Existing policies and strategies and their effectiveness for improving health literacy at national, regional and organizational levels in the WHO European Region

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*What is the evidence on existing policies and linked activities and their effectiveness for improving health literacy at national, regional and organizational levels in the WHO European Region?*

Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2018 (Health Evidence Network (HEN) synthesis report 57).

The Health Evidence Network

• Summarizes the best available evidence for decision-making;
• Peer-reviewed, professionally written responses that are relevant, ready-to-use and evidence-informed;
• An official WHO source for evidence – now listed in PubMed;
• 74 reports published to date
• Received ‘highly commended’ in BMA Book Awards 2017.
The problem

- Based on the European Health Literacy Survey (HLS-EU, 2011) in eight EU countries:
  - 47% of adults have sub-optimal health literacy, with 12% of people at the lowest skills level
  - A wide variation in health literacy between the countries surveyed\(^1\)
  - Low health literacy is associated with lower health and more illness\(^1\)
  - Low health literacy has a social gradient; poses particular issues for socio-economically disadvantaged and marginalized groups

- Health literacy identified as being critical to delivery of the Health 2020 targets\(^2\)

The approach

• The evidence synthesis used clear definitions of policy and health literacy, and clear inclusion and exclusion criteria.

• Policies were identified through
  – A rigorous search of peer-reviewed literature using a pre-defined search strategy
  – An internet search and secondary reference searching for ‘grey’ literature and
  – A web-based internet enquiry involving health literacy experts.
Health literacy is a balance between the skills of the individual / family / community and the environment in which they live.

*Parker R. 2009.*
Individual, family community capacities

Health Literacy

System demands and complexity
The approach

- A new health literacy policy framework was developed

- Evidence of impact of the policies was identified
Member States in the WHO European Region with health literacy policies

- Countries in which health literacy policies were identified: 19 (36%)
- Countries involved in the expert enquiry where no policy evidence was identified
- Countries not involved in the expert enquiry where no policy evidence was identified
Some examples

- Building health literacy in schools
- Building skills in migrant groups
- Information prescription service
- Digital / e-health
- Organisations
- Media
- Employment
- Lived environment
- Education through the life-course
- System / legislative
- Communities
- Individuals
- Health Services
Building health literacy through the school curriculum: Finland

Aims to build health literacy in Finnish pupils throughout their school lives

Outcomes:
Evaluation has shown a satisfactory level of student development of health literacy

All students in the Finnish school system

Helsinki: Board of Education; 2013
Building health literacy in migrant groups: **Sweden**

Newly arrived migrant women

Culturally sensitive sexual health training

Outcomes:
Increased:
- knowledge and language;
- confidence to raise and discuss;
- awareness of sexual and reproductive rights; and
- empowerment.

Information prescriptions: **Israel**

**Patients with low health literacy**

**Information prescription service**

**Outcomes:**
- High patient satisfaction
- Improved adherence to medication regimens
The approach

- A new health literacy policy framework was developed

- Evidence of impact of the policies was identified
Thank you!

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