



# Health Literacy Framework

## FOREWORD

Health literacy is core to us delivering equitable health outcomes for our community and must be considered and embedded in all we do.

Health literacy has rightly been prioritised by the Community Advisory Committee. I am pleased to be part of delivering this important initiative to ensure that consumers across the Nepean, Blue Mountains Lithgow and Hawkesbury are appropriately supported to improve their health literacy, through the services and programs delivered by Wentworth Healthcare, providers of the Nepean Blue Mountains PHN.

The Framework, with its associated activities to deliver improved health literacy, is a genuine and meaningful collaboration with Wentworth Healthcare, to support our local healthcare professionals and consumers. It is on that basis that I am confident we will deliver sustainable improvements across the region.

The fundamental premise of improved health literacy is that consumers can make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing, including prevention and treatment. Ensuring

health information is accessible and responsive to the needs of all users of the health system, regardless of demography, is a key element of the program.

The program does not aim to be transformative in the short term. Rather it provides a framework for health literacy to ensure it is embedded in all we do as we design and implement health programs delivering sustainable outcomes over the long term.

We are rightly proud of the work done to date and are committed to continuing the process of embedding health literacy principles into all we do to improve health outcomes for our community.

*Belinda Leonard*  
Chair, Community Advisory Committee



## FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

Wentworth Healthcare's commitment to health literacy prioritises three integrated domains that foster progress towards achieving the vision of **people in the Nepean Blue Mountains region receiving information and advice about their health care that is easy to understand and will assist them to make informed decisions.**

In doing so, Wentworth Healthcare will be better positioned to work with stakeholders to encourage the adoption of health literate environments and services. This will be achieved by supporting the development of

health literacy skills with our key stakeholders, commissioned services, delivered services and primary care services to target their responses to the health literacy needs of individual consumers.<sup>4</sup>

To improve health literacy in the region, Wentworth Healthcare's Framework sets a path to learn more about health literacy and embed what we learn into our systems and processes through **three health literacy domains** that provide overarching guiding principles and articulate actionable outcomes:

**DOMAIN 1 Accessible health information for consumers**

**DOMAIN 2 Embedding health literacy into systems at all levels**

**DOMAIN 3 Building health literacy through training**



## HEALTH LITERACY POLICY STATEMENT

**Wentworth Healthcare is committed to improving health and wellbeing for the people in our community, whilst recognising and supporting the importance and value of health literacy as an underpinning enabler.**

Wentworth Healthcare's strategic vision, mission and values are central to driving the development of health literacy to support people's ability to understand information about their health and how they use that information to make decisions about healthcare, including actions to support their health in everyday life.<sup>1</sup>

Wentworth Healthcare is committed to increasing health literacy in our community because health literacy can:

- improve people's health and quality of life physically, mentally, socially, and culturally
- empower people to manage and improve their health
- support the prevention and management of chronic conditions
- help to reduce costs to the health system and consumers.

To promote health literacy and reduce barriers within our communities we will:

- embed health literacy strategies within our core activities
- encourage health consumer information is easy to comprehend in order to support people to understand more about their health conditions and the actions to manage them
- ensure the services we commission build the health literacy of the consumers
- develop the skills of health workers within our networks to improve communication with consumers.

The actions we will take have been developed in recognition that Wentworth Healthcare are in a position to:

- play a leadership role in the region's health literacy development with primary care
- empower our stakeholders with tools and strategies for increasing health literacy
- encourage our commissioned services to use health literacy as a tool to boost positive health outcomes for their consumers and target communities
- support our delivered services to use health literacy as a tool to boost positive health outcomes for consumers of our services.

## HEALTH LITERACY: Vision, Purpose and Scope

<b>VISION</b>	People in the Nepean Blue Mountains region receive information and advice about their health care that is easy to understand and will assist them to make informed decisions.
<b>PURPOSE</b>	To ensure an understanding and accountability for health literacy is available in all programs and services delivered and / or commissioned through Wentworth Healthcare.
<b>SCOPE</b>	This Framework applies to all Wentworth Healthcare staff, Board, Committees, Clinical Councils, delivered services, commissioned services and the initiatives that support and develop primary care.

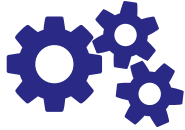
**DELIVERED SERVICES** Wentworth Healthcare will ensure that consumers who directly receive services experience high quality, effective person-centered care, through a workforce that is skilled in supporting the health literacy needs and informed decision making of consumers.

**COMMISSIONED SERVICES** Wentworth Healthcare will articulate health literacy requirements required from our commissioned service providers. Where required, support will be provided to services to ensure health literacy is incorporated into the design and planning of services.

