

**Health Literacy workshop Report**  
**Wednesday 10 December 2014**  
**The Mount Business and Conference Centre**

**Introduction:**

WHO defines health literacy as 'linked to literacy and entails people's knowledge, motivation and competences 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' (Health Literacy: The Solid Facts, WHO Europe 2013).<sup>1</sup> The benefits of improved health literacy are felt across society and between government departments, highlighted within the Northern Ireland Executive's *Making Life Better*<sup>2</sup> strategy and through a number of initiatives occurring at local and regional level. Health Literacy was identified by stakeholders as a core theme in Belfast's successful application for designation as a member of the World Health Organization (WHO) European Healthy Cities Network Phase VI (2014-2018).

In preparation for taking forward a programme of work on health literacy, a working group was established with key partners to identify priorities for health literacy in Belfast, supported by Belfast Healthy Cities. A background paper was produced outlining the WHO definition of health literacy, evidence on the impact of health literacy on health and existing tools for measuring health literacy. A workshop was held to explore and develop a common understanding of health literacy within the context of Belfast. The workshop presented models of practice locally and from across the UK and Ireland. Through small group discussion participants proposed suggestions for a way forward with partners and stakeholders in Belfast.

This paper provides a report on the workshop, and presents a basis for developing a work programme on health literacy for 2015-16 onwards.

**Health Literacy workshop 10 December 2014: Presentations**

The workshop was chaired by Joan Devlin, Chief Executive of Belfast Healthy Cities. The opening address was given by Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland Dr Michael McBride who highlighted the importance of health literacy within *Making Life Better* needing a whole of government and whole of society approach. Describing health literacy as a key determinant of equity, Dr McBride acknowledged there are

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization (2013) *Health Literacy: The Solid Facts, WHO Europe*  
[http://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/190655/e96854.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/190655/e96854.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> DHSSPS (2013) *Making Life Better - A Whole System Framework for Public Health 2013-2023*  
<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/making-life-better>

opportunities to develop it within schools, workplaces and social networks to increase knowledge, information, communication and access to services.

Speaker presentations are available at <http://www.belfasthealthycities.com/health-literacy-healthy-city-making-case-and-taking-action>

The following presentations were delivered, leading to small group discussions.

- Making it Easy, Health Literacy in Scotland: *Christine Hoy, Primary Care Development Manager, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland*

Scotland's approach included raising the awareness and capacity of health professionals on health literacy. The work is guided by *Making it Easy, the National Health Literacy Action Plan for Scotland*.<sup>3</sup> Other integral aspects of the action plan included promoting the development and spread of existing and new health literacy tools, innovations and technologies. Improving access to tools and resources and the health literacy needs at transitions of care were also developed.

- Health Literacy in Ireland: *Fergus Dolan, Literacies Development Worker, National Adult Literacy Agency, Ireland*

*The Healthy Ireland framework (2013-2025)*<sup>4</sup> was developed for improved health and wellbeing and outlines a commitment to address and prioritise health literacy within future policy. A whole of government commitment is essential to realising the potential of health literacy. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) facilitates the health literacy advisory panel with representation from across sectors informing the action plan, developing capacity building and awareness, knowledge development and building partnership and co-operation.

- Health Literacy in the City: *Judy Kurth, Strategic Manager, Safer and Healthy Communities, Public Health, City of Stoke-on-Trent*

A baseline survey was conducted using the Newest Vital Sign (UK) to identify health literacy priorities in Stoke-on-Trent.<sup>5</sup> A participatory approach was used to inform action through an 'Ideas Exchange' event. The baseline report identified 49% of the population of Stoke-on-Trent as having inadequate health literacy and priority areas of work include early years, adult literacy, plain English and health champions.

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<sup>3</sup> The Scottish Government (2014) Making it Easy: A Health Literacy Action Plan for Scotland <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/06/9850>

<sup>4</sup> The Irish Government (2013) Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025 <http://health.gov.ie/healthy-ireland/>

<sup>5</sup> City of Stoke-on-Trent (2015) Health Literacy Exchange Event <http://www.stoke.gov.uk/ccm/content/social-care/health/health-literacy-ideas-exchange-event.en>

- Health literacy at a local level: *Glen McCrum, Fit & Well Officer, Fit for Life Centre, Greater Village Regeneration Trust*

A local perspective on work taking place in Belfast, the Fitness 8 project outlined information sharing techniques and partnership working. The programme recorded the impact on improved knowledge and understanding of health information for participants from the local community. The programme evaluation and outcomes for participants indicated an increase in health literacy. The programme will now be incorporated in the Northern Ireland curriculum for Key Stage 2 Personal Development and Mutual Understanding.

