

Health Literacy Month Handbook



The Event Planning Guide For Health Literacy Advocates

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My Note of Thanks

I believe in the power of groups. No matter what kind of project I've been involved with, I've always found that when there's input from others, the results far exceed anything one person could achieve alone. Writing this *Health Literacy Month Handbook* has been no exception.

Thanks to everyone who has worked with me over the years to create Health Literacy Month and helped make it thrive and grow. This includes advocates everywhere who champion the cause, create and run awareness-raising events, and do all that's needed to find the right words for better health.

For the third edition of this *Handbook* I want to acknowledge and thank an ad-hoc team of volunteer Health Literacy Consulting advisors who help keep me focused on what's important. I also want to express my sincere appreciation to all who shared their stories or otherwise contributed to this edition. They include Geri Lynn Baumblatt, Cynthia Baur, Chris Cheney, Tanielle Jackson-Price, Angie Knackstedt, Julie McKinney, Susan Reid, Don Rubin, Hope Schwanhausser, Jan Scotton, Steph Synoracki, Mark Tatro, Michael Villaire, and Krista Wright.

It takes more than any one person, profession, or program to move health literacy forward. Thanks everyone!

Helen

About the *Health Literacy Month Handbook*

I often refer to people like you and me as "health literacy advocates." We get excited about wanting to ensure that the way people communicate does not get in the way of the healthcare people need. And we are eager to share both our passion for this effort and what we know about the topic with each other and the communities in which we work and live. That desire to share is why I wrote the *Health Literacy Month Handbook*. It's meant to be a guide we can all use to create, plan, run, and evaluate events that raise awareness about this very important issue.

Anyone can plan and run a Health Literacy Month event. You don't need permission from me. What you do need is a determination to let the world know that health literacy matters and a plan to get from idea to action. This *Handbook* is here to help. It covers topics ranging from finding people to work with and brainstorming ideas to putting an event together, marketing it, and assessing effectiveness. Throughout the *Handbook* you'll find examples and insights from others who have made Health Literacy Month events happen.

In addition, the *Handbook* has worksheets, review forms, a sample press release, a countdown calendar, and other practical tools for you to use. There are also references to other resources, including websites, where you can learn more or even download a Health Literacy Month logo.

I am a healthcare provider, so throughout the handbook I've used clinical examples and language but encourage you to make this handbook your own. For example, when I write "provider," think of the term as referring to anyone who communicates health information. That could be a clinician, community health educator, public health specialist, teacher, professor, tutor, or librarian. And when I use the term "patient," think of anyone on the receiving end of health communication such as family members, students, caregivers, and the general public. And go ahead, write in the margins, fill out the worksheets, and highlight tips you plan to use. This is your book to use to help make people aware of what health literacy is and why it's important.

Thank you for being a health literacy advocate.

"My feedback about Health Literacy Month: Start early. Pick a theme. Plan and plan and plan and plan. It is a lot of hard work but worth it."

From: Susan Reid, Consulting Manager at Workbase, a not-for-profit organization in New Zealand.

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About Health Literacy and Health Literacy Month

What is health literacy?

The definition of health literacy is evolving. Until recently, many definitions of health literacy were framed in terms of patients' communication deficits (especially reading problems) seen in medical settings. Lately, the definition is focusing more on the alignment of communication strategies used by providers, patients, and systems throughout the continuum of care. My functional definition has always been that "Health literacy is a shared responsibility between patients (or anyone of the receiving end of health communication, including the lay public) and providers (or anyone on the giving end, including agencies that provide health information). Each must communicate in ways that the other can understand.



Why is health literacy a problem?

Studies consistently show that a significant number of people have problems reading, understanding, and acting on health information, and there are a number of reasons why. For one thing, health information is inherently complex, and health providers are not necessarily skilled communicators. Additionally, patients bring a wide range of learning needs to the healthcare experience. Basic literacy skills, language, age, disability, cultural context, and emotional responses can all affect the way people receive and process information — and the way people process information, in turn, has a direct impact on health outcomes and cost.

What is Health Literacy Month?

October is Health Literacy Month, a time when health literacy advocates around the world promote the importance of making health information understandable.

The idea behind Health Literacy Month is the same now as it was when I first proposed it in 1999. Health Literacy Month is a time of observance when hospitals, health centers, literacy programs, libraries, social service agencies, businesses, professional associations, government agencies, consumer alliances, and many other groups can work collaboratively to draw attention to, and develop local capacity for, addressing this important issue.

Health Literacy Month is listed in *Chase's Calendar of Events* as well as numerous other databases that call attention to special observances. Since Health Literacy Month began, events have been held in a majority of U.S. states and territories, in many Canadian provinces, and on most continents.

Designated months like this provide a sense of urgency to year-round concerns, and many people speaking out at the same time on the same topic amplifies the message. As a result, television, radio, newspapers, and other media pay special attention.

Why is Health Literacy Month celebrated in October?

Health literacy is an issue all year round. But when an ad hoc committee came together to establish Health Literacy Month, October seemed particularly attractive for a number of reasons:

- The weather tends to be temperate almost everywhere. This is important because Health Literacy Month is an international observance.
- Unlike other months, October has few national or religious holidays to compete for attention.
- In the United States, elections are held in November, and the committee figured politicians would likely support efforts to improve health understanding and would be eager to participate in events that promoted positive reform (if in no other way than simply by showing up for a photo).
- There are many other October health-related holidays to possibly partner with. These include Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Dental Hygiene Month, Depression Education and Awareness Month, Medical Librarians Month, Physical Therapy Month, and Talk About Prescriptions Month.

How should people observe Health Literacy Month?

There is no right or wrong way to participate. Groups (alone or in partnership with others) create events that match their interests, resources, and community needs. There are numerous ways to initiate an event:

- Hospitals may host health literacy educational workshops for their employees or for the general public.
- Senior centers often run prescription safety sessions.
- A literacy program might sponsor a health literacy fair.
- A library can display samples of effective consumer health information.
- A school may publish a health literacy newsletter.
- Employers sometimes sponsor educational programs for employees focusing on wellness and disease prevention.
- Some states have even officially proclaimed October as Health Literacy Month.

How can I learn more?

The Health Literacy Month website includes information about this annual awareness-raising event. It also lists Health Literacy Month resources including a free promotional logo that you are welcome to download and use. The Web address is at <http://www.healthliteracymonth.org>.

"Health literacy is a shared responsibility between patients and providers. Each must communicate in ways the other can understand."

— Helen Osborne, president of Health Literacy Consulting

Getting Started on Your Health Literacy Month Event

Now that you know what Health Literacy Month is about, it's time to start thinking of ways to observe it so that you can help raise awareness and make a difference in people's lives. That means it is time to start planning an event. And you — with your passion and conviction that clear communication matters — are obviously the right person for the job. Keep in mind that successful events are seldom the product of just one person's efforts. At some point, preferably sooner rather than later, you are going to need to create a team. But the first step is to have a vision. Having a vision means knowing what you want your event to accomplish. In other words, what is your primary goal? Then, once you have answered that question, you will need to define three, four, or five measurable objectives that you can use to gauge whether you have accomplished your goal. Your vision, and the objectives that go along with it, will make up the foundation on which you will build your event.

Creating a vision

Do not just dream, dream big. This is the time to be as creative and grandiose as you can. Remember, the ultimate goal is a world in which patients and providers always understand one another. What will it take to help your organization become a part of this world? Do not worry if what you want to happen feels too big or overwhelming. Just break it all down into "bite-sized" components. Then think about how to accomplish them one at a time.

