

Spotlight Series

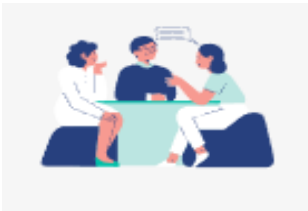
Issue 002/2024

Call for a National Health Literacy Initiative

Introduction

The Patient Safety Together *Spotlight Series* highlights different patient safety initiatives, examples of local shared learning or patient safety content that may impact the wider healthcare audience in Ireland.

In this instalment we shine a spotlight on the national health literacy initiative spear-headed by Patients for Patient Safety Ireland (PfPSI). In January 2024 PfPSI launched a major National Health Literacy Initiative with an [open letter](#) to the Ministers for Health, Education, Further and Higher Education and Minister of State for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.



The initiative calls for a **joined-up national approach to health literacy to empower everybody in Ireland with the knowledge, skills and confidence to be active partners and advocates for their own care** – an integrated approach across healthcare, education and in our communities to enable, encourage and educate people to make informed choices about their own health and have a voice in their own care.

This national initiative is supported by the largest patient advocacy groups, the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua) and the International Health Literacy Alliance.

The initiative is built on national and internationally recognised resources and best practices including from the WHO, Institute of Healthcare Improvement (IHI) and National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). PfPSI invite engagement from healthcare professionals who can provide input and feedback.

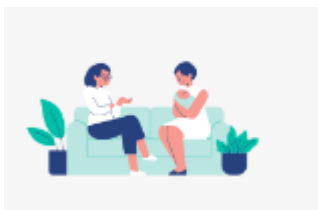
Is Health Literacy Important?

Low levels of health literacy have serious implications for the health of every person in Ireland, and makes health literacy a key component in delivering a quality service that has patient safety at its core. Research by NALA¹, shows that patients who understand health information:

- are better informed about their health
- have more effective consultations with their health care provider
- are better informed about the medicines they are prescribed
- have improved health outcomes
- reduce the burden on the health service



Health literacy is a life skill that should be taught to prepare people for;



1. Healthcare conversations and decisions
2. Making informed choices
3. Safeguarding good health
4. All things health and wellness related

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Page 1 | 2



PfPSI welcomes the investment in existing health literacy-related initiatives in schools (e.g. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)), communities (e.g. Healthy Counties and Cities) and within the health service (e.g. [Make Every Contact Count](#)). PfPSI are now calling for all initiatives to be reviewed in order to develop a joined-up approach, mirrored within the health service and practised by all healthcare professionals. Key areas to include would be how to:

- access healthcare
- navigate the services
- empower people with simple questions to ask healthcare professionals
- source credible, reliable sources of health information online
- locate advocacy groups who provide condition-specific education
- raise concerns and complaints



A national approach to health literacy would help empower everybody in Ireland with the knowledge, skills and confidence to be active partners and advocates for their own care. An integrated approach across healthcare, education and in our communities would enable, encourage and educate people to make informed choices about their own health and have a voice in their own healthcare.

About Patients for Patient Safety Ireland



Patients for Patient Safety Ireland members have been working in collaboration and partnership with the health service since it was formed eleven years ago under the WHO Patients for Patient Safety programme. Its goals, defined by the WHO, are to:

- facilitate efforts to engage and empower patients, families and communities to play an active role and be advocates for their own care
- bring the voices of patients and people to the forefront of health care
- create an enabling environment for partnerships between patients, families, communities and health professionals

Supporting Information

1. [NALA Health Literacy in Ireland Report](#) (2012)
2. [Good Health Literacy is key for good health](#) (2019)
3. The Health Literacy Place - [Tools and Resources](#) for people and healthcare professionals
4. [Majority of patients want to be treated as partner in their healthcare](#) – Medical Council research (2023)
5. [International Report on the Methodology, Results, and Recommendations of the European Health Literacy Population Survey 2019-2021 \(HLS19\) of M-POHL](#) (Page 107 for the summary)
6. <https://irishchronicle.com/politics/watt-system-unable-to-treat-increasing-patient-numbers/>

How can I get further information?



Patients for Patient Safety Ireland seeks input and engagement from healthcare professionals.

- Email health-literacy@patientsforpatientsafety.ie or learn more about PfPSI at <https://patientsforpatientsafety.ie/>
- X: @PFPS_Ireland
- LinkedIn: Patients for Patient Safety Ireland



The Spotlight Series is available on the *Patient Safety Together* website www.hse.ie/pst

If you would like to discuss a potential Spotlight Series instalment please contact patientsafetytogether@hse.ie

