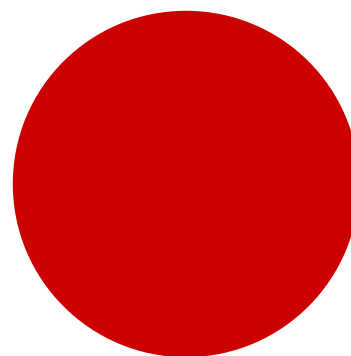


# Final report

## Executive summary (D17)

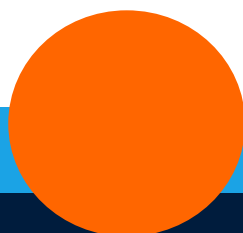
# The European Health Literacy Project (HLS-EU)

The HLS-EU Consortium 2012



# HLS • EU

The European Health Literacy Project 2009-2012



 Maastricht University



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National Institute  
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 Executive  
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Health and  
Consumers

## Final report; April 2012

### Executive summary of the European Health Literacy Project

The European Health Literacy Project (HLS-EU) is conducted by the HLS-EU Consortium including Maastricht University as lead partner and eight institutes and universities as associated partners from Austria, Bulgaria, Germany (NRW), Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain. More than 20 collaborating partners have followed the progress of the project, which took from 2009-2012.

### Objectives

The general objectives of the project include

- HLS-EU helps establish the issue of health literacy (HL) in Europe
- The project contributes to further development of HL, demonstrating its manifestation in various European regions and cultures
- The project discusses the overall social and political significance of HL
- The project documents ways HL is operationalized in various national contexts.

The specific objectives include

- Establish a network for health literacy as entry point for health literacy in Europe
- Adapt a model instrument for measuring health literacy in Europe
- Generate first-time data on HL in European countries, providing indicators for national and EU monitoring
- Comparative assessment of HL in European countries
- Create National Advisory Boards in countries participating in the survey and to document different valorisation strategies following national structures and priorities

There exist few instruments, little population-level data on health literacy, and no data on many competencies for health in most countries in Europe. Hence the project provides added value of comparability and knowledge transfer at both national and European levels.

### Outcomes of the project

The obligations and objectives outlined for the project were met to the fullest satisfaction. The Commission for Health and Consumers Mr. John Daili stated at the final conference, the European Health Literacy Conference, that the European Health Survey provided sound evidence on health literacy in Europe. 150 stakeholders from more than 20 countries took part in the discussions and valorated the results of the project, which was called a success by many of the speakers.

The achievements include three main outcomes:

- The network Health Literacy Europe, which is now a platform for health literacy in Europe was launched at the European Health Forum Gastein in 2010 and

endorsed by member of the European Parliament Mrs. Parvanova in a session organized by the HLS-EU Consortium.

- The European Health Literacy Survey took place in 2011 in eight countries using a model instrument developed by the HLS-EU Consortium. The tool is scientific grounded derived from a systematic review of definitions, concepts and existing tools. The result of the development process was an integration of findings into an adapted 'all inclusive' new definition, conceptual framework and a matrix to serve as basis for the questionnaire design. The questionnaire design involved also pre-testing and field-testing as well as dialogue and consultation with other health literacy experts from all over the world.
- The National Advisory Boards have been set up at national level in all participating countries using different organizational approaches depending on the national cultural, societal and political contexts. The boards serve as platform for action in terms of discussing the overall, the comparative and the national aspects of the results of the European Health Literacy Survey to ensure a fast and transparent dissemination to appropriate users of survey results.

### Final results of the European Health Literacy Survey

The first time data on health literacy in eight countries generated interesting and relevant results. Almost one in two, on average 47%, has risk of limited health literacy across the eight countries and the levels vary between the countries. In certain sub-groups of the populations there are higher risks, such as among elderly, among people with low levels of education, among people with low socio-economic status and among people considering having a bad health.

The survey has measured how people access, understand, appraise and apply information to make decisions in terms of health care, disease prevention and health promotion. The HLS-EU consortium has chosen a citizen empowerment approach when measuring health literacy in the general population which includes perspectives on how health literacy affects quality of life during the life course. It is illustrated in the HLS-EU definition of health literacy and the conceptual framework published in the scientific journal BMC Public Health January 2012. The design process and validation of the tool will also be published in due course after the project has terminated. The report on the results is available from [www.health-literacy.eu](http://www.health-literacy.eu)

### Wider impact of the outcomes of the HLS-EU project

The wider impact of the European Health Literacy Project did already show during the project period and it is expected to last through the sustainable structures provided by the project. The project results whether being the network, the survey or the national activities have boosted the awareness of health literacy among researchers, decision-makers, and professionals. The synergy of project activities and the final European Conference have ensured a continuous flow of output, which could be easily adopted by partners and stakeholders. The media coverage has been high at European and national levels in most cases and established organizations such as WHO Europe and ECDC have called on the HLS-EU consortium as advisers on health literacy on several occasions.

National HLS-EU consortium members have ensured the establishment of national platforms for actions involving a wide range of national stakeholders to engage in health literacy and to tackle the health literacy challenge made clear by the results of the European Health Literacy Survey. The health literacy gap needs specific attention by ensuring a higher degree of accessibility and readability of systems as well as strengthening the individual's competences, knowledge and motivation to act in terms of their own health to the benefit of themselves, their families and their communities.

The contribution to the health programme is clear since the actions are directly related to the paragraph on health literacy in the Health Strategy 2007-2013 and the outcomes provide information and knowledge to enhance citizen involvement and empowerment in terms of health as well as demanding a change in terms of health in all policies and a wider focus on how societies facilitate health in a more health literate way.

#### Conclusion and recommendations

The European Health Literacy Project has created a tipping point for health literacy in Europe by establishing health literacy on the European agenda and pushing awareness and action at national levels in countries involved in the project. The results of the European Health Literacy Survey showed that almost half of the people have risk of limited health literacy hence having difficulties in accessing, understanding, appraising and applying information to take decisions in terms of health. In certain groups the vulnerability is higher than 60%. Health Literacy Europe, the European wide network can act as spring board for future action.

The HLS-EU Consortium recommends that

- The health literacy gap is challenged by professionals and policy-makers in terms of allocation of resources and means
- The health systems and other relevant sectors recognize the importance of health literacy in terms of their readability and accessibility of services
- The health literacy is strengthened at personal levels through focus on enhancing life competencies at school, at work, at the market place and in the political arena
- The learning for well-being and health literacy is prioritized to enhance quality of life and linked to the social determinants of health
- The relevant stakeholders such as governments, the private sector, and the civil society make collaborative efforts to advance health literacy in Europe.