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Dodson, S., Beauchamp, A., Batterham, R.W. and Osborne, R.H. 2015, *Health literacy and other key concepts in health promotion*, Deakin University, Melbourne, Vic.

## Available from Deakin Research Online:

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# Health literacy and other key concepts in health promotion

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

## Health promotion concepts, their definitions, and links to health literacy

Concept	Definition	Links to health literacy
Health education	Consciously constructed opportunities for learning which involve some form of communication designed to: improve health literacy, including improving knowledge and developing life skills which are conducive to individual and community health. <sup>1</sup>	Health education is a strategy for improving the health literacy of community members.
Literacy	The ability to read and write. <sup>2</sup>	The ability to read, write, count and calculate influences access to information about health and assists with making decisions about health.

Concept	Definition	Links to health literacy
Cultural competence	A set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals; enabling that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. <sup>3</sup>	A culturally competent health system responds more effectively to community members with varying health literacy strengths and limitations.
Patient empowerment	Empowerment-based interventions include both a process and an outcome component. The process component occurs when the true purpose of the intervention is to increase the patient's capacity to think critically and make autonomous, informed decisions. The outcome component occurs when there is a measurable increase in the patient's ability to make autonomous, informed decisions. <sup>4</sup>	An empowerment approach seeks to enhance consumer health literacy.
Treatment adherence	Active, voluntary, and collaborative involvement of the patient in a mutually acceptable course of behaviour to produce a therapeutic result. <sup>5</sup>	People with higher health literacy often make informed decisions about their health and care. Their choices may or may not conform to the recommendations of health providers.

Concept	Definition	Links to health literacy
Patient activation	Activated patients believe they have important roles to play in self-managing care, collaborating with providers, and maintaining their health. They know how to manage their condition and maintain functioning and prevent health declines; they have the skills and behavioural repertoire to manage their condition, collaborate with their health providers, maintain their health functioning, and access appropriate and high-quality care. <sup>6</sup>	Activated patients often have health literacy strengths in areas relating to personal skills but may have varying access to social resources for health.
Cognitive capacity	The capacity to perform higher mental processes of reasoning, remembering, understanding, and problem solving. <sup>7</sup>	Cognitive capacity influences ability to access, understand, appraise and apply health information.
Self-management	Engaging in activities that promote health, build physiologic reserve, and prevent adverse sequelae; interacting with health care providers and adhering to recommended treatment protocols; monitoring physical and emotional status and making appropriate management decisions based on the results of self-monitoring; and managing the effects of illness on the individual's ability to function in important roles and on emotions, self-esteem, and relationships with others. <sup>8</sup>	Health-related behaviours and, consequently, self-management of health, are determined by an individual's decisions about health. Decisions about health are influenced by an individual's health literacy.

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Suggested citation

Dodson S, Beauchamp A, Batterham RW and Osborne RH. Information sheet 4: Health literacy and other key concepts in health promotion. In Ophelia Toolkit: A step-by-step guide for identifying and responding to health literacy needs within local communities. 2015. Retrieved from [www.ophelia.net.au](http://www.ophelia.net.au)

