



Our Health Literacy commitment and approach

Introduction

This document outlines Wessex Cancer Alliance's (WCA) commitment and approach to becoming a Health Literate Organisation. We believe this will help more patients, care-givers and members of the public to benefit from the work we do.

WCA will source and share training, support, and resources to enable us to be a Health Literate Organisation. We will consider the health literacy levels of the people who:

- we communicate with verbally
- access information we produce in all formats and ...
- use the services we design, deliver, and improve.

This should mean our communications get better and better. We will encourage those we work with to take a health literacy approach too.

Why do we need to do this

In the UK ...

- More than 4 in 10 adults find it difficult to understand health information written for the public
- 7.1 million adults read at, or below, the level of an average 9 year old
- More than 6 in 10 adults struggle with health information that includes numbers and statistics
- Up to 1 million people cannot speak English well or at all
- Men and older people are likely to have lower levels of health literacy

If we don't address health literacy we risk ...

- More health inequality
- Less ability to self-care¹
- More preventable ill health and death
- Less trust in healthcare professionals
- General negativity towards health and healthcare.

¹ People with low levels of health literacy are three times more likely to be admitted to hospital. They may also experience higher levels of depression.



What we will do

As a Health Literate Organisation, we will:

- Increase staff awareness of the impacts of lower levels of health literacy
- Ensure managers explain our 'Health Literacy commitment' and approach to new employees
- Provide health literacy training and development opportunities to WCA's team
- Provide training and support on effective communication
- Make sure WCA colleagues use everyday language when speaking to patients, caregivers, the public, as well as the community and voluntary sector partners we work with
- Encourage WCA colleagues to use techniques such as Teach Back, and Chunk and Check, when speaking with patients, caregivers and the public about our work
- Ensure that new written information we produce uses health literacy good practice and has been user tested through our 'Reader Panel'
- Review existing public facing information with people to test out whether they understand it
- Commit to stocking information and resources which are suitable for all levels of health literacy, including those who want more comprehensive information as well as those who require simpler ones
- Advocate for greater health literacy awareness and encourage our partners to take a similar approach
- Ensure that we report on progress with this commitment every 6 months to our Managing Director.

Resources to support some of the activities are provided in Appendix A.



How will we know we are meeting our commitment

We will check the written information we produce for patients, caregivers and the public to test how well it meets health literacy standards.

We will ask for feedback from patients, caregivers and the public, as well as our partners, on the way we communicate with them. We will use learning from any relevant complaints to inform what we do. This feedback will be used to improve what we do.

Who is responsible for this commitment

Our Managing Director will make sure all WCA colleagues are aware of and familiar with this commitment and approach.

WCA colleagues will make sure they understand and implement this commitment and encourage anyone they are working with to do the same.

For further information about this commitment

Contact a member of WCA's Involvement and Inequalities Team or Communications Team (Emma, Sue, Jemma or Keith).



Appendix A: Further resources

Health literacy good practice principles

- Write for a reading age of 9-11 years old
- Use plain language
- Keep sentences short – between 10 to 15 words
- Use clear subheadings
- Explain technical terms and use them consistently across different communications (letters, signage, websites, videos etc)
- Use active verbs and avoid speaking in the third person
- Use pictures to explain the words
- Use readability tools (see below)
- Involve and get feedback from people who use your information

Readability Tools

[NHS Document Readability Tool \(newcastlelse.github.io\)](https://newcastlelse.github.io)

[Hemingway Editor \(hemingwayapp.com\)](https://hemingwayapp.com)

[SMOG Readability Calculator - SMOG Index \(charactercalculator.com\)](https://charactercalculator.com)

Training

[E-Learning for Health Online Health Literacy Training](#) – a 30 minute introduction to health literacy, why it is important and the core techniques that can be used to improve health literacy. (WCA's ODS number is N46 when signing up to E-Learning for Health)

Other resources

Health Education England's [Health-literacy-how-to-guide.pdf](#)
[Patient Information Forum Health Literacy resources, including a checklist](#)

NHS England has commissioned a [health literacy geodata tool](#) that provides a percentage estimate of low health literacy among local health authority populations.