### **Workshop:**

The workshop was facilitated by Erica Ison, WHO Expert Adviser, who introduced the concept of health literacy in a WHO context and suggested all stakeholders have responsibility for health literacy including professionals, individuals and communities across the lifecourse. The facilitator also set the context for the small group discussion part of the workshop.

In order to establish the level of health literacy understanding and activity currently taking place in Belfast, questions were issued to participants prior to attending the workshop.

Participants were asked to identify:

- What current activity exists locally on health literacy?
- What does health literacy mean to you?

### **What current activity exists locally on health literacy?**

It is recognised that health literacy promotion does exist within a number of initiatives across the community and voluntary sector and statutory agencies, which may not always be recognised as health literacy. In order to establish the level of health literacy activity taking place locally, participants were asked to detail current or past activity. Health literacy was clearly identified by the Community Development Health Network in a number of their projects and in particular the Building Community Pharmacy Project. Belfast Health and Social Care Trust also promote health literacy in a number of their projects, without specifically using the term there is promotion of clear health messages.

### **What does health literacy mean to you?**

- Ability of an individual and communities to read, understand and process information in relation to health behaviours and use of health services.
- Ability, confidence and resources of individuals and communities to make informed decisions that will benefit their health and lead to better physical and mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

- Ability to identify health symptoms of unhealthy living and have the capacity to take appropriate action to change and take responsibility for health.
- Understanding the consequences of the inability to make healthy lifestyle choices.
- Being confident in literacy levels and skills.
- Producing information in a clear and simple format, with no jargon.
- Appropriate communication on health issues by professionals to ensure individuals understand their health status and what affects their health.
- Accessible information on all aspects of health and wellbeing that is relevant, up to date and easy to understand.

**The facilitated small group discussions explored the following questions:**

- How do we develop a common understanding of health literacy for people living in Belfast?
- What do we need to do to improve health literacy in Belfast?  
As part of the response to this question, consider priority areas for action and/or particular population groups who may require greater support.
- What resources are available to support the development of health literacy in Belfast? As part of the response to this question, consider the organisations and agencies that could be involved, the local groups, people and their skills, the material resources, sources of information, and sources of financial support.

**Key points from discussions:**

The facilitator identified words and phrases used by participants during the group discussion on health literacy in Belfast.

Ambition	Framework	Transition	Aims	Goal
Partnership	Action plan	Baseline	Trust	
Priorities	Access	Confidence	Exchange	Assets
Exchanges	Festivals	Building capacity	Adapt	
Mutual understanding		One small change	Pilot	

## **How do we develop a common understanding of health literacy for people living in Belfast?**

Discussion on this area of action identified a number of key elements/drivers viewed as important to develop a key understanding of health literacy.

- Clear communication:
  - Produce and communicate easily understood health messages.
  - Support action on health messages, taking into consideration individuals personal circumstances.
  - Increase access, understanding and application of information.
  - Provide a variety of formats to users to access/promote and reinforce messages.
  - Develop communication skills and empower people to be confident to make informed decisions.
  - Develop communication skills of health professionals to be opportunistic in targeting all individuals and communities to develop health literacy skills.
- Motivation of all stakeholders:
  - Provide increased education to motivate staff to be aware of health literacy issues. Health professionals to be aware of individuals 'Not in frame of mind to take part', work with patient/client until they are ready to engage in health promotion.
  - Build screening for health literacy into pre-assessment consultations between user and health care professionals.
  - Consider variety of methods, including motivational interviewing with users and health care professionals, to support delivery of clear information.
- Capacity building:
  - Provide capacity building and improve health literacy levels of professionals, providers of education/information, individuals, and communities.
  - Learning strategy and models for building capacity on health literacy must be integrated into existing work, rather than additional and stand alone.
  - Identify sources of information/support to share across communities and between the individual user and health professional. Health practitioners to provide clear messages and ensure communication is understood, for example, teach back method. Repeat appointments can be avoided if clear information is provided initially.
  - Health literacy implies understanding of health care professionals to respond appropriately when challenged by individual and also implies empowering local people to be confident to challenge professionals.
- Linking health literacy to other thematic areas of work:
  - Consider similar approaches taken elsewhere.
  - Health inequalities are strongly linked to health literacy.
  - Health literacy programmes require a partnership approach. In developing health literacy programmes, consider the impact of the educational and industrial background of Belfast.
  - Identify a baseline of health literacy to provide a basis for setting priorities in health literacy programme.

