ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

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.

Improving the health literacy of people and systems has the potential to improve the safety and quality of health care, reduce disparities in health outcomes thereby promoting more prosperous and equitable societies. It is an asset for healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion. It generates a return on social and economic investments which helps to save time, costs, and lives.

With a view to strengthening and developing health literacy, decision-makers, health professionals and health providers in Council of Europe member states are invited to:

▶ Support users of health systems, including their caregivers and representatives of associations, to access valid health information and appropriate care, as well as to actively participate in shared decision making with health professionals and health authorities regarding treatment and care.

▶ Promote access to digital spaces to understand and thereby to use health services, so that individuals may fully benefit from them.

▶ Mobilise policy makers and health authorities to advance health literacy in collaboration with non-state stakeholders, such as academia, industry, and NGOs.

▶ Conduct health literacy needs assessments at various levels. Decision-makers and health providers are encouraged to deploy an evidence-based approach to health literacy.

▶ Increase health literacy capacity, such as in the design of health systems, workforce and leadership training and education, awareness raising of health literacy as a job opportunity and requirement, and the development of health literacy as a professional skill.

BACKGROUND

Health literacy entails people's knowledge, motivation, and competencies to access, understand, appraise, and apply health information to make judgements and decisions in everyday life concerning healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion, for themselves and those around them.

As a tool to empower all people, including those in vulnerable situations, to be more effective advocates in accessing healthcare services, the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health (CDBIO) prepared a Guide to health literacy.

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. It covers ways to improve health literacy policy, research and practice, and refers to collaboration with health literacy communities.

ACCESS TO THE GUIDE

The guide is freely available on the Council of Europe bioethics website at: https://www.coe.int/en/web/bioethics/guide-to-health-literacy. It is available in English and French as well as several other languages.

AIM

With focus on the 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, to promote health literacy by suggesting ways in which decision-makers and health providers can act at various individual, organisational, and political levels.

GUIDE OUTLINE

The guide comprises five actionable components of health literacy 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

ACCESS THE GUIDE

QR CODE