

Summary of this bulletin

A key resource for people interested in health literacy issues:

- ***Improving health literacy: what should—or could be on an Australian policy agenda?***

Presentation to Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra, by Dr Sophie Hill, 2008

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Improving health literacy: what should—or could—be on an Australian policy agenda?

Sophie Hill PhD, Co-ordinating Editor, Cochrane Consumers and Communication Review Group, La Trobe University, Melbourne, recently presented at the Department of Health and Ageing, on behalf of the Cochrane Policy Liaison Network. The Network is supported by the Australasian Cochrane Centre and the Department of Health and Ageing.

In the presentation Sophie intended to “create a space to think about health literacy... and to explore ideas for improving it...”. Sophie contemplated how and whether health literacy should be on a national agenda, how policy could be framed and the challenges around this. Sophie acknowledged key informants who contributed to the presentation, referenced key research sources, and drew on 2008 submissions to the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC).

With these sources in mind Sophie proposes three ways to think about health literacy:

1) Give health literacy a positive frame—it is about empowerment; navigating through life; seeking, finding, interpreting and understanding information; knowing what constitutes good advice and translating that into action.

Sophie suggests a broadening of the frame in Australia and argues for a policy focus on health literacy. She points to policy opportunities that exist within the NHHRC by highlighting some of the Commission’s key principles that have a direct link to health literacy eg. shared responsibility, equity, strengthening prevention and wellness, safety and quality, and public voice.

2) Have an approach that builds capacity—of individuals; for people to work better with each other; and for health systems and organisations to integrate concepts and strategies.

Health literacy cuts across policy boundaries; it links aspects of consumer experience across policy domains and programmes. Sophie asks: “What should be on the agenda?” “How could health literacy be built ... what might a conceptual frame look like?”

3) Build health system capacity for health literacy—Sophie analyses submissions to the NHHRC, applying a framework for differentiating approaches to consumer participation.

Strategies for health literacy within the submissions combine scientific approaches with democratic participation. Sophie uses the framework to recommend various strategies to promote health literacy.

To conclude, having a policy can be a driver, as is evidenced by the Victorian policy on consumer participation. Sophie recommends a national policy agenda for health literacy.

Download slide presentation:

www.latrobe.edu.au/cochrane/assets/downloads/HealthLiteracy_DOHA_2008slides.pdf

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www.latrobe.edu.au/cochrane/HKN/HKNBulletins.html

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