**PRIMARY CARE SUPPORT & DEVELOPMENT** Wentworth Healthcare's role with the primary healthcare workforce is to encourage the delivery of health information, both written and verbal, that is easy to understand and supports and empowers consumers in managing their health.

## KEY ENABLERS

Wentworth Healthcare will be enabled to implement the Health Literacy Framework through our:



**Engagement** with consumers and stakeholders being pivotal with supporting the design and development and in future implementation.



**Leadership** authorising the Health Literacy Framework to be embedded across the Organisation.



**Governance** monitoring of the systems and processes in place that support implementation of the Framework.



**Capability** development with stakeholders through the provision of resources and training to build skills and knowledge.



**Funding** to explore support for sustainability and scalability.



**Partnerships** across organisations and stakeholders that allow for information sharing, collaborative learning, and enhanced approaches.





## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The successful implementation of the Health Literacy Framework involves all levels of the Wentworth Healthcare organisation and its stakeholders. Key responsibilities apply as:

▶ **The Wentworth Healthcare Board** has a leadership role as health literacy champions that demonstrate commitment through their interactions with the CEO, Executive, Senior Management and Staff. Actions to embed health literacy across organisations are embedded into the organisational systems and processes to drive stakeholder engagement and in the design, development, and delivery of services.

▶ **The Community Advisory Committee** spearheads the development of this Framework through its advocacy to prioritise health literacy as a key outcome. The committee will continue to drive implementation, and hold to account the Organisation's health literacy vision.

▶ **The CEO, Executive and Senior Management Team** have a responsibility to provide oversight for the systems and processes within the Organisation that supports the implementation of health literacy. Evaluating both delivered and commissioned services will also incorporate health literacy compliance. The actions and decisions of the CEO, Executive and Senior Managers in relation to health literacy are informed and supported by the 'Community Advisory Committee'.

▶ **Executive and Senior Managers** will actively engage staff in the delivery of the Health Literacy Action Plan and champion health literacy's integration into Wentworth Healthcare's business as usual. They will operationalise plans which include activities to boost health literacy through the services and programs delivered by the Organisation.

▶ **The Program Managers and their Teams** are responsible for understanding, utilising, and implementing the Wentworth Healthcare Health Literacy systems and processes and for overseeing day-to-day implementation in their respective program areas of responsibility including contracted and delivered services. This includes pre-commissioning due diligence for health literacy; implementing proactive health literacy improvement initiatives; and identifying capacity-building opportunities with health literacy.

▶ **Service providers including commissioned organisations and clinicians** are expected to, where appropriate, include activities aimed at developing strategies to simplify the health literacy environment for their consumers and producing measurable health literacy outcomes. Commissioned services will be provided with standard health literacy essential criterion by Wentworth Healthcare.

▶ **Consumers, carers and community members** are involved in implementation through meaningful engagement with Wentworth Healthcare. This may include co-designing the content and delivery of consumer health information and contributing towards the development of systems that will support the implementation of health literacy.



## FRAMEWORK BACKGROUND

Research shows that approximately 60% of Australians have low health literacy. People with low health literacy are 1.5 to 3 times more likely to have poorer health outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Health literacy is important because it empowers consumers to make informed decisions about their health. An individual's understanding of health information is key to health literacy. Accessible health information responds to the needs of everyone and can make a real difference to the health of people in our communities – including the most vulnerable. It is important to consider that, while health and medical information may be part of our everyday working lives, it can be complex and difficult to understand. Comprehension is not just impacted by complexity but also by the fact that over 50% of Australians 'have a reading comprehension age of below Year 8.'<sup>1</sup>

Health literate organisations make information easy for people to navigate, understand, and to then use information and services to take care of their health.<sup>2</sup> The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC) defines health literacy as follows:

*Health literacy is about how people understand information about health and health care, and how they apply that information to their lives, use it to make decisions and act on it. Health literacy is important because it shapes people's health and the safety and quality of health care.<sup>3</sup>*

Under this definition the ACSQHC further breaks health literacy down into two areas;

**1 INDIVIDUAL HEALTH LITERACY:** people's capacity and motivation to assess and use information to make informed decisions about their health and health care.

