

Health Literacy Final Report



HEALTH LITERACY FINAL REPORT

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About this report

This report provides stakeholders with an overview of the achievements of the NT PHN Health Literacy Strategy from 2018 to 2021. Beyond this strategy, NT PHN remains committed to improving health literacy for all Territorians by working to make it easier for people to navigate, understand, and use health information and services by:

- Strengthening our own health literacy environment, through our systems, policies, and practices
- Promoting continuous improvement in the health literacy environment provided by organisations we commission and the skills of providers so they can support people to make informed choices about their health and healthcare

Goal and Objectives

The NT PHN Health Literacy Strategy 2018 – 2021 supported the achievement of the NT PHN Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023 with the expectation that outcomes will aid all strategic goals, with a particular focus on Goal 1: To empower people to take control of their own health and wellbeing.

GOAL







The primary goal of the strategy is to improve the health of Territorians by enhancing health literacy of consumers and health professionals across the Northern Territory.

OBJECTIVES

To achieve this goal, the following objectives have been set:

- 1. Strengthen the health literacy environment created by NT PHN systems, policies, and practices;**
- 2. Support consumers to make informed choices about their health and healthcare both directly and through improving healthcare providers' skills;**
- 3. Create and sustain a health information library for validated accessible consumer information; Improve collaboration and integration of health literacy activities across NT health system and organisations.**

Objective 1 Strengthen the health literacy environment created by NT PHN systems, policies, and practices

Activity	Progress	Status
1.1 Develop and implement a strategy for NT PHN to become a health literate organisation	The activities listed in this strategy support NT PHN building internal health literacy capacity. These activities have been integrated into business as usual.	
1.2 Engage with NT PHN Community Advisory Council on health literacy strategy	NT PHNs Community Advisory Council, Top End and Central Australia Clinical Councils have been engaged in the development of the strategy and in individual initiatives occurring under the strategy. Between 2018 and 2021, 14 presentations were made to these forums.	
1.3 Create a full time Health Literacy Officer role	Health Literacy Project Officer role commenced 29 November 2018. The incumbent resigned in August 2020 and was not replaced pending review of NT PHN's approach to meeting the objectives of the strategy.	
1.4 Provide health literacy training to all new and current NT PHN employees and embed its importance in role descriptions	NT PHN has developed Cultural Induction videos for Central Australia, Katherine, Yirrkala and Darwin regions. These videos provide insight into local Aboriginal culture and context and how it affects and interfaces with health. The videos were launched in June 2021. NT PHN is currently reviewing opportunities to strengthen the internal health literacy environment.	
1.5 Require all new NT PHN projects and business activities to have a health literacy component	<p>The Health Care Home case study illustrates the use of videos in language as a health literacy tool to empower community.</p> <p>NT PHN has incorporated health literacy obligations in some policies and procedures. This includes the Commissioning Policy, Clinical Governance Policy and Consumer and Community Engagement.</p>	
1.6 Ensure that all NT PHN commissioning partners use, develop and share health literacy tools	<p>Organisations that are commissioned by NT PHN are required to train personnel in cultural safety and awareness. In addition, principles in NT PHN's Commissioning Policy include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed the Health Literacy Strategy across the PHN in all business units • Work with commissioned providers to ensure integration of health literacy into formal processes <p>The NT Health Literacy Integration Forum provided partners the opportunity to share knowledge and resources. NT PHN continues to explore opportunities to encourage the development and use of health literacy tools for commissioned partners.</p>	

Activity	Progress	Status
1.7 Prioritise Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in commissioning health literacy programs for Aboriginal consumers	NT PHN’s Commissioning Policy states “Where possible, contract Aboriginal specific health programs and services through Aboriginal community controlled health services”. However, during the three years of the current strategy, limited resources have been available to support external health literacy programs. NT PHN is currently investigating options to increase our commissioning of health literacy activities encompassing this activity.	✓
1.8 Conduct organisational health literacy self-assessment regularly to assess progress	A staff survey was completed in October 2019 to determine the relevance of health literacy to each position. Over 75% of staff completed the survey and approximately 90% rated health literacy as directly relevant to their position. This exceeds the target of 70% in the strategy.	✓

