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The HLS-EU is joint by more than 15 collaborating partners from Europe and abroad.

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[www.health-literacy.eu](http://www.health-literacy.eu)

# The European Health Literacy Survey

# HLS●EU

[www.maastrichtuniversity.nl](http://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl)

Based in the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences  
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## Health Literacy

### The concept

Health literacy encompasses people's capacities, skills, knowledge and motivation to access, understand, appraise and apply health information in written, spoken or digital form, in order to form judgments and take decisions in terms of using the healthcare system, disease prevention and health promotion, to improve quality of life throughout the life course.

The concept of health literacy appeared in relation to health education in the 1970s in the USA and the interest in the topic has increased highly since the 1990s.

Health literacy is closely related to literacy, which refers to the ability to read, write, listen, comprehend and speak a language; thereby enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

Health literacy requires additional skills than literacy skills, including those necessary for finding, evaluating and integrating health information from various contexts as well as knowledge about organization and culture of the health system.

### Why is health literacy important?

Research has shown that people with inadequate health literacy are less knowledgeable about importance of preventive health measures; have higher risk of hospital admission and additional costs of limited health literacy range from 3-5% of the total health care cost per year.

Limited health literacy often means that a person is unable to manage own health effectively, access health services effectively, and understand the information to them and thus make informed healthy decisions and improving health literacy of those with the worst health outcomes could be an important strategy to reduce health inequalities.

## The European Health Literacy Survey

### Aim

The European Health Literacy Survey (HLS-EU) is a project which will measure health literacy in various European regions and cultures and create awareness of its societal and political impact in Europe.

The HLS-EU is the first international survey of health literacy, yielding datasets for European and national valorization as well as in-depth international analyses.

### Outcomes

The outcomes of the HLS-EU project are expected to be

- development of a conceptual-based instrument to measure Health Literacy in Europe;
- comparable datasets on Health Literacy from eight European countries;
- insight on how well Health Literacy can be measured by the new survey instrument in and between different European countries;
- results highlighting empirical differences and commonalities in Health Literacy in Europe;
- input for priority setting in national valorization strategies;
- development of national and regional advisory boards transferring survey findings into practical political acting and to establishment of long-term working structures;
- an European Network on Health Literacy facilitating exchange of know-how and expertise.

### Milestones

#### Autumn 2009

Review of existing survey tools

Development of conceptual framework for the new tool

Questionnaire development

#### Spring 2010

Pilot study

Survey in eight European countries

#### Autumn 2010

Results from the European survey  
Launching of European Network on Health Literacy

#### Spring 2011

Establishing national advisory structures on health literacy

#### Autumn 2011

Final conference on health literacy

## More information

[www.health-literacy.eu](http://www.health-literacy.eu)