**2 HEALTH LITERACY ENVIRONMENT:** all areas of the health system (from policies, physical space, people, relationships and more) that influence people's access to health services and information.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, *Ten Attributes of Health Literate Health Care Organizations* serve as an important guide for organisations wanting to transform themselves to meet health literacy goals that move beyond a project-based improvement mindset to developing broader systems and processes that permeate the organisation and are integral to all operations.<sup>2</sup>

# Wentworth Healthcare is committed to increasing health literacy in our community

• help to **reduce costs** to the health system and consumers

## DOMAIN 1 – ACCESSIBLE HEALTH INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS

- Develop information in consultation with consumers to ensure it is easy to understand and culturally appropriate
- Consumer-facing health information is useful and accessible to all people

## DOMAIN 3 – BUILDING HEALTH LITERACY CAPACITY THROUGH TRAINING AND INFORMATION

- Health professionals develop the skills needed to support increased health literacy of consumers
- Increase awareness around the importance of health literacy for Wentworth Healthcare staff



## DOMAIN 2 – EMBEDDING HEALTH LITERACY INTO SYSTEMS AT ALL LEVELS

- Health literacy is an integrated part of Wentworth Healthcare's business as usual
- Policies and systems that encourage health literacy
- Evaluate the Health Literacy Framework to guide improvement

Improve people's **health and quality** of life

empower people to manage and improve their health

support prevention and management of **chronic conditions**



## HEALTH LITERACY DOMAIN 1

### ACCESSIBLE HEALTH INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS

**Consumer-facing health information is useful and accessible to people with varying levels of health literacy.**

**Health information must be useful and accessible to people with varying levels of health literacy** – Following a systematic approach to the development of health information can increase its accessibility and enhance the ability of its content to boost health literacy.

**Tailor the content and delivery method of health information to the consumers you want to target** – Accessibility of health information for the intended audience is vital. Authors should consider reading age, language and how the culture of consumers impacts on the way they conceptualise health.

**Work with consumers and the community to co-design health information and delivery methods** – Co-designing the content and delivery method of health information with consumers can be an effective way to reduce health literacy barriers – especially for vulnerable consumers such as older people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Indigenous Peoples.<sup>4</sup>

**Ensure comprehension** – Health literacy relies on a person's ability to understand, assess and use health information. Therefore, comprehension is a key concept in building health literacy.<sup>5</sup> Adopting consistent methods for ensuring comprehension is important because health literacy is fluid and can vary according to context and subject matter.<sup>6</sup>

**Support people to navigate the health system** – The health system's complexity can be a barrier to positive health outcomes.<sup>7</sup> Supporting people to navigate the system by communicating in ways that consumers can understand is encouraged.<sup>1</sup> This principle also relates to the navigation of physical locations of health services<sup>3</sup>. In doing so, this will help make health services and information about them accessible and useable for consumers.

## HEALTH LITERACY DOMAIN 2

### EMBEDDING HEALTH LITERACY INTO SYSTEMS AT ALL LEVELS

**Health literacy is an integrated part of Wentworth Healthcare's business as usual.**

**Play a health literacy leadership role** – *The National Statement on Health Literacy* recommends that organisations that support healthcare providers should play a leadership and coordination role in regard to health literacy.<sup>6</sup>

When health literacy goals are closely aligned with the organisation's vision, goals, and business imperatives it becomes instrumental to achieving important organisational priorities and is viewed as a means to an end, or integrated, rather than another separate thing to do.<sup>2</sup>

The NSW Health Clinical Excellence Commission recommends that actions to embed health literacy across organisations should be driven from the top by senior executives, working in partnership with consumer and clinical governance committees.<sup>1</sup> This supports effective collaborations between Wentworth Healthcare and the Local Health District in furthering joint initiatives that support health literacy.

**Create a health literacy framework** – The development of health literacy frameworks aligns with calls from the ACSQHC<sup>6</sup> for a coordinated and collaborative approach to health literacy. Health literacy frameworks also communicate to internal and external stakeholders that health literacy is an important priority for an organisation. In addition, staff and stakeholders will need to be provided the adequate support in implementing the Framework within their scope of work.

**Evaluate and use evidence to guide improvement** – As an organisation sets its goal of becoming health literate, it replaces fragmented quality improvement activities with a systematic and comprehensive approach that encompasses evaluating and monitoring the impact of health literacy strategies and their component parts to ensure effectiveness to support continuous improvement.<sup>1</sup>

## HEALTH LITERACY DOMAIN 3

### BUILDING HEALTH LITERACY CAPACITY THROUGH TRAINING AND INFORMATION

**Increased staff and stakeholder's awareness of the importance of health literacy, and their ability to work in ways that increases consumer health literacy, contributes to better health outcomes in our communities.**

**Universal Awareness and training** – increasing awareness and building capacity of staff within Wentworth Healthcare with health literacy is critical to enabling health literacy principles to be imparted to stakeholders, commissioned service providers, and delivered services providers. Training staff on health literacy and the effective techniques to develop and deliver health information will support consumers to increase their own health literacy and gain associated benefits.<sup>6</sup>

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