- Challenges:
  - English not first language.
  - Focus on one clear message or issue in developing a health literacy programme – evaluate information and make the right decision.

**What do we need to do to improve health literacy in Belfast?**

**As part of the response to this question, consider priority areas for action and/or particular population groups who may require greater support.**

Participants identified a number of short, medium and long term priorities for action to develop health literacy in Belfast.

- Short-term goals for health literacy:
  - Develop a baseline on health literacy to inform action plan, consider a life course approach and targeting groups within this.
  - Scope and map current programmes that contribute to health literacy.
  - Consider health literacy within professional development programmes with relevant professions. Include health literacy in every module for health professionals.
  
- Medium term goals for health literacy:
  - Using baseline to identify gaps and provide support for all ages, resulting in a health literate population.
  - Develop health literacy as an aspect of ongoing professional education/development.
  - Build partnerships in different settings eg. pharmacies and libraries, to promote health literacy.
  - Use online resources, media campaign, and variety of formats for message campaigns.
  - Use a tool like ALISS (A Local Information Service for Scotland) to map existing services, co-ordinating different activities in Northern Ireland.
  - Promote standardising methods of common/best practice in promoting health messages.
  - Encourage plain English language (simplyput.ie website).
  
- Long-term goals for health literacy:
  - Target education and professional sector to promote importance of health literacy and its impact on people and the use of health services.
  - Educate professionals to communicate using open questions, and use of technology to provide key messages where appropriate.
  - Educate public to encourage asking questions to professionals.

Priority groups identified during discussion: older people, pregnant women, lower socio economic groups, professionals, migrant population, young people, more multi-cultural Belfast, low literacy groups, low income families, long-term conditions, Black Minority Ethnic (BME) groups.

Proportional universalism: participants stressed the importance of targeting groups, whilst ensuring that the population in general have the opportunity to develop full health literacy skills.

**What resources are available to support the development of health literacy in Belfast? As part of the response to this question, consider the organisations and agencies that could be involved, the local groups, people and their skills, the material resources, sources of information, and sources of financial support.**

Financial resources:

Identify existing funding sources, health improvement consortium, Big Lottery, Health and Social Care research funding, Horizon 2020.

Organisations and sources of information:

- Making use of community leaders as drivers for successful health outcomes.
- Use and be aware of existing data including Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service, pharmacy, Community Development Health Network Building the Community-Pharmacy Project, Men's shed, women's groups, partnerships within Belfast, volunteers, Good Morning Service, Belfast City Council, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Education, Housing, Tenants Associations.
- Networking, partnerships, simplyput.ie, A Local Information Service for Scotland (ALISS) style database, build on what exists; community development, Community Development Health Network.
- Representation from education and Department for Employment and Learning on the working group.
- Ensure representation from education, industry, local government and community; government departments, disability groups.
- Promote a co-ordinated, integrated approach to the development of health literacy programmes.
- Belfast Healthy Cities co-ordinated think tank to bring forward programme as a result of priorities identified in workshop.

**Next Steps:**

- Be alert to health literacy already happening within classroom based ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) programmes. It is important that this learning is shared but also that the impact is being measured.
- It is important that case studies of good practice are showcased in order to raise awareness of health literacy amongst staff.
- Interested parties to be invited to attend next working group meeting to progress the health literacy agenda and ideas generated at the workshop.

## Health Literacy in a Healthy City: Making the Case and Taking Action



**Date:** Wednesday 10 December 2014, 12.15pm – 4.45pm

**Venue:** The Mount Business and Conference Centre, Belfast

Health Literacy is a core theme for Belfast as a member of the WHO Healthy Cities Network Phase VI (2014-2018). Health Literacy implies achievement of a level of knowledge, personal skills, and confidence to take action to improve personal and community health by changing personal lifestyles and living conditions. The benefits of improved health literacy are felt across society and between government departments, highlighted locally within the Northern Ireland Executive's Making Life Better strategy and through a number of initiatives occurring at local and regional level. This workshop will explore an understanding of Health Literacy within the context of Belfast, look at models of practice locally and across the UK and Ireland and agree a way forward with partners and stakeholders in Belfast.

