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What is health literacy?

Health literacy is the term used to describe the ability to engage with health information and services.

Health literacy brings together many concepts that relate to what people and communities need to make effective decisions about health for themselves, their families and their communities.¹⁻⁶

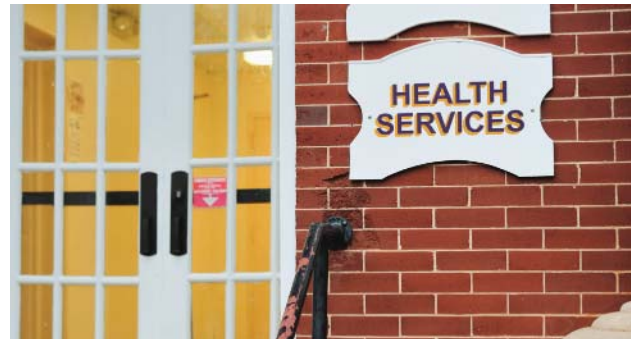
Health literacy refers to the personal characteristics and social resources needed for individuals and communities to access, understand, appraise and use information and services to make decisions about health, or that have implications for health. Health literacy includes the capacity to communicate, assert and enact these decisions.

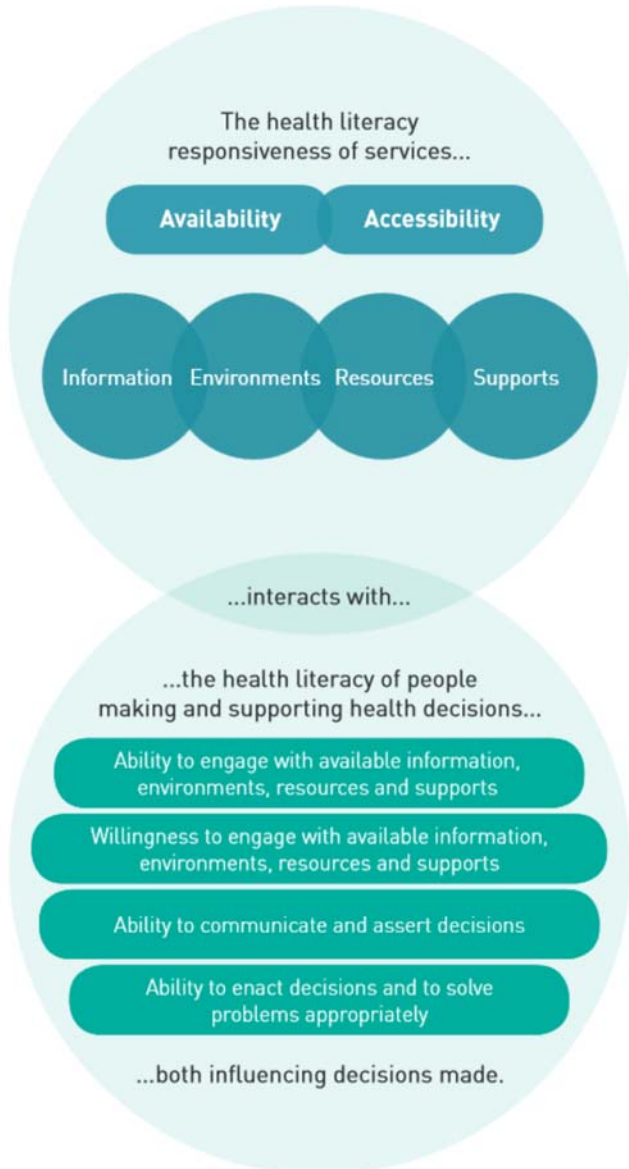
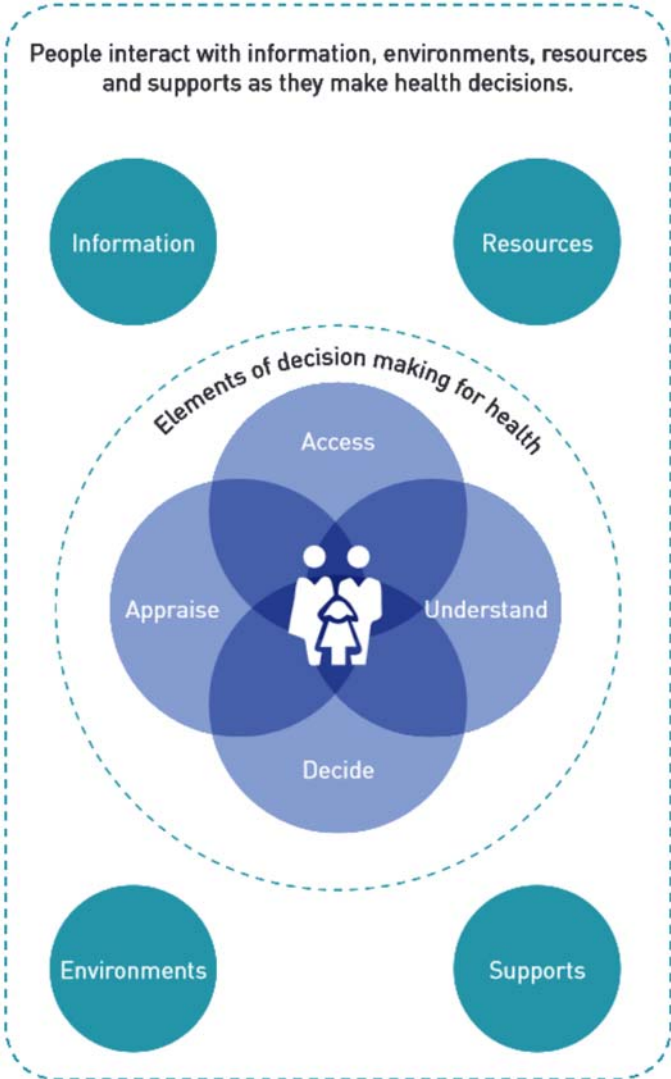
Health-related decisions may be about a person's own health, the health of another person, or the health of the community. These decisions may be made either by a group of people (e.g., a family or community) or an individual. The health literacy of individuals and communities influences (and is influenced by) health behaviours and the characteristics of society and the healthcare system.²⁻⁵ Further, it is context- and content-specific, so health literacy in one setting or relating to one health decision may be different from another.⁴



Individuals and communities have health literacy strengths and limitations that influence how effectively they engage with health information and services. Health and social service systems can also have strengths and limitations in how they respond to the health literacy of the people they serve.^{6,7}

Health-literacy responsiveness describes the way in which services make health information, resources, supports and environments available and accessible to people with different health literacy strengths and limitations.





The interaction between health literacy of people and the health literacy responsiveness of services



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