

Health Literacy: Taking Action

Erica Ison

Expert Adviser to World Health
Organization (WHO) European Network
of Healthy Cities

WHO Definition of health literacy

“linked to literacy and entails people’s knowledge, motivation and competencies to access, understand, appraise and apply health information in order to make judgements and take decisions in everyday life concerning health care, disease prevention and health promotion to maintain or improve quality of life during the life course”

Developing a common understanding of health literacy

- **Definitions exist in the published literature but what do we mean when we talk about health literacy?**
- **In practice, what are the components or elements that make up health literacy?**
- **How do we create a common understanding to ensure we mean the same thing when we talk about health literacy and when we work to improve health literacy?**

What is involved in improving health literacy?

- **The issues range across the spectrum of health-related activities from Health Promotion through to Disease Prevention to Health Care**
- **Identifying the fundamental skills needed for individuals, communities, and service providers**
- **Identifying the information and other needs of different groups of people**
- **Identifying the information and other needs across the life course**
- **Identifying the responsibilities of service providers in the health and other sectors**

Integrating activities to improve health literacy

- **There are already programmes and other activities going on in Belfast to improve health literacy**
- **What else needs to be done?**
- **What can we learn from elsewhere?**
- **How do we coordinate and integrate these activities?**
- **Which activities should we plan for the short term, mid term and long term?**

What resources are needed to improve health literacy?

- **What resources – organisations involved, personnel, information and other materials, financing – are already available?**
- **What resources are needed over and above those already being utilised?**
- **How can we mobilise the resources needed?**