What do you want your event to do? Here are some ideas to consider:

- Significantly increase awareness that health literacy affects everyone
- Ensure that all printed materials provided to patients use language patients can understand as well as formats that enhance the patients' ability to get what they are supposed to get from them
- Make it a policy that the end-user's perspective is always included when new materials are developed
- Build a sustainable, community-wide health literacy coalition
- Make a connection between reading and good health
- Teach students (of all ages, grades, or life experiences) to be health advocates

Specifying measurable objectives

Once you have a goal, you will need to create objectives that will help you reach that goal. Objectives can be thought of as specific tasks or smaller goals that need to be accomplished as you move toward the larger goal or vision. And since they are specific, they can be measured, which means they can be used to determine how successful you are at achieving your grander vision.

The best way I know to determine objectives is first to answer three simple questions: If you achieve your goal, what should the intended audience

- Know?
- Do?
- Feel?

The answers to these questions identify what you are looking for in terms of educational, behavioral, and emotional outcomes. Once the outcomes are clear, stating objectives is a straightforward process. For instance, if your goal is to increase awareness within an organization of the importance of health literacy, you will want people within the organization to

- Know what health literacy is
- Address health literacy issues at multiple levels within the organization
- Be committed to bringing about change throughout the entire organization

Here are some objectives that might be used to determine that at least some of those outcomes have been achieved:

- A meeting with senior leaders to discuss how health literacy supports the organization's strategic plan
- The addition of health literacy to the agenda of all departmental staff meetings
- A policy stating that all printed patient materials must be reviewed by a team of intended readers

Once you have created a list of objectives, you can use them to guide the planning of your event. An appropriate event will highlight those objectives and increase the likelihood of achieving them. How successful your event is can be determined by measuring how many of the objectives are actually met.

The table below offers examples of other possible combinations of goals and objectives.

If your goal is to...	Then a possible objective might be to...
Encourage colleagues from all departments to join the health literacy committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructure the committee to ensure that all departments are represented. • Maintain a record of who joins the committee and what departments they are from. • Schedule meetings at a time and in a location accessible to all committee members. • Offer the option of online get-togethers such as webinars, conference calls, and email discussions.
Educate workshop participants about the concept of health literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and analyze the results of participants' pre- and post-workshop surveys about health literacy. • Make clear participants' learning needs and goals including what they might know, do, and feel after attending this event.
Broaden community support for health literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify which groups to include such as the library, senior center, public services, cultural associations, literacy programs, and local businesses. • Arrange meetings with representatives from these local groups. • Send out press releases and announcements to local newspapers along with radio and television stations.

Measuring success

Success can be measured by the number of objectives that were met and by how well they were met. I have always found it useful to define measures of success at the start of the planning process. This helps keep projects "on track" from beginning to end. But even more importantly, clearly defined measures of success can help with funding. Do not wait for others to ask. Let potential funders know up front that your proposed program includes an evaluation component. This helps demonstrate your commitment by showing that you are approaching this project in a serious, objective, and measurable way.

Building a team

The best events result in sustainable changes, and the chances of bringing those changes about are greatly enhanced when you put together a dedicated team. An ideal team consists of people who come from varied professions and varied programs and have varied points of view. Here are some tips for putting together the right kind of team to plan and run Health Literacy Month events.

As Health Literacy Month Coordinator (or whatever title you choose), you are likely to be the one to inspire, oversee, and otherwise orchestrate this year's event. This job is much easier and more satisfying if you focus on developing the following traits and qualities:

- **Good organizational skills.** The job is a lot easier when tasks are done on time and within budget.
- **Flexibility.** You will need to deal with the unexpected, unplanned, and otherwise unwanted occurrences that you will inevitably encounter.
- **Purpose and passion.** Purpose and passion will help you sustain your efforts when you are faced with equally worthy yet competing priorities.
- **Creativity and humor.** These traits will let you teach in meaningful, memorable, and enjoyable, maybe even funny, ways.

It takes time and energy to be the Health Literacy Month Coordinator. Others are going to look to you for leadership and inspiration. The rewards you get, though, are being able to help patients and families and working with colleagues worldwide to improve how health information is communicated. Both are well worth the investment.

Finding committee members can be daunting. In my experience, it is easy to find like-minded folks who agree in theory about health literacy concepts, but it can be much more difficult to get these same folks to commit their time, money, or other precious resources to this project. So you are going to need to be persuasive as you look for people to fill the following roles:

- **“Worker bees.”** This is a term I use when referring to those who actively help with day-to-day tasks.
- **Department representatives.** Ideally, they will come from a wide range of departments such as clinical services, marketing, risk management, information technology, and the library. They are important not only because they bring these various perspectives to the task of planning and running an event, but also because they carry the message that health literacy is important back to their own departments.
- **Patients and their families.** As you choose members, try to include those who represent your intended audience in terms of literacy, age, disability, language, culture, and personal experience. They bring the valuable perspective of those who are on the receiving end of health communication.
- **Representatives from community services.** Consider nearby organizations that also communicate health information. They might include your local library, senior center, adult education program, public school, or public safety department.

One way to make it easier to recruit committee members is to make it easy for committee members to meet.

- When you ask people to join, let them know that the committee’s work is time-limited and task-focused. Make a promise to disband after Health Literacy Month is over. While the group may later reconvene, people are more likely to join if they know there are clear limits to their commitment.
- Thanks to technology, there are many ways to hold meetings — in person, over the phone, or via the Internet. Likely, your committee will use some combination of all the above.

- Regardless of where and how you meet, make sure that all get-togethers are purposeful and not just a meeting for meeting's sake. Always have a clear agenda and end meetings on time. This applies even to meetings that start late or have extra-full agendas. As someone who has led many meetings, I know that this is one of the best ways to earn and keep members' trust.

Health Literacy Month Blog: An Example of Partnership

At Emmi Solutions we found that our Health Literacy Month blog series is a wonderful way to build a conversation and community. But how did this get started? I was writing an article about health literacy for our company's then-new blog and realized it was nearly Health Literacy Month. So I invited others to join me in this effort.

After doing this several years, I've learned that it takes a lot of time and effort to create a successful blog. This includes determining a theme or themes, helping contributors understand the broad audience, and coaching those who are used to an academic style to write more informally. I usually start in August as it's a large effort to recruit participants and make sure they get their articles in on time.

Emmi Solution's Health Literacy Month blog series has accomplished a lot:

- We created a place where people from different communities contribute, interact, and get exposure to each other. This includes patients, clinicians, decision scientists, behavioral economists, journalists, and family caregivers.
- A blog series attracts readers. It helps gather momentum that feeds into our social media. We also cross post with many other blogs.
- Our employees at Emmi Solutions can write for the blog, too. This gives them a chance to talk about the work they do and challenges they encounter when creating programs, products, and educational services about patient engagement.
- As editor, this blog provides an opportunity to talk with a lot of different stakeholders, learn from them, and hear what they are working on. My recommendation to others is to not take on a project like this lightly. It can be a challenge even for people who work in the field of health literacy to write for a new medium and more diverse audience.

From: Geri Lynn Baumblatt, Executive Director of Patient Engagement, Emmi Solutions, emmisolutions.com, [@GeriLynn](https://twitter.com/GeriLynn)

Partnering with other organizations

Just as your committee has members from many departments, your Health Literacy Month event can be hosted by multiple organizations. It is common for several local groups to work together as a Health Literacy task force. With pooled resources and added people power, you can raise the visibility of your event considerably.

When looking for organizations to form partnerships with, think about groups you know that face communication challenges similar to yours or those that share a vision matching the one you have chosen for your event. For example, local safety officials (such as police and fire de-

partments) might be interested in working with you to improve communication about public health risks. Reference librarians may share your interest in finding health information written at appropriate reading levels. Here are some other things to consider while searching for potential partners:

- Hospitals, health centers, and outpatient clinics need to create and maintain effective patient education materials as well as develop programs that will enhance patient adherence to treatment regimens.
- Public health initiatives need to put out messages that can be understood by a wide range of audiences.
- Adult education or family literacy programs focus their efforts on working with people to develop skills they need to function in their everyday life.
- Immigrant services organizations work to help people get beyond language and cultural barriers that can interfere with effective communication.
- Cultural organizations want people to be able to maintain the richness of their cultural heritage without being penalized because others don't understand them.
- Advocacy groups, faith-based programs, and other community initiatives strive to have the needs of the people they represent not only heard, but understood.
- Health professional associations are focused on finding ways to help their members become better providers.
- Government departments and services need to make and implement policies that provide for the well-being of their constituencies.

