Health Literacy
What you need to know

Definition
Health literacy is the capacity to make sound health decisions in the context of every day life – at home, in the community, at the workplace, in the health-care system, in the market place, and in the political arena.

Health literacy in Europe — a few facts
6 out of 10 Europeans have used the internet to retrieve health information.

Health literacy varies between countries.

Even people with advanced education and reading skills can face health literacy challenges.

Vulnerable groups include:
- elderly people with low education
- people with low income

Why is health literacy important?
Low health literacy makes it difficult for you ...

- understand doctor’s advice
- read a package leaflet with information about the medicine
- follow a vaccination chart
- maintain a healthy lifestyle
- fill out complex forms
- find the right treatment

Low health literacy is a cause for...

- Unnecessary hospital visits
- Poor health outcomes including early death
- Inefficient health care spending

Promoting health literacy requires a multi-stakeholder approach

What needs to happen next:
1. Develop a European strategy on Health Literacy
2. Set defined health targets for improvement on health literacy levels across Europe
3. Develop a monitoring process to evaluate health literacy levels across Europe

References:
Ref. 4: See Sorensen K et al. (2015), Health literacy in Europe: comparative results of the European health literacy survey (HLS-EU); Eur J Public Health. 25(6):1053-8

This infographic has been created by the Health Literacy Coalition (European Patients’ Forum (EPF), Health Literacy Europe, MSD Europe Inc., Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) and University of Maastricht) and is intended for use by policy makers within the European Union.