### Programme:

- 12.15pm**      **Registration and light lunch**
- 1.00pm**      **Welcome:** *Chair: Joan Devlin, Chief Executive, Belfast Healthy Cities*
- 1.05pm**      **Opening address:** Health Literacy; An Equity Challenge. The Northern Ireland Response  
*Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer, DHSSPS*
- 1.15pm**      **Making it Easy, Health Literacy in Scotland**  
*Christine Hoy, Primary Care Development Manager, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland*
- 1.35pm**      **Health Literacy in Ireland,**  
*Fergus Dolan, Literacies Development Worker, National Adult Literacy Agency, Ireland*
- 1.50pm**      **Health Literacy in the City**  
*Judy Kurth, Strategic Manager Safer and Healthy Communities, Public Health, City of Stoke on Trent*
- 2.05pm**      **Health literacy at a local level**  
*Glen McCrum, Fit & Well Officer, Fit for Life Centre, Greater Village Regeneration Trust*
- 2.15pm**      **Tea / Coffee**
- 2.30pm**      **Health Literacy: Taking Action**  
*Erica Ison, WHO Expert Advisor*
- 2.45pm**      **Workshop - Developing health literacy in Belfast**  
*Small discussion groups*
- 4.15pm**      **Workshop feedback and next steps**  
*Erica Ison, WHO Expert Advisor*
- 4.45pm**      **Close**



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Ahern	Maura	Belfast Healthy Cities
Atkinson	Dolores	Belfast Health Development Unit
Barrett	Eimear	QUB
Briggs	Alison	Antrim Borough Council
Bryans	Alison	East Belfast Community Development Agency
Casson	Karen	Ulster University
Collins	Laura	East Belfast Integrated Care Partnership
Connolly	Jan	Ulster University
Crudden	Malachy	CCMS
Cullen	Bernadette	
Dawson	Karen	DHSSPS
Devlin	Shane	Belfast HSC Trust
Devlin	Joan	Belfast Healthy Cities
Dolan	Fergus	National Adult Literacy Agency
Downey	Gareth	Belfast City Council
Dunne	Laura	QUB
Fleck	Kate	Arthritis Care
Glackin	Dermot	West Belfast Partnership Board
Heaney	Brendan	Diabetes UK NI
Hoy	Christine	Health & Social Care Alliance
Humphries	Katie	RECALL Project
Ison	Erica	WHO Advisor
Kielt	Helen	Libraries NI
Kurth	Judy	City of Stoke-on-Trent
Lappin	Una	Belfast City Council
Long	Rachel	Belfast HSC Trust
Magee	Fidelma	DHSSPS
Maguire	Terry	Belfast Local Commissioning Group
Mair	Jacqueline	Ulster University
Martin	Una	Belfast HSC Trust
McBride	Michael	CMO
McBrinn	Jackie	Belfast Health Development Unit
McCusker	Anne	Belfast Healthy Cities
McDonald	Laura	Belfast Healthy Cities
McGettigan	Maresa	Cancer Focus NI
McGill	Deirdre	Dept for Employment and Learning
McIntyre	Diane	Public Health Agency
McManus	Margaret	Macmillian Support & Information Centre
McNally	Anthony	PSNI
Meekin	Sarah	Belfast HSC Trust
Meenan	Fiona	Belfast HSC Trust

Miller	Suzanne	Belfast Healthy Cities
Monaghan	Jonna	Belfast Healthy Cities
Mullan	Brian	Mater Hospital Community Forum
Nelson	John	Belfast City Council
O'Hagan	Mary	CDHN
Patterson	Claire	Belfast City Council
Power	Danny	Belfast Local Commissioning Group
Scott	Caroline	Belfast Healthy Cities
Shaw	Lindsay	Ulster University
Tallentire	Stephanie	DHSSPS
Thurston	Allen	QUB
Walsh	Ursula	Ulster University
Ward	Rachel	Dept for Employment and Learning
Watters	Fiona	Skills for Life Centre
Wylie	Linda	Public Health Agency