When you meet with representatives from these other groups, discuss the challenges that you both face. Compare the strategies you use to address them. Then explore ways you might help one another. Collaborating on a Health Literacy Month event is an excellent beginning for building community-wide interventions.

Enlisting the help of influential others

When influential others such as senior executives, well-respected community members, politicians, and local business owners publicly support your event, they add visibility. But that is not all they do. Their support can help sustain whatever vision has shaped your event long after the event has ended.

Again, dream big. Imagine enlisting a movie star or elected official who most embodies the concepts you want to convey. Then ask that person to help. You will not always get a yes, but you will not ever get one if you do not ask. You can increase the likelihood of gaining the support you seek by making participation easy for whatever influential others you approach. So rather than making a vague request, be specific about the type and amount of support you hope they will bring.

Being part of a larger community

You are not alone as a health literacy advocate, even though it may sometimes feel that way. Thousands of people worldwide are doing exactly what you are doing — working to raise awareness about health literacy in order to make a lasting difference where they live and work. These people can be immensely helpful by offering support and advice drawn from their experience. And they will welcome input from you regarding their own efforts.

There are many ways to meet others (at least virtually) who share your commitment to health literacy. Here are some examples:

- Many regions and states in the U.S. are creating health literacy coalitions. A good place to keep up-to-date with these is the map of "Health Literacy Activities by State" at the CDC's Health Literacy website, <http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/>
- One great meeting place for health literacy advocates is the Health Literacy Discussion List. This online discussion serves as a forum to ask questions, find answers, and share information with fellow health literacy advocates. Hosted by the Institute for Healthcare Advancement and moderated by Julie McKinney. Learn more, search the archives, and subscribe for free at <http://listserv.ihahhealthliteracy.org/>
- And of course, you are welcome to subscribe to the free "What's New in Health Literacy Consulting" monthly e-newsletter. It includes information about Health Literacy Out Loud podcasts, how-to tips, and other health literacy news. Here's the link to subscribe, <http://healthliteracy.com/newsletter.asp>

Creating the Event

Now that you have a vision, several measurable objectives, and a team of people to help, it is time to figure out what kinds of activities to sponsor for your event. Keep in mind, there is no right or wrong way to participate. What you do is up to you and the planning committee, given the limitations imposed by your organization's interests and resources and the identified needs of your community.

Brainstorm ideas

While many groups host health literacy conferences and presentations, you need not limit your ideas to "tried and true" formats. Now is the time to consider a wide range of possibilities — and one way to come up with ideas is to brainstorm them. If there is someone in your organization who has been trained in facilitating brainstorming sessions, ask that person to help. If there is not, follow these steps to generate ideas:

1. Meet with others who share your interest in health literacy. Start with your committee, of course. But then invite other health literacy advocates from the community as well as patients, members of local organizations who have an interest in healthcare, teachers and their students, or others who represent the potential audience for your event.

2. Establish ground rules. Let everyone know why you are meeting (to generate ideas for a Health Literacy Month event). Say how long the session will last (usually an hour is sufficient). Tell how they can help (by coming up with lots of ideas). Explain what will happen after the brainstorming session is over (how decisions will be made). Then agree on brainstorming ground rules such as:

- Go for quantity (the more ideas the better)
- No idea is too wild or silly
- Defer judgment (there are no bad ideas)
- Piggy-back (build on) other ideas
- Use lots of humor

3. Ask one question. State the vision for the event and the specific objectives. Then ask an open-ended question such as, "If we could devote one day to making [the vision] a reality, what would we do?"

4. Get lots of answers. Be sure to allow time for people to think. You can do that by giving them a stack of Sticky Notes or index cards and asking them to write one idea per piece of paper. Then set a time limit (perhaps 5 or 10 minutes) and encourage people to write as many ideas as they can without discussion. Reassure them that quantity matters more than practicality.

5. Combine, sort, and clarify ideas. Once people have lots of ideas, ask them to meet in small groups to combine, sort, discuss, and otherwise clarify what they wrote. They can do this by posting their papers on the wall or an easel. Encourage group members to question each other about what their ideas mean. As a group, people can then combine and cluster ideas that are essentially the same.

6. Prioritize ideas. Now reassemble the whole group. Let everyone have an opportunity to prioritize what he or she would like to do or see happen. An easy and fun way to do this is by asking people to vote using Sticky Dots or other adhesive symbols to mark their favorite ideas.

Your brainstorming session will generate many ideas, some of which will be very surprising. Now all that is left is for you and the committee to take those ideas and decide which of them to implement.

A Health Literacy Social Media Awareness Campaign

#plainpledge™ is the name of the UAMS Center for Health Literacy's month-long social media awareness campaign. It was timed to coordinate with the opening of our Health Literacy Center and Health Literacy Month. We asked people to post selfies (photos of themselves) holding cards that have a difficult to understand health word that they pledged not to use (or better explain).

We chose #plainpledge™ because we wanted to have an interactive campaign with maximum reach and minimal cost. This campaign was a success in many ways:

- More than 110 selfies/pledges were posted on the UAMS Center for Health Literacy's Facebook and Twitter.
- People from 15 states and 6 countries participated in this campaign.
- A local television station featured our health literacy center on the morning news show and aired this story throughout the day and evening.
- Due to the success of this campaign we trademarked #plainpledge™ and will host the awareness campaign again next year.

From: Tanielle Jackson-Price, MS, CHES, Coordinator, Plain Language Program, UAMS Center for Health Literacy, Little Rock, Arkansas

Decide on the scope and location of the event

One way to start thinking about the ideas that have been generated is to consider how big you want your event to be. It could be an in-house event that addresses either a small but significant portion of your organization or one that targets the entire organization. Or you might want to extend it into the community. Available budget and organization resources will obviously affect this decision, but so will your experience and comfort level. If you are new to running events, you might want to start with a relatively narrow in-house focus. Then, as you gain confidence and learn from experience, you can expand what you do for later events.

Plan events with the audience in mind

As you and the committee sort through ideas, looking for just the right event, be sure to keep the needs of your intended audience in mind. These are the people you hope will take part in and learn from your Health Literacy Month event. Think about who they are, what they know, and how their behavior might change as a result of this event.

For instance, if your audience will be made up of primarily providers, one thing you might want to encourage them to do is to use common “living room” words instead of medical jargon when talking with patients and their families. Or another behavior change you might want to encourage is for health professionals to routinely ask all patients to “teach back” (say in their own words) concepts just discussed. For patients, one change you might want to encourage is for them to start writing a list of questions to ask during each appointment with their provider. Another would be for them to make it a habit to double-check their understanding of self-care instructions before they leave their provider’s office.

When I think about asking people to change their habits, I often refer to the *Stages of Change Model* developed by Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente.¹ While this model was designed to help people make lifestyle changes such as lose weight or stop smoking, I find it works equally well when planning Health Literacy Month events.

The authors identify five distinct stages of change an individual needs to go through for a successful behavioral change: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. Associated with each stage are specific teaching tasks that a facilitator can address in order to help an individual move through that stage and get to the next. The following chart outlines the stages and the teaching tasks associated with each one and then offers suggestions about how to apply these concepts when planning Health Literacy Month events. As you look at the chart, think about your audience. Will everybody be at the same stage? Will they be spread evenly throughout all of them? What teaching tasks apply to the majority of your audience?

