

3 Why is health literacy important? continued

3.4 What are the benefits of health literacy?

Health literacy is a complex concept, and it is not always obvious to consumers or people working in the health system what it means in practice or why it is important to address it. Table 1 summarises some of the benefits that may result from addressing health literacy for different people within the health system.

Table 1 Examples of potential benefits of addressing health literacy for individuals with different roles in the health system

Role	Addressing health literacy has the potential to:
Consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make it easier for me to know where to go, what to do and how to find what I need to improve my health and wellbeing and that of my family • help me to make better decisions about my health, wellbeing and health care and that of my family • make it easier for me to manage my own health care and the health care of my family, including maintaining treatment and medication regimens • help me to contribute more effectively to decision-making and action about healthcare information, provision, planning or evaluation
Healthcare providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help me to deliver health care that reflects the needs and preferences of my patients and their families, in a way that is easy to understand and act on • help me to work in partnership with my patients and their families so that they can take appropriate actions and make effective decisions for their health and health care • help me to change the way I provide health care to make it easier for patients to access, understand and use the information I provide • help me to reduce the risk of harm to my patients by improving interpersonal communication and information exchange
Health service managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help me to organise the way in which health care is delivered to make it easier for consumers to take appropriate actions and make effective decisions for their health and health care • help me to make it easier for consumers to find, and find their way in, my health service • help me to make it easier for consumers to access clear, focused and useable information about health and health care • help me to increase the likelihood of consumers engaging with my healthcare organisation to improve the safety and quality of my health services • help me to reduce the risk of harm to consumers by improving communication and information exchange

Role	Addressing health literacy has the potential to:
Health service executives and board members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help me to make sure that my health service understands and addresses consumer healthcare needs and preferences • help me to understand and address safety and quality issues that are of concern to consumers within the health service by actively encouraging consumers to be involved in decision-making • help me to improve the experience of consumers and healthcare outcomes by making sure the care that is delivered is what the consumer would choose • help me to make sure that the information the health service provides is effective and fit for purpose • help me to provide support and a conducive environment for partnerships within my health service • help me to be confident that consumers are providing informed consent
Policy makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help me to ensure that the health system is organised and that care is provided in a way that makes it easier for consumers to take appropriate actions and make effective decisions for their health and health care • help me to make it easier for consumers to access clear, focused and useable health information • help me to provide support and a conducive environment for partnerships between healthcare providers, healthcare organisations and consumers • increase the safety and quality, efficiency and effectiveness of health care by empowering consumers to be actively involved in decision-making