – particularly important with Slaintecare and the reorganisation in progress, health regions, etc.
- Empower people with simple questions to ask your healthcare professionals
- Credible, reliable sources of health information online
- Signposting to advocacy groups who provide condition-specific education

These actions should be mirrored within the health service and practiced by all healthcare professionals.

So, we ask – what is more important than our health and being educated to optimise it and use all the resources available to assist us. Health Literacy is the key to the knowledge we all require to optimize our health, prepare and empower us to be informed people when health challenges arise and give us the skills to engage in healthcare conversations as active participants for ourselves and our loved ones.

Supporting Information

Research clearly shows that making health information more widely available and in a manner that is easily understood is key to reducing health inequality and improve outcomes for patients. <https://irishheart.ie/news/good-health-literacy-is-key-for-good-health/>

According to Medical Council research published in the Medical Independent (Sept 2023), **the majority of patients in Ireland want to be treated as partners in their healthcare**: <https://www.medicalindependent.ie/in-the-news/breaking-news/majority-of-patients-want-to-be-treated-as-partner-in-their-healthcare-medical-council-research/>

Yet the International Report of the European Health Literacy Population Survey 2019-2021 shows that 43% of respondents have low levels of health literacy (<https://m-pohl.net/sites/m-pohl.net/files/inline-files/HLS19%20International%20Report.pdf>).

A Truly National Initiative – Based on Internationally Recognised Best Practices

This is a national initiative, supported by the largest patient advocacy groups and the International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua). It is built on internationally-



recognised resources and best practices from the WHO, Institute of Healthcare Improvement (IHI), NALA and others.

We have assembled a team of internationally-recognised health literacy experts to advise us, including [Prof Gerardine Doyle](#) from UCD, who provides the Irish research into the European Health Literacy Survey and [Kristine Sorensen](#), one of the leading thought leaders on health literacy worldwide

In December 2023 PfPSI wrote the attached open letter to the ministers primarily responsible for health literacy. Our next step starts here, by creating media awareness in order to create public awareness, and in doing so, encourage our government to move this agenda along. Ireland could become a World leader in upskilling our population and truly make a difference, benefitting our health service and most importantly, our people.

About Patients for Patient Safety Ireland

Patients for Patient Safety Ireland (PFPSI), follow the World Health Organisation (WHO) framework for volunteers, we are people with lived experiences of healthcare which we share to improve patient safety. We have been working in collaboration and partnership with the health service since we were formed eleven years ago under the WHO [Patients for Patient Safety](#) programme. Our goals, as defined by the WHO, are to:

- Facilitate efforts to engage and empower patients, families and communities to play an active role and be advocates for their own care
- Bring the voices of patients and people to the forefront of health care
- Create an enabling environment for partnerships between patients, families, communities and health professionals

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