¹ Prochaska JA, Norcross JC, DiClemente CC, 1994. *Changing for Good: A Revolutionary Six-Stage Program for Overcoming Bad Habits and Moving Your Life Positively Forward*. New York, NY: Avon Books, Inc.

Health Literacy Month and the Stages of Change

Stage of Change	Teaching tasks	Health Literacy Month suggestions
<p>Pre-contemplation. People at this stage have not thought of making a behavior change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build relationships • Introduce concepts • Focus on information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the concept of health literacy to people who are unaware of its importance. • Provide data about the impact of inadequate health literacy on clinical outcomes and medical costs. • Present cases that make health literacy problems both personal and real. • Show examples of hard-to-read documents in current use.
<p>Contemplation. At this stage, people are somewhat aware of problems and are thinking about making changes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about the costs and benefits of making this change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give your health literacy message clout by referring to accreditation standards and public health guidelines or goals. • Discuss the costs of misunderstanding (if patients do not comprehend printed materials) and the benefits of clear communication (such as participation in health screenings).
<p>Preparation. People in the preparation stage have decided to make a change but may not know exactly what to do.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer alternatives • Provide help in deciding on a plan • Assist in selecting from available choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a community-wide coalition and discuss the communication challenges, needs, and goals each organization faces. • Contact other health literacy programs to find out how they are raising awareness, setting standards, and otherwise improving health communication.
<p>Action. At this stage, people are actually taking steps to make a change happen.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it easy for people to change their behaviors • Provide practical resources that people can and will use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host a workshop to introduce health literacy and teach skills participants can use to improve health communication. • Distribute notepads and other tools patients can use to better communicate with their providers.
<p>Maintenance. This is an ongoing phase when the change becomes lasting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up systems to maintain the health literacy momentum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange adequate funding for health literacy programs. Ideally, this will be a recurring line item rather than a one-time grant. • Develop policies to ensure that all written materials are reviewed and approved by representatives of the intended audience. • Create a long-term health literacy plan. This may begin with awareness raising and be followed by training, policy changes, and research.

Exploring the Range of Possible Events

This section will help you think in more specific ways about what you want to do. It discusses different formats events can take and offers examples of what other groups have done. I encourage you to peruse these examples and then use them as a springboard for coming up with your own Health Literacy Month event — one that is based on your vision and that meets the specific needs of your organization and audience.

Events for professionals

Conferences, workshops, and other formal educational events

Many groups host formal educational events to observe Health Literacy Month. These can be as short as an hour or as long as several days. Often, professionals are able to earn continuing-education credits by attending.

Educational events can take many forms:

- **Keynote presentations** are individual presentations (about an hour long) that generally address a key concept rather than attempt to teach a particular skill. Keynotes can “stand alone” to raise awareness and interest, arouse curiosity, and inspire participants to learn more. For example, I often give keynote presentations about what health literacy is and why it matters. Or a keynote presentation can be used to kick off a larger health literacy initiative. For instance, sometimes keynote presentations are used to set the stage for a follow-up series of workshops.
- **Workshops** provide an opportunity to help people develop skills and learn strategies they can use to address the issues. A workshop, for example, might focus on exploring techniques for creating accessible patient education pamphlets or on developing active listening skills. I often find that workshops are most effective when they last at least a few hours. It is important to allow ample opportunity for participants to practice the skills as they learn.
- **Panel presentations** are an excellent way to explore health literacy from multiple points of view. For example, you might assemble a panel of providers, patients, and adult learners to discuss their different views on health communication.
- **Facilitated or roundtable discussions** give people a way to talk with each other about their ideas regarding health literacy. These discussions work best when there is a clear agenda and a designated facilitator. The agenda and facilitator help keep the discussion on message and ensure that everyone’s opinion is heard.

Here are some examples of Health Literacy Month events that have taken place over the years:

- A program for healthcare providers and administrators that gave an overview of health literacy and explored the impact of health literacy on the individual, the organization, public health, and the economy
- A one-day conference for school nurses and healthcare providers that focused on ways of improving health literacy, especially in public schools

- An educational conference to discuss health disparities in underserved communities and to discover strategies to better inform and empower individuals from those communities who need to choose among healthcare options
- A health literacy forum designed to help health professionals increase their understanding of functional health literacy, become familiar with health literacy research, and work with other community agencies to identify resources and bring about change

Meetings and less formal get-togethers

These types of get-togethers often combine education with elements of fun and socializing, and food is always included. Beyond simply exploring health literacy, these get-togethers are designed so that people with shared interests can meet and be encouraged to take action. Examples of what others have done include:

- A reception to celebrate Health Literacy Month
- An ice cream social for staff members who completed a health literacy questionnaire
- A bus trip for nurses that included an hour-long presentation on health literacy and how it affects the nurse's role

Bulletin boards, posters, and other types of displays

Conferences and get-togethers have a short time span and reach a limited number of people. Bulletin boards, posters, and other kinds of displays can remain in place for an extended period and be viewed by anyone who passes by, as long as they're designed to attract attention. Here are some tips for getting the most out of your displays:

- Place your display in an area with lots of traffic. This might be in or near the lobby, cafeteria, or other public space.
- Make it eye-catching as well as informative. You can do this with colors, simple text, and appealing yet informative graphics.
- Place someone nearby to answer questions and explain why the display is there.
- Make the display interactive, or use it to promote a contest. That way, people not only learn by looking at it but also by participating in an activity.

When I chaired our hospital's Patient & Family Education Committee, we designed a bulletin-board display to teach others about health literacy. On a bright red background, we posted "before" and "after" examples of patient education materials. We pointed out word-choice or design problems and showed ways to make these materials easier to read. The title of our display was "What Is Black and White and Read All Over?" We got great feedback about the way we communicated the concepts, and many people told us that the use of design and humor helped them learn about health literacy.

Contests, quizzes, and other participatory events

I am a true believer in the power of group think. By working together (rather than apart), we usually come up with effective solutions to difficult problems. Improving health literacy is no exception.

People like to participate and share their opinions. You can take advantage of this by running contests, sponsoring quizzes, or designing other participatory events. Here are two examples:

- An adult literacy program asked its students to create health literacy displays from recycled materials. The students not only created amazing and amusing displays, but also improved their literacy while learning about health.
- A few years ago, I held a Health Literacy Month Tagline Contest when I wanted a catchy new slogan. I posted the rules, invited people to enter, and assembled an esteemed panel of health literacy judges. I also awarded two prizes — a grand prize for the winner and a lottery-type drawing for everyone who entered. This contest was a huge success. It built interest and excitement while at the same time producing a great slogan. Thanks to Kenneth Lo then of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Health Literacy Month tagline now is "Finding the right words for better health."

Health Literacy Online Quiz

At Carolinas HealthCare System, we created an online health literacy quiz for employees. The goal was to raise awareness about health literacy in a way that not only was educational but also relatively easy to implement. While we hoped to have an automatic scoring system, this was hard to implement. Instead, we had an online key so participants could score their own answers. We held two prize drawings from submitted entries.

It took us a few hours to develop, proof, and finalize the quiz questions and answers. We had help from Corporate Communications to load the quiz on the intranet and run reports about submitted entries. We spent a few hundred dollars on mugs, gym bags, and other such prizes.

This quiz seemed to be effective in raising health literacy awareness as more than a thousand employees participated. While an automatic scoring system would be ideal, I definitely recommend prizes. Even though ours weren't large items, people got really excited about winning.

