



SKILLS 4 HEALTH LITERACY



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Building health literacy capacity in health and social care

POLICY BRIEF

Health literacy is a skill in demand among health and social care professionals.

This policy brief introduces the concept of health literacy and shows how health literacy can be implemented in higher education to upskill the workforce engaged in dementia care based on the outcomes of the Skills 4 Health Literacy Project funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission.



HEALTH LITERACY AND DEMENTIA

Dementia presents a significant public health challenge, with its prevalence expected to rise due to an aging global population. Effective management and care for individuals living with dementia are closely linked to the health literacy of both the affected individuals and their caregivers. Enhancing health literacy can lead to better health outcomes and improved quality of life. However, achieving this requires a well-trained health and social care workforce capable of delivering person-centered, informed care. This policy brief underscores the necessity of building capacity within the health and social care sectors to improve health literacy and dementia care.

Health literacy involves the ability to access, comprehend, and utilize health information to make informed decisions. In the context of dementia, high health literacy enables individuals and caregivers to navigate complex care needs, understand disease progression, and engage effectively with healthcare services. Conversely, low health literacy can lead to mismanagement of the condition, increased caregiver burden, and higher healthcare costs.

The health and social care workforce plays a pivotal role in fostering health literacy among individuals with dementia and their caregivers. However, studies indicate that many healthcare professionals lack adequate training in dementia care and health literacy principles. This gap hampers the delivery of effective care and the promotion of health literacy.

The Skills 4 Health Literacy Project presents a new competency profile, courses, a handbook in curriculum development and policy recommendations to bridge the gap.

Health Literacy

A person's 'skills, knowledge, motivation and capacity to access, understand, appraise and apply information to make effective decisions about health and healthcare and take appropriate action.

Organisational health literacy

Organisational health literacy refers to the degree to which organisations enable individuals to find, understand, appraise and apply information and services to maintain and improve health and quality of life. It involves providing services and information that are easy to access, comprehend, and use, and removing barriers all individuals to seeking health services.

1 in 2

may face health literacy challenges

The European Health Literacy Survey indicates that limited health literacy is a public health challenge impacting people's use of health services, their health status, participation in health affairs and sustainable living.

FOCUS



Competency profile

Workforce development

The health literacy competency profile presents the knowledge, skills and competencies recommended for health and social care professionals engaged in dementia care.



Courses

Capacity building

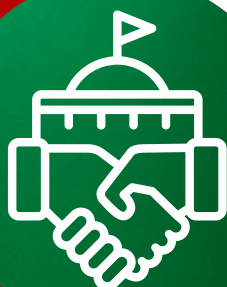
The open course in English on health literacy and dementia care is inspired by tested courses in higher education conducted in the Nordic countries.



Handbook

Curriculum development

The Handbook introduces curriculum development with regards to courses on health literacy and dementia inspired by courses tested in higher education in the Nordic countries.



Policy recommendations

Bridging the skills gap

The policy recommendations include suggestions to bridge the skills gap in health and social care with regards to health literacy and dementia care.

HEALTH LITERACY COMPETENCY PROFILE IN DEMENTIA CARE

This health literacy competency profile was developed by the Skills 4 Health Literacy Consortium to inspire professional development and capacity building in dementia care. It was informed by seven sources of information:

1. Review of health literacy and dementia research and curricula in the Nordic countries.
2. Document analysis of guidelines and strategies.
3. Focus group interviews with caregivers and health and social care professionals.
4. ESCO classifications and Bloom's Taxonomy.
5. Expert consultation.
6. Piloting in health literacy and dementia courses in higher education.
7. Scoping review of dementia literacy from the perspective of people living with dementia, caregivers and professionals.

While the health literacy competency profile focuses on dementia care, it can be adapted to other areas of diseases.



Competency profile including the specific knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values as well as transversal skills and competencies suggested for health and social care professionals in their work to promote and / or improve health literacy when supporting people living with (risk of) dementia.

