



Embedding health literacy within HealthWest's activities

This position statement outlines HealthWest Partnership's commitment to being a health literate organisation and to responding to health literacy needs in the western region of Melbourne. HealthWest has identified health literacy as a key strategic priority that is closely related to *community participation*, another strategic priority.

What is health literacy?

Health literacy is the ability of individuals and groups to access, understand and use health-related information in ways which promote and maintain good health.

Why is health literacy a priority?

Almost sixty per cent of Australian adults do not have adequate health literacy to meet the demands of everyday life¹. Many factors associated with low health literacy are evident in the western metropolitan region, including low education, culturally diverse backgrounds, low socioeconomic status and an ageing population^{2,3}.

HealthWest recognises that health literacy can be improved at the individual, organisational and population level. An effective health literacy response should emphasise the ability of all organisations to communicate and provide health-related information in ways that are relevant, accessible and appropriate. We aim to partner with community to respond to low health literacy, supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups rather than further isolating them.

What is HealthWest doing?

HealthWest is committed to embedding health literacy within our organisation. We will adhere to health literacy principles in our policies, activities and communications. This will enable us to partner more effectively with our community and to model good practice to our partner organisations.

HealthWest is a strong advocate for health literacy among our members, encouraging health literacy principles to be adopted and embedded at all levels of an organisation. HealthWest is leading a coordinated, regional approach to health literacy in Melbourne's west. We are providing leadership, training and resources to build the capacity of organisations to respond to the health literacy needs of consumers and communities.

HealthWest will involve community at all levels of this work. We will also build the capacity of communities to actively participate in their own health, while influencing health-related decision making within health organisations and the public arena.

Endorsed by the HealthWest Partnership Board

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¹ Australia Bureau of Statistics 2006, *Health Literacy, Australia, 2006*, cat. no. 4233.0, ABS, Canberra.

² Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care 2014, *Health literacy: Taking action to improve safety and quality*, ACSQHC, Sydney.

³ Western Melbourne Regional Development Australia Committee 2015, *WMRDA Regional Plan 2013-2015*, http://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/196153/Regional-Plan-WMRDA-Feb-15-1.pdf