From: Hope Schwanhausser, MPH, Ed.S., Patient Experience Consultant, Carolinas HealthCare System

Initiatives, demonstrations, and other ways of doing and showing

This category is a hybrid of several others. It includes educational displays, interactive elements, as well as actual teaching tools. Here are some ways that groups show, not just discuss, how to improve health communication:

- Showing how to improve the readability of written materials by having an "extreme makeover" of health-related documents
- Contacting medical offices and offering to review materials from a literacy perspective as well as training staff to recognize and assist low-level readers
- Translating health materials into other languages spoken by people in the local area
- Creating a learning advisory service where medical staff can refer patients for help in accessing and using the healthcare system

- Compiling a list of plain-language terms as alternatives to jargon typically used by health professionals

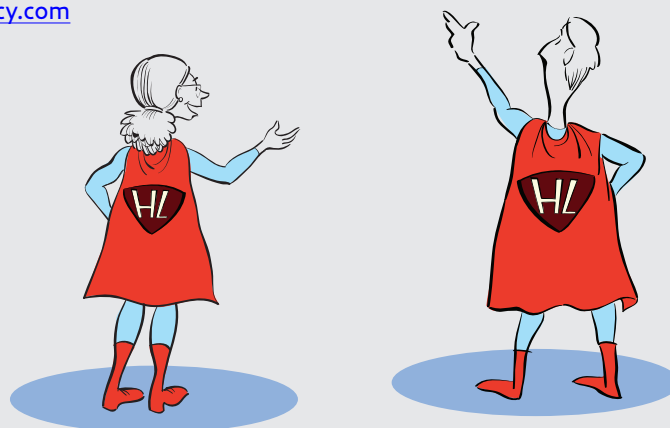
Kick-offs, launches, awards, and other special events

Many organizations use Health Literacy Month as a time to kick off ongoing initiatives, highlight research findings, and present awards for excellence. Here is what some groups have done in past years:

- A professional association used this time to announce the launch of a three-year health literacy awareness campaign that addresses the needs of people of all ages. In the first year, the focus is on children in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade. Association members around the country are reading to elementary-school children and providing books to their classrooms.
- Public health graduate students used this occasion to publish a health literacy report, which included new research about health literacy and its local impact along with recommendations about how to improve the situation.
- College students created research posters that demonstrated their in-depth knowledge of various health issues, with an emphasis on appreciating diversity.
- Several associations and companies used this month to present health literacy awards. Some recognized outstanding work by individuals who support access to health information and services. Others awarded health literacy research scholarships.

Health Literacy Hero Him & Her

Many groups are building on the Health Literacy Month theme, "Be a Health Literacy Hero." Here's how I define this concept: "Health Literacy Heroes are individuals, teams, and organizations who find health literacy problems and act to solve them." You are welcome to incorporate this theme in all you do whether by giving awards, distributing stickers, creating press releases, and even designing t-shirts. To request the image file for Health Literacy Hero "Him" and "Her," email me at helen@healthliteracy.com



From: Helen Osborne, Health Literacy Consulting & Health Literacy Month

Building on the Health Literacy Hero theme

The Health Literacy Committee at Children’s Mercy Hospital in Kansas City Missouri celebrates Health Literacy Month every October. In 2014, many events built on the theme of being a Health Literacy Hero. They included:

- Creating t-shirts with “I’m a Health Literacy Hero” logo on the back. Committee members wore these t-shirts at all Health Literacy Month events.
- Hosting a Health Literacy Champions luncheon to discuss health literacy direction for the hospital. Invited guests included the hospital’s president, vice presidents, and department managers. Each champion was given a Health Literacy Hero t-shirt.
- Displaying information on health literacy and teach back to staff, families, and visitors. Included Health Literacy Hero stickers, plain language handouts, and other health literacy tools in both English and Spanish. Ruffled off Health Literacy Hero t-shirts to people who visited this health literacy information table.
- Giving a hospital-wide Health Literacy Hero award to an employee who utilized health literacy principles to provide exceptional communication throughout the health system. She received a super hero cape and certificate at Grand Rounds.

From: Krista Wright and Angie Knackstedt at Children’s Mercy Hospital & Clinics in Kansas City, Missouri.

Websites and other forms of electronic communication

A growing number of Health Literacy Month events are happening virtually. Here are some examples:

- A university posted its Health Literacy Program on the school’s website. Aimed at both students and working professionals, the program not only provides an overview of health literacy but also includes teaching modules for developing such skills as assessing reading ability and developing strategies for getting messages across.
- A library sent out a *Health Literacy Awareness* e-newsletter to all its subscribers and made the same information available on its website.
- An association compiled a list of health literacy resources and made it available to all its members through an electronic quarterly publication.

Healthwise Health Literacy Tweet Chat, #HWtweetchat

Healthwise has been commemorating Health Literacy Month each October for many years. In 2014, we decided to try something new and hosted a tweet chat on health literacy. Preparation for the tweet chat included:

- Choosing date, time, moderator
- Promoting tweet chat via social media and email
- Brainstorming tweet chat prompts with moderator
- Narrowing the list down to just a handful of questions
- Training moderator on tweet chat process
- Gathering resources (articles, videos, stats, etc.) to share during tweet chat

Preparation took about 5 to 7 hours. No hard costs were involved. We had 4 staff members involved in the preparation, hosting and moderating of the tweet chat. We had a small audience but a great conversation. We learned that it's important to focus the conversation, such as on just 1 or 2 aspects of health literacy. After the tweet chat, it's great to create a Storify to archive key points and keep the conversation going.

From: Steph Synoracki, Marketing and Communications Specialist, Healthwise, www.healthwise.org

Events for patients, students, and the community at large

Health fairs and other ways to bring community and providers together

Festive yet informative, health fairs and similar community-wide events create opportunities to educate the public about health. These events can be informal and usually include food and giveaway items.

- A hospital hosted an interactive health literacy booth at its organization's annual fall festival. By doing so, it was able to promote awareness of various initiatives, including health-literate consent forms and an Ask Me 3 campaign.
- A health plan offered free handouts and materials for health consumers. These included tips on managing a chronic illness, understanding doctor's directions, taking medication properly, and knowing what screenings and tests to have each year.
- Health educators made a presentation to a group of seniors who were participating in the walking program at a local shopping mall about ways to communicate better with their doctors.
- A group of clinicians offered free blood pressure checks as well as other health screenings.
- Several Health Literacy Month programs offered how-to sessions on such topics as diabetes or asthma self-management. One conducted workshops for parents about ways to "Make the Best of Your Child's Doctor Visit."

- Pharmacists and pharmacy students took part in “brown bag” medication reviews for seniors at community centers.
- An ESL (English as a Second Language) program offered a health literacy program for its students. The program not only introduced healthcare basics but also gave the students an opportunity to use their new language in context.
- An adult literacy program encouraged its students to participate in an essay contest, answering the question, “What does health mean to you?”
- A statewide health department hosted “Health Literacy in the Classroom.” Volunteers visited elementary school classrooms across the state and read aloud the children’s book *Curious George Goes to the Hospital*. They then donated the book as an appreciation for teachers who completed an evaluation form.

Events for the media

The media responds well to annual events like Health Literacy Month. In fact, I have been interviewed many times for newspapers, magazines, and radio shows because Health Literacy Month is listed in *Chase’s Calendar of Events*. You can always wait for the press to contact you. But if you are thinking of initiating your own media event, here are some examples of what others have done to promote their efforts:

- One hospital’s health literacy committee wrote an article for the local newspaper that highlighted Health Literacy Month and initiatives the hospital is taking to improve patient care.
- Groups have sponsored public service announcements on radio about Ask Me 3.
- Many associations have linked Health Literacy Month with other October events such as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, National Depression Education and Awareness Month, National Physical Therapy Month, National Medical Librarians Month, Service Excellence Month, and Talk about Prescriptions Month.

The Power of a News Release

For Health Literacy Month 2014, Georgia Alliance for Health Literacy (GAHL) decided to piggy-back on the national “Health Literacy Hero” theme, along with earlier workshops we had done on “Good Questions for Good Health.” How do you become a health literacy hero? By asking good questions—or assisting someone else in asking good questions—whenever you visit your health care professionals.

