The National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy

Cynthia Baur, Ph.D.
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Why a National Action Plan?

• Identify and define key issues
• Establish priorities and key actions
• Connect diffuse sectors and organizations around common goals
• Create blueprint for regional and local efforts
• Provide a focal point for the field
Modeling a Process

• Plan development led by government staff with multi-sector engagement
  – Such as healthcare, public health, education, social services, communication and media

• Participatory and inclusive approach
  – Approximately 700 public and private sector people involved

• Outcome is a public document available for all to use
Federal Foundations for a National Action Plan

- Healthy People Objectives (first released in 2000)
  - 2010 and 2020 health literacy and related objectives
  - 2003 action plan pre-National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)
- NIH/AHRQ Program Announcement to fund research
- 2003 NAAL data
- 2004 Institute of Medicine report
- 2006 Surgeon General’s Workshop on Improving Health Literacy
- 2007-08 Town Halls in 4 cities
- 2009 organizational consultations and draft reviews
Federal Definition for Health Literacy

• Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

— Healthy People 2010
National Action Plan

• Goals and high level strategies
• Multiple sectors and professions included
• Status: cleared for publication by HHS March 2010
  – Forward by HHS Assistant Secretary for Health Dr. Howard Koh
Vision

• A society that
  – Provides everyone access to accurate, actionable health information
  – Delivers person-centered health information and services
  – Supports life-long learning and skills to promote good health
• Call for a response from all sectors involved in health information and services
Seven Goal Areas

• Health information
• Clinical practice
• Early childhood-university education
• Community-based services
• Partnership and collaboration
• Research and evaluation
• Dissemination of evidence-based practice
Goal 1

- Develop and disseminate health and safety information that is accurate, accessible and actionable
  - Applies to any organization or individual who is involved in developing or disseminating health information
  - Includes, for example, healthcare providers, public health officials, healthcare facilities, payers, the media
Examples of Goal 1 Strategies

– Involve members of the target population, including persons with limited health literacy, in planning, developing, implementing, disseminating and evaluating health and safety information

– Ensure that all consumer health communication—including applications, benefits materials, rights and responsibilities, letters, and health and wellness information—incorporate health literacy principles

– Participate in ongoing training in health literacy that focuses on improving clear communication and information design practices
Goal 2

• Promote changes in the healthcare delivery system that improve health information, communication, informed decision-making and access to health services
  – Applies to any organization or individual who manages, delivers or oversees healthcare services
  – Includes, for example, doctors, nurses, dentists, administrators, regulators, educators who provide professional training
Examples of Goal 2 Strategies

– Providers
  • Use existing programs, such as AHRQ’s Questions Are the Answers, to prepare patients and providers for visits and structure their communication

– Healthcare Administrators
  • Increase awareness of and compliance with Title VI, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and other laws designed to ensure that individuals with limited English proficiency can access medical care

– Licensing and credentialing
  • Include assessment of health literacy and CLAS (cultural and linguistic competence) skills in licensure requirements for all health professions
Goal 3

- Incorporate accurate, standards-based and developmentally appropriate health and science information and curricula in child care and education through the university level
  - Applies to anyone administering or providing educational services to children, adolescents and young adults
  - Includes school administrators, managers, teachers and policymakers
Examples of Goal 3 Strategies

• Promote the availability of formal early childhood education for all eligible children

• Require coursework in health education for all students who are in postsecondary schools and preparing for a career in early childhood education

• Promote health literacy by including the National Health Education Standards in school curriculum reform initiatives

• Incorporate health education into existing science, math, literacy, social studies, and computer instruction in grades K–12 by embedding health-related tasks, skills, and examples into lesson plans
Goal 4

• Support and expand local efforts to provide adult education, English language instruction, and culturally and linguistically appropriate health information services in the community
  – Applies to any organization or individual delivering services in the community
  – Includes, for example, adult educators, community service providers, healthcare teams, health information and library professionals
Examples of Goal 4 Strategies

• Adult educators and community service providers
  – Support community-based programs that empower people to be more involved and active in health and that teach skills, such as computer use, to assist people in acquiring credible health information.

• Healthcare team
  – Invite adult education classes to visit your health center and adult education students to speak at meetings and symposia

• Health information and library professionals
  – Become familiar with information and literacy resources in your community and refer consumers to them
Goal 5

• Build partnerships, develop guidance and change policies
  – Applies to any organization funding, guiding or overseeing health literacy-related activities, programs and investments
  – Includes philanthropic, nonprofit, voluntary, advocacy, academic, professional organizations and government agencies
Examples of Goal 5 Strategies

• Government Agencies
  – Review, analyze and propose changes to existing laws, policies and regulations that make health information difficult to use
  – Facilitate public discussion about health information and services needed in communities to support better health outcomes

• Private sector and non-profit organizations
  – Include health literacy in strategic plans, request for proposals, grant awards, programs and educational initiatives
  – Educate policymakers and other decision-makers about the importance of health literacy and its contributions to improvements in health outcomes and decreased costs
Goal 6

• Increase basic research and the development, implementation and evaluation of practices and interventions to improve health literacy
  – Applies to any organization or individual involved in research, evaluation and intervention development
  – Includes, for example, researchers, funders, evaluators, and public health professionals
Examples of Goal 6 Strategies

– Researchers
  • Develop methods to measure the full range of health professionals’ and organizations’ health literacy skills
  • Develop more comprehensive individual and population measures of health literacy

– Public health professionals
  • Include health literacy measures in public health data collection and surveillance
  • Increase support for systems- and community-based research in health literacy improvement
Goal 7

- Increase the dissemination and use of evidence-based health literacy practices and interventions
  - Applies to any organization or individual involved in sharing information about more effective health information and services
  - Includes, for example, researchers, academic organizations and journals, health information and library professionals, professional associations advocacy groups, and funders
Examples of Goal 7 Strategies

• Strategies for Professional Associations, Advocacy Groups and Funders
  – Increase funding for dissemination and implementation research of evidence-based health literacy interventions
  – Develop guidance on how to change practice as a result of research findings

• Academic organizations and journals, and health information and library professionals
  – Use a variety of channels and formats to disseminate evidence-based research findings that are appropriate to the target audiences, including health professionals and adult educators
  – Explore new mechanisms to pull together and share data and research findings as they become available
Six Principles for National Action

- Cross disciplinary boundaries
- Be strategic and evidence-based
- Evaluate
- Continuously educate the public
- Include laws, policies and other institutional factors
- Involve communities most affected by limited health literacy
What Can You Do?

• Identify the most relevant goals and strategies for your organization
• Draft possible action steps
• Brief your colleagues and propose action steps
• Plan and implement approved actions
• Evaluate their effectiveness in improving health literacy
• Share your findings widely