

GUIDE TO HEALTH LITERACY

Contributing to trust building and Equitable access to healthcare

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



BACKGROUND

Health literacy makes a fundamentally important contribution to safeguarding the human rights principle of equitable access to healthcare, especially when existing healthcare resources are less accessible to certain populations due to their circumstances. On this basis, in the framework of its Strategic Action Plan, the Steering Committee for Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health (CDBIO) decided to prepare a guide to health literacy for equitable access to health care in order to empower all people, including those in vulnerable situations, to be more effective advocates in accessing healthcare services and in making appropriate decisions regarding their health.



TARGET AUDIENCE

The guide is intended for decision-makers, health professionals and health providers to help them identify the needs of individuals in accessing healthcare, and to undertake corresponding responsibilities in healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion.



ACCESS AND ORIGINS OF THE GUIDE

The guide is freely available on the Council of Europe bioethics website at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bioethics/guidetohealthliteracy>. It is available in English and French and is being translated into a number of other languages.



AIM

With focus on the health literacy needs of individuals and the corresponding responsibilities of health systems, the guide aims to be an informative online resource, illustrated by good practices and tools. It contributes to building trust and equitable access to healthcare by suggesting ways in which decision-makers and health providers can implement health literacy at various individual, organisational, and political levels.



GUIDE OUTLINE

To support the development of more accessible and inclusive health systems, the guide comprises five actionable components for health systems and users of health systems, namely: access to valid health information; access to appropriate care; communication between individuals, health professionals and health authorities; shared decision-making regarding treatments and care; access to digital spaces to understand and use health services. It covers ways to improve health literacy policy, research and practice, and refers to collaboration with health literacy communities.