Among its many other activities, GAHL sent out a news release about Health Literacy Heroes and Health Literacy Month to several hundred news outlets throughout the state. Stories were published in various local papers. A feature writer for the large-circulation *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* became particularly intrigued. She worked with several GAHL members and interviewed community members and physicians. The resulting article—including a box about Good Questions for Good Health—provided tremendous exposure for GAHL and for health literacy in Georgia.

From: Don Rubin, Chair of the Georgia Alliance for Health Literacy

Action and advocacy events

Promoting health literacy goes beyond raising awareness and providing education. Indeed, long-lasting changes happen when advocates take action.

- One group worked with other organizations to modify legislation that sets standards for written materials.
- One program arranged to have the chairwoman of its state's Senate Appropriations Committee come as a guest speaker and present awards for excellence in patient education/health education.
- A large public health initiative focuses on empowering and informing people about their right to accessible, meaningful health information and services. The effort involves collaboration between adult learners, clients of literacy coalitions, immigrant-serving organizations, and community health programs serving vulnerable populations.
- Some states have officially proclaimed October as Health Literacy Month.
- I am currently looking for people who can help get Health Literacy Month proclaimed nationwide. Please contact me if you are one of those people.

Putting It All Together

The preceding chapters were designed to help you form the vision, define the objectives, assemble the people you need, and decide on the event you want to make happen. Now it is time to put all these pieces together. To do that, you need to think about time, location, budget, and several other event-planning basics.

Time

Health Literacy Month events can happen any time during the month. Some people even stretch the calendar and hold them in late September or early November. An event can also be as long or as short as you want. Consider the pros and cons of the following options:

- **An event that lasts just a few hours.** A time-limited event can be appealing. For one thing, attendees as well as those running the event only need to make a small time commitment. But opportunities to get your message across can be missed if people forget about the event or are not able to attend because of scheduling conflicts.
- **An all-day event.** The obvious advantage is that an all-day event is more visible, and you and your committee do not need to commit to running it for longer than a single day. On the other hand, invariably there will be people you want to attend who just will not be able to be there on that date.
- **An event that goes on for several days, up to a week.** When you repeat the same event over several days, people are more likely to put it on their calendar. Of course, they may delay attending because they know it will still be there tomorrow. Extended events that last for two or more days also offer opportunities for progressive learning. But attendees may be reluctant to commit this much time to a single focus. And think about you. Do you have the energy to continue teaching for so long? Sometimes, energy builds over time. Other times, energy steadily fades over the course of a few days.
- **A month-long event.** Repetition helps. You might want to host several events under the umbrella of a month-long initiative. The advantage is that you consistently and frequently get to promote your message. A disadvantage is that a month's worth of presentations, displays, articles, and contests is a major commitment of your time and energy.

Location

The location you choose for your event should be compatible with your purpose, schedule, audience needs, and budget. Whatever location you choose, make sure it is accessible to people with disabilities as well as convenient to public transportation and parking. Here are some options to consider:

- **Where you work.** An in-house location is convenient, accessible, and often can be reserved free or at least at low cost. On the other hand, an in-house location may not feel special enough to make your event distinctive. Think about your goals before simply settling for the familiar.
- **Community spaces such as a library, senior center, pharmacy, or shopping mall.** Spaces like these do get a lot of foot traffic, which means that you have an opportunity to reach a

larger audience. However, that audience is likely to be preoccupied with borrowing a book, picking up a prescription, shopping, or whatever else brought them to that space in the first place. You are going to have to compete for their attention before you can teach them anything about health literacy.

- **Local organizations.** Community colleges, health centers, clinics, and other local organizations may be happy to host a health literacy event. You should be prepared, though, to share the credit for the event with the organization that has provided the room.
- **Hotels, retreat centers, and other special places.** Staff usually enjoy and feel special when they attend meetings at off-site locations like these. But, of course, these locations are not cheap. Your budget will need to accommodate such expenditures as rental fees and per-person catering charges.
- **Virtual get-togethers.** You need not limit your location to a physical space. Consider whether you can accomplish some or all of your goals via conference calls, emails, or the Internet. Advantages are low cost, convenience, and flexibility. Disadvantages are that some people may be distracted or multitasking when you wish they were paying attention.

Booklets, articles, and other educational materials

Once you introduce the topic of health literacy, people want to know more. Professionals may ask for resources, including educational materials that will improve communication. Likewise, community members may ask about ways to communicate better with their doctors and other healthcare providers. You can help by having educational materials available. These materials can include any of the following things:

- Books, booklets, articles, newsletters, fact sheets, and other printed resources
- Lists of, or links to, credible and relevant websites where they can learn more
- Videos, audio recordings, pictures, posters, and actual objects that teach about or demonstrate health literacy principles

Giveaways

People like free “stuff.” This can include practical tools for people to use everyday as well as more whimsical doodads and other giveaway items that convey your message. Here are some examples:

- Practical tools for patients might include notepads specifically designed to write their questions for providers.
- A tool for providers might be laminated pocket-sized cards with tips for clear communication.
- Items with the Health Literacy Month logo clearly show that your event is part of a world-wide initiative. Items can include stationery, postcards, bookmarks, posters, buttons, pens, and mugs. You can create some of these items yourself by using the free downloadable logo available at <http://www.healthliteracymonth.org>.
- Food is almost always a winner. One group offered custom-made fortune cookies. Some of the cookies had fortunes that emphasized the importance of clear communication. Others listed ways to get more information.

- Several groups use the back of payroll slips every October to raise awareness of health literacy. Benefits are that this space is seen by all employees. Of course, you will need an okay from your organization's payroll or human resources department to do this.
- You can use items such as tent-style cards that you put on tables in the cafeteria to make it easy for people to find health literacy information. Or you might want to design special health literacy place mats to be put on each patient's meal tray.
- People often like to show off their accomplishments, so pins and awards are a good way to emphasize the importance of health literacy. At one event, health literacy award winners received a gift that included a special pin to wear on their uniform. "These individuals proudly wear their pins and it's a coveted award," the event planner said.

Budget

Budget realities may keep you from creating the Health Literacy Month event of your dreams. Consider not only what you need to pay for but also how to get the money. You should start raising money as far in advance as you can. In fact, now is not too early to start thinking about a budget.

Make sure while you put the event together that you keep track of both expenses and income. You might want to create a Health Literacy Month budget using a spreadsheet program such as Excel or keep track of your income and expenses using an accounting program such as Quicken or QuickBooks Pro.

Here are items you may need to pay for:

- **Food.** I cannot think of a Health Literacy Month event that at some point does not include food. Refreshments can be as simple as mid-morning snacks or more substantial meals and desserts. My bias is that, regardless of how simple or sumptuous, you include some healthy eating options. Make sure also to take into account any cultural considerations or possible food allergies.
- **Printing.** As with food, I cannot imagine an event that does not include some printed materials, whether that is promotional flyers, educational handouts, or evaluation forms. Find out in advance how much it will cost to print these materials. In consideration of your budget, you may need to make some trade-offs, such as printing materials in black and white on regular stock rather than in full color on glossy paper.
- **Speakers.** Fees for keynote speakers, workshop leaders, and other invited presenters vary widely. They can range from no fee or a modest honorarium to thousands of dollars for an outside expert coming just for your event. In addition to the fees, you need to allocate enough money to reimburse speakers for travel and other out-of-pocket expenses.
- **Location.** As discussed above, there are many cost considerations when you choose a location. Make sure to build these into your budget.
- **Publicity.** The movie adage "If you build it, they will come" does not necessarily apply to Health Literacy Month. Simply having a good event is not sufficient. You need to get the word out in order for people to attend. Publicity needs to do more than simply say where and when your event is happening. You also need a hook to entice people to attend (such

as continuing-education credits). Your publicity budget should include the price of printed materials, postage, and maybe even radio or television airtime. You might also budget for help from publicity pros — perhaps from your organization’s communications department or an outside marketing firm.