Aims	Objectives
1. KNOWLEDGE	<p>With regards to knowledge a health and social care professional should be able to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> analyze and define the concept of health literacy and explain how it relates to health and well-being. analyze and define organizational health literacy and how it applies to their workplace, community, sector, and system in which they work. discuss the importance of health literacy and to explain the common factors associated with predictors and outcomes of it. be aware of the relevance of cultural sensitivity in relation to promoting health literacy when supporting people and their families living with (risk of) dementia. define different verbal and nonverbal communication methods and explain about their usage when working with people living with (risk of) dementia. define the known risk factors for cognitive decline and dementia. explain the known relationship between lifestyle factors and brain health. be familiar with different memory tests for different target groups and understand the factors that can affect the test results. They should also be able to name the specialists that conduct these tests for people living with (risk of) dementia. distinguish between various dementia types and cognitive impairments and their specific features, as well as the associated cognitive and social difficulties and challenges. name pharmacological treatments for various dementia types as well as non-pharmacological interventions. link health literacy to the principles of human and patient rights and sustainable development. be familiar with the legislation governing memory services and name the services and benefits available. name and refer to local services available for people living with (risk of) dementia, including third sector /voluntary services.
2. SKILLS	<p>With regards to skills a health and social care professional should be able to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> search for information and evaluate its reliability and guide people living with (risk of) dementia and their family members and informal caregivers to reliable information. give the people living with (risk of) dementia and their family members and informal caregivers personal guidance and advice on the services available, the conditions for receiving them, and support in applying for and using the services and benefits, in a way that is understandable for them. operate in manner that takes into account the sensory abilities when interacting, giving guidance and care for people living with (risk of) dementia and their close ones. utilize the service chain of the people living with (risk of) dementia. design a care plan for people living with (risk of) dementia and implement and monitor its implementation. provide individually targeted lifestyle guidance taking into account the needs, wishes and life situation of people living with (risk of) dementia. produce opportunities for people living with (risk of) dementia to stay as socially engaged and active as possible, with an emphasis on their abilities, wishes and preferences. support the family members and informal caregivers of people living with (risk of) dementia.
3. ATTITUDES AND VALUES	<p>With regards to attitudes and values a health and social care professional should be able to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> use appropriate strategies designed to increase public awareness about dementia and cognitive decline, to decrease stigma, and promote early diagnosis. meet people living with (risk of) dementia and their families in a person-centred manner at different stages of the illness, taking into account the dignity, autonomy and personal needs. In particular, the health and social care professional must be sensitive to and able to reflect on the ethical issues that may arise when he / she engages in conversation about and evaluation of the level of health literacy of people with dementia and their family caregivers / close ones. discuss health literacy in relation to patient autonomy, beneficence, and justice. demonstrate willingness to update and expand his or her knowledge and skills related to dementia care, prevention, and research continuously, as well as to critically evaluate new information and sources of information. act with cultural sensitivity which embrace the diverse backgrounds of the people they serve.
4. TRANSVERSAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES	<p>With regards to transversal skills and competencies a health and social care professional should be able to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> apply different methods of communication, interaction and guidance when working with people living with (risk of) dementia, in a manner that is understandable and building trust. communicate verbally and nonverbally with people living with (risk of) dementia and those close to them effectively and empathically also about sensitive topics. translate medical terms and explain health information in a manner that is understandable and meaningful for people living with (risk of) dementia, their family members and informal caregivers identify barriers that interfere with the process of successfully using information and navigating in the health and social care system and find strategies to overcome these health literacy barriers. guide people living with (risk of) dementia and those close to them to find and critically analyze the health information they need. plan, use and support multi professional collaboration with people living with (risk of) dementia. plan and support collaboration with third sector /voluntary organizations.

HEALTH LITERACY AND DEMENTIA EDUCATION

IN ENGLISH



MOOC course: Talking about health with older adults

The MOOC course is an introductory course on health literacy and dementia aimed at health and social care professionals working with older adults focusing on 'Talking about health with older adults'.

The course is conducted online in English. It lasts 5 weeks based on 10-15 hours of self-study per week (2 ECTS). A certificate of participation is provided after completion of the course and the mandatory tasks have been approved.

Life does not end with a dementia diagnosis. If we only see the illness, we cannot improve the quality of life of people living with dementia. We need to learn a new language - the dementia language - to support people with dementia.

Anneke Dapper-Skaaning, dementia psychologist



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

on health literacy and dementia - a key to quality of care

1. Integrate health literacy into professional education and training

- Incorporate health literacy and dementia care modules into the curricula of medical, nursing, social work, and allied health programs.
- Provide ongoing professional development opportunities focused on communication strategies and health literacy enhancement.

2. Adopt a train-the-trainer model

- Implement programs where experienced professionals are trained to educate their peers in dementia care best practices, fostering a culture of continuous learning.

3. Develop health literate organizations

- Encourage healthcare organizations to adopt attributes of health literate organizations, ensuring that health information and services are accessible and understandable to all.

4. Leverage community health and social workers

- Utilize community health and social workers to bridge gaps between healthcare providers and communities, offering culturally sensitive education and support to individuals with dementia and their caregivers.

5. Promote interprofessional collaboration

- Facilitate collaboration among healthcare providers, social workers, and community organizations to create comprehensive care plans that address the multifaceted needs of individuals with dementia.

6. Implement public health campaigns

- Launch initiatives to raise awareness about dementia and the importance of health literacy, targeting both the general public and healthcare professionals.





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Building health literacy capacity in health and social care

AN ERASMUS+ PROJECT

The Skills4HL project was initiated to meet the needs of Higher Education Institutions to reduce skills gaps of health and social professionals to promote health literacy capacity-building.

Funded through Erasmus+ EU Programme for education, training, youth and sport, Call 2021, Action Type KA220-HED - Cooperation partnerships in higher education, the SKILLS4HL aims to meet the needs of higher education institutions in training their future and current health and social care professionals, through digital education technologies, to promote health literacy capacity-building when supporting persons at risk of dementia to deliver relevant and personalized interventions.

The Skills4HL consortium

- Karolinska Institutet (coordinator), Sweden
- Seinäjoke Ammattikorkeakoulu Oy, Finland
- Professionshøjskolen University College Nordjylland, Denmark
- Universitetet i Tromsø - Norges Arktiske Universitet, Norway
- Global Health Literacy Academy, Denmark

Objectives

- to improve the understanding of the needed specific knowledge, skills and abilities that the health and social care sectors demand from their professionals to promote and/or improve health literacy in dementia care.
- to strengthen the strategic and structured cooperation of higher education institutions partners in health literacy education to develop a learning-outcomes-oriented curriculum and educational contents.
- to increase the use of innovative and accessible digital technologies, to generate open education resources for skills development about health literacy of health and social professionals and build digital pedagogy capacities of lecturers.

Contact and questions

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