- **Doodads and other giveaways.** Beyond the cost of printing educational or promotional materials, budget for free giveaway items. See the section above to learn more.
- **Other costs.** Without a doubt, there will be other costs for your Health Literacy Month event. For example, you may need to rent technical equipment (such as microphones and LCD projectors), hire support staff (such as on-site technicians), and contract with cleaning or serving crews. Make sure to allow sufficient room in your budget for such expenses.

You will need to find funds to pay for everything. Here are some suggestions:

- **Internal funding.** Financial support could come from one or more departments within your organization. For instance, clinical services and marketing might both contribute to an event that improves health outcomes and garners positive attention for the institution. Ideally, Health Literacy Month will become a recurring item in the annual budget of several departments.
- **External funding.** Consider approaching local businesses, corporations, and foundations to ask them to be a part of your event. Let them know that the event you are asking them to support will address an important issue that has a major impact on their community. Then assure them that in return for their willingness to be a sponsor, or to underwrite some or all of the costs, they will receive public recognition for their contribution.
- **Grants.** Many organizations use grant money to fund their events. Grants may come from local or national businesses and foundations. Many groups find it easier to get small grants from local foundations than to get larger awards from national programs. If you plan to seek grant funding, pay close attention to the details of the application process. Know when the deadlines are and make sure you understand what needs to be included in your proposal. Also, be aware of how long it takes to be funded. You want to apply early enough to have the funds to pay for your event when you need them.
- **In-kind support.** Outside groups may respond to a request for donation of services or products rather than cash. Be open to thinking about options such as free or low-cost printing, food, or rental space. As with cash gifts, make sure the groups understand you are pleased to publicly acknowledge their contributions.
- **Registration fees.** Registration fees for health literacy workshops and other educational programs can help cover costs. Another advantage of registration fees is that often people feel more committed to attend if they pay at least a modest sum. One group put a clever twist on this idea and only charged people if they registered but did not attend. Indeed, this event ended up having a standing room crowd.
- **Other ways of paying costs.** As with all other aspects of Health Literacy Month, be as clever and creative as you can. You might want to fund your event in part through raffles, silent auctions, or other types of fundraisers.

Marketing Your Event

There are two important goals involved in marketing your event and promoting Health Literacy Month. The first is to generate interest and build enthusiasm so that people are eager to participate. The second is to attract attention to the issues you designed your event to address. Here are some ways to promote Health Literacy Month within your organization, in your local community, and around the world.

Ways to promote Health Literacy Month within your organization

- **Write an article for your organization's newsletter.** Include basic facts about health literacy such as whom it affects and how it impacts your organization. Follow this up with information about actions people can take — including, of course, participating in your Health Literacy Month event.
- **Put up posters and other eye-catching displays.** Do not just use words; employ the power of pictures and graphics to raise health literacy awareness. Feel free to use the Health Literacy Month logo and Health Literacy Hero images on all your materials. The logo is available at www.healthliteracymonth.org. For the Health Literacy Hero images, email me at Helen@healthliteracy.com
- **Post information on your organization's Intranet.** If possible, dedicate a special page of your organization's website to Health Literacy Month. You might want to contact other groups within your organization and ask if they will link to your page.
- **Informally promote your Health Literacy Month event.** You can build early enthusiasm by talking up what is planned and sending out save-the-date emails. But since many people are on vacation in July and August, you might want to wait until September before you officially open registration.

Ways to promote Health Literacy Month in your community

- **Ask local organizations to help promote your event.** You can provide Health Literacy Month flyers for other groups to distribute and post on their bulletin boards. You can also ask them to link to your website. Your request is more likely to be accepted if you offer to reciprocate by promoting their events when the time comes.
- **Send a press release to your local newspaper and radio or television stations.** You will find a sample press release in the appendix at the end of this booklet. You are welcome to adapt and use this release to promote your own event.
- **"Piggy back" on other events.** For example, if your community is holding a senior-citizen flu clinic, you might ask to put health literacy pamphlets in the waiting room.
- **Human-interest stories.** People like to read or hear about real-life experiences. Ask people to share their stories about the good and bad of health communication. Neighborhood newspapers and local newsletters are often receptive to such stories, or you might approach a radio station and ask them to run the stories as part of a public service announcement.
- **Photographs.** Take pictures during your event. Then, after it is over, write an article for your local paper and include the photographs. Remember to get written permission from each person before using his or her image and name.

Assessing Your Health Literacy Month Event

When your event is finished and you have accepted congratulations and finally put your feet up to relax, how do you know the event was a success? There are plenty of good reasons to ask that question. You no doubt told your funding sources and your department head that you were going to measure the outcomes. If you assess this year's event, you will have plenty of data to help you get organized and to attract support and volunteers for next time. Assessing what you did and did not accomplish will give valuable insight to the process you just went through — insight that you can use to help run your next event. Here are three ways to gauge the success of what you have done:

- **Review the vision and the objectives you set.** How close did you come to achieving your vision? And what about those three to five objectives you set? Did you meet them? One way I assess success is by writing informal comments to myself about each of these items. I have done this so often that I have created a form I call Notes to Me. I use this form to ask myself three questions: 1) What worked? 2) What didn't? and 3) Knowing what I know now, what would I do differently the next time? You will find a Notes to Me form in the appendix. You can use this form to assess how well your event accomplished what you set out to accomplish.
- **Count.** One way to measure success is by assembling objective data. How many people participated? What departments were represented? Who volunteered to serve on task-force committees? What was the return on investment (ROI)? This could be a closer look at behavioral or clinical outcomes. You might also want to count website clicks if you put health literacy information online and record how many newspaper articles or media interviews resulted from the effort. Remember, any quantifiable measures you established in the beginning or recognized after the process of planning and putting on an event began should be recorded and then shared with others who have an interest in what you have done.
- **Ask the committee.** You might want to ask each committee member who worked on the event to answer the same three questions you answered on the Notes to Me form. Then meet one last time as a committee to share your responses. Based on this review and discussion, it will be easy to see what is needed for the next Health Literacy Month event. You might even want to start planning it now.

When it is all over, celebrate the success of Health Literacy Month with your colleagues, committee, and community. You have earned the right to celebrate by making a difference in the lives of people who need healthcare. That includes you and me and just about everyone else we know.

Appendix A

Countdown to Health Literacy Month: A List of Things to Do Including When to Do Them

Taking on a big project like Health Literacy Month can seem overwhelming. You may feel as if you have too much to do, too many people to meet, and too little time to get any of it done. I like to break big projects like this down into a series of small steps and list them in the order in which they need to be done. That way I only need to think about one step at a time. When I do, I can see each step is quite doable. Then each time I check off a step, I feel good about making real progress toward the final goal.

If you like working from a list, here is one you can use to get ready for your Health Literacy Month event. It starts with tasks that need to be done six months before Health Literacy Month begins and ends with tasks that need to be completed the month after. There is also space on the list for you to add your own "To-Do" items.

April. Health Literacy Month is 6 months away.

People

- Consider what role you want to take. Perhaps you will lead the way as the Health Literacy Month Coordinator (or some such title). If this is not right for you, then think of other ways to participate and who to enlist instead.
- Speak with colleagues and interested others about health literacy. Get a sense of their interest in helping to create a Health Literacy Month event. Ideally, some of these people will become members of the planning committee.
- Think about other organizations that share your interest in health literacy. For example, your local literacy program may be teaching adults about health. Or the senior center may be helping older adults understand insurance. Introduce yourself and explore ways to collaborate on Health Literacy Month.

Putting it together

- Talk about health literacy with your supervisor, manager, and other organization leaders. Get a sense of how receptive they are to hosting a Health Literacy Month event. Beyond gauging interest, find out how much support they can offer in terms of money and other needed resources.

Planning

- Look at the big picture of what you want to accomplish, whom you want to work with, and how this event will benefit the people you serve.
- Think about what success will look like — whether it means educating people about health literacy, forming community coalitions, or improving health outcomes.

- Set a meeting date for all who express interest in Health Literacy Month. Plan this as a get-to-know-you time to share common interests and concerns.

My other To-Do's

- _____
- _____
- _____

May. Health Literacy Month is 5 months away.

People

- Build people-power. Beyond “worker bees,” start thinking about “influential others” to include in this work.
- Consider your intended audience — who they are and what you are asking them to do. An excellent way to do this is to think of them in terms of the Stages of Change model.

Planning

- Arrange a brainstorming session to create a vision. Feel free to be as creative and grandiose as you want.
- Identify a clear objective, achievable goals, and data-driven measures of success.

Putting it together

- Discuss what is realistic or possible in terms of locations and dates.
- Look seriously at the budget. Now is a good time to look outside your organization for grants, sponsors, or other sources of funding.
- If you plan to invite an outside speaker, now is the time to start thinking of who to ask. Many well-known speakers book at least six months in advance.

My other To-Do's

- _____
- _____
- _____

June. Health Literacy Month is 4 months away.

Planning

- Continue meeting regularly with the planning committee.
- Ask members to commit to projects they will work on. Then develop a system for following through to be sure that everything is being done in the time frame in which it needs to be done.

Putting it all together

- Book the facility, plan the food, and take care of other event basics.
- If you are bringing in an outside speaker, confirm the business side of this arrangement. Talk with the speaker about your event's goals and how he or she can help you accomplish them.
- Start on the paperwork needed for educational credits (such as CEUs or CMEs). This process often takes quite a while so begin as early as you can.
- Decide how you will later measure the success of your event.

Promotion

- Think about all the materials you want to distribute. This is likely to include educational materials as well as give-away items such as buttons, pens, or notepads. Now is the time to start designing or ordering these items.

My other To-Do's

- _____
- _____
- _____

July. Health Literacy Month is 3 months away.

Planning

- Continue meeting with the planning committee on a regular basis.
- Since many people may be on vacation this month, find other ways to stay in contact.

Promotion

- Start promoting your event internally to build enthusiasm and have people save the date.
- Consider having a separate website or a designated page on your organization's site. It can take weeks, if not months, to design a site you feel good about.
- Plan your external promotion. July is traditionally a slow news time so you might be able to get interviewed by your local newspaper and television or radio stations.

My other To-Do's

- _____
- _____
- _____

August. *Health Literacy Month is 2 months away.*

People

- Continue to keep your community partners informed about your plans.
- Confirm that all committee members are following-through with their commitments.

Putting it all together

- Create a registration system for your event. Make it as easy as possible for your intended audience members to sign-up and pay.
- Finalize your food plans.
- Purchase all your give-aways.

Promotion

- Send out press releases to the local media. Like July, this can be a quiet month so your local newspaper, radio, or television station may be delighted to feature a newsworthy story about health literacy.

My other To-Do's

- _____
- _____
- _____

September. *Health Literacy Month is 1 month away.*

Promotion

- Promote, promote, promote. This includes in-house flyers, Intranet announcements, and personal emails or phone calls.

Putting it all together

- Confirm everything is in place. This includes confirming the speaker's travel plans, details about the meeting location, arrangements for refreshments, and approval of educational credits.
- Print handouts and make sure you have a sufficient supply of give-away items.

My other To-Do's

- _____
- _____
- _____

October. Health Literacy Month is here!

Putting it together

- Tend to all last-minute details.
- Write notes to yourself on what works and what does not.
- Gather data to measure success.
- Take photographs (with permission, of course).
- Distribute and collect evaluation forms.
- Make sure you have enough. This includes enough flyers, brochures, and give-away items. And don't forget the food, which should not only be tasty but also abundant.

People

- Beyond bustling about for the event itself, find time to relax and enjoy what you worked so hard to create.

My other To-Do's

- _____
- _____
- _____

November

People

- Assess success, both individually and as a group.
- Have one last committee meeting. Congratulate yourselves, take pride in your success, and then discuss what to do differently and better next year.

Putting it together

- Put Health Literacy Month away for a few months. You have plenty of time to plan for next year.

Health Literacy Month. Done!

Appendix B

Sample Press Release

Publicity doesn't just happen. You need to generate interest among people in the media before they will tell others about your event or cause. One way to do this is to send press releases to your local news outlets. When you do, do not just think of the daily newspaper. Neighborhood newspapers, TV and radio stations, organizational newsletters, bloggers, community access channels on cable, and regional magazines are always on the lookout for interesting items to fill the spaces they have to fill. Here is a sample press release you can adapt, use, or model to help generate media interest in what you are doing to observe Health Literacy Month.

Date: [Insert the date you send the release]

For immediate release

For more information contact: [insert your contact information here]

[Your Organization's Name] to Participate in Health Literacy Month

Health Literacy Month Is Celebrated Each October to Promote the Importance of Understandable Health Information.

[Your Organization's Name] announced today its participation in Health Literacy Month, a grass-roots campaign to promote the importance of understandable health communication. Health Literacy Month, which is observed every year in October, is a time health literacy advocates use to learn from each other and work together to raise awareness about this important issue.

As part of the observance of Health Literacy Month, [your organization's name] will [fill in information on your event(s)]. If possible, include a quote from a key individual (yourself, a director, an elected official, etc.).

[Sample quote: "Serving our patients is our number one priority," said Jane Doe, executive director of County Hospital. "Providing understandable and accessible health information is a crucial part of that service, and we are proud to be a part of Health Literacy Month this year."]

Health literacy is often defined as "the degree to which people can obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services they need to make appropriate health decisions." But this definition is only a starting point. Health literacy is about the entire process of exchanging healthcare information. It is not just about reading and writing, but also about how people communicate about health through speaking, drawing pictures, and using technology.

The Institute of Medicine published a report in 2004 titled, *Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion*. The report's authors state in the executive summary that "nearly half of all American adults — 90 million people — have difficulty understanding and acting on health information." This difficulty can have a profound effect on individuals as well as entire healthcare systems.

"I know firsthand the challenges of communicating healthcare information," said Helen Osborne, M.Ed., OTR/L, founder of Health Literacy Month. "As a healthcare professional, I am well aware of the pressures clinicians face fulfilling even the basics of patient care. But I also appreciate the costs — to our patients, to ourselves, and to our organizations — when health providers fail to communicate in ways patients can understand."

To learn more about health literacy and ways you can participate in Health Literacy Month observances, contact [provide specific contact information the public can use].###

Appendix C

Notes to Me: Assessing the Success of My Health Literacy Month Event

You can use the following form to assess the success of your event and to find ways to make future events even better.

What the event was called:

What the vision was:

Specific and measurable objectives:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

What worked?

What didn't work?

Knowing what I know now, what to do differently next year?

About Helen Osborne

Helen Osborne M.Ed., OTR/L is recognized for her expertise in health literacy. She helps organizations communicate health information in ways that patients and the public can understand.

Helen is president of Health Literacy Consulting based in Natick, Massachusetts. She is the founder of Health Literacy Month. Helen also is the producer and host of the podcast series, *Health Literacy Out Loud*.

Helen brings clinical experience, educational training, and patient perspective to all this work. She speaks about health literacy at conferences and workshops around the world. She also serves as a plain language writer/editor on a wide variety of health-related materials. Helen is the author of several books, including the award-winning *Health Literacy from A to Z: Practical Ways to Communicate Your Health Message, Second Edition*—considered by many as the most important health literacy reference today.

To learn more about Helen's work, please visit the Health Literacy Consulting website at www.healthliteracy.com. You can also listen to her Health Literacy Out Loud podcast interviews at www.healthliteracyoutloud.org



Thanks for being a Health Literacy Advocate!

~Helen