Health Care Homes Case Study




NT PHN’s support for the national Health Care Homes reform trial included a particular focus on health literacy. Health Care Homes are general practices or ACCHSs that provide better coordinated and more flexible care for Australians with chronic and complex health conditions. This national initiative had high uptake in remote NT communities and clinics, creating a need to ensure information was clear, easy to understand and contextually






appropriate. To support the promotion of the trial in the NT, we worked in partnership with AMSANT and community members to design a set of videos to explain Health Care Homes and their value to community members. NT PHN contracted italk Studios to produce an educational animated resource that explains Health Care Homes to people in the remote Aboriginal communities where they are being trialled. The video is available in English and seven Indigenous languages, including Anmatyerre, Arrernte, East Side Kriol, West Side Kriol, Pitjatjantjarra, Warlpiri and Yolngu Matha. We worked closely with AMSANT on the rollout of the videos and broader program, subcontracting a position to them to support the implementation of Health Care Homes throughout the NT

Link: [Health Care Homes videos in language available on YouTube.](#)

Objective 2 - Support health consumers to make informed choices about their health and healthcare both directly and through improving healthcare providers' skills

Activity	Progress	Status
<p>2.1 Develop a range of tools and resources for consumers to be active in their healthcare through prevention, self management and decision making</p>	<p>NT PHN continues to deliver and support activities that improve consumer participation in the management of their health. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mental Health NT website, a resource developed by NT PHN, AMSANT and NTG to connect people to doctors, remote health services and local community mental health services as well as increase their understanding of feelings and situations. The website links users to the right level of care for them. • Development of resources for people living with a disability to help them prepare for a general practice appointment and to understand their rights as a patient. A consumer representative is included on the working group for this project. • Support to assist Elders from around East Arnhem to attend Midawarr Day Out in Nhulunbuy, bringing together Elders from across the region with service providers to learn about aged care services • Support to assist sepsis awareness raising events for T is for Thomas. • Support for Mental Health Week Resources through the NT PHN sponsorship program. 	
<p>2.2 Ensure that all NT PHN continuing professional development sessions for health professionals include a health literacy component</p>	<p>Presenters engaged for NT PHN continuing professional development sessions are asked to include health literacy considerations with respect to both:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the health literacy of the target audience for the CPD activity and how the activity will be delivered to accommodate these needs • the skills of participating health professional with respect to communicating with their patients in relation to the subject <p>NT PHN CPD team utilise several touch points in the planning and delivery of sessions to ensure that opportunities health literacy outcomes are maximised.</p>	
<p>2.3 Provide and support access to culturally competent health literacy training for health professionals, including training in teach-back, risk</p>	<p>NT PHN provide a range of resources to health professionals recruited to primary health care services across the NT. Included are resources that contribute to health professional understanding of the unique communication needs of Aboriginal people. These documents include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal Ways of Using English by Diana Eades 	

Activity	Progress	Status
communication and the use of decision aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous Australians and Health – The Wombat in the Room • Teach Back website information <p>Throughout the Covid-19 response NT PHN has shared resources and radio advertising in language to increase access to health information for consumers.</p> <p>NT PHN will continue to identify options for health literacy training as part of the existing education program for health professionals.</p>	
2.4 Provide and support access to training for health professionals and other staff working in primary health care regarding locally available services to support people with additional communication needs, including interpreters, assisted hearing devices, relay systems and materials for people with visual impairment	<p>NT PHN’s Rural Workforce Agency recruits health professionals into primary health care positions across the NT. All new recruits are offered cultural awareness training.</p> <p>Support is also provided to health professionals through Health Pathways.</p>	
2.5 Provide and support access to training and materials for practice/clinic managers in service co-design	<p>The Primary Care Support team supports primary care providers through quality improvement and accreditation. Accreditation requirements provide an opportunity to co-design a health literacy environment for patients. Accreditation requires health care providers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create and maintain an up-to-date practice information sheet that contains all the required information in language that is clear and easily understood • provide alternative ways to make the information available to patients who have low literacy levels (eg provide versions in languages other than English, and versions including pictures) • consider the patient’s cultural and linguistic background (eg you may need to use an interpreter to check that the patient understands everything that you have told them – teach back) • consider the patient’s level of health literacy and therefore their ability to understand the information • obtain patient consent for a third party (eg an interpreter) to be present at consultations when the patient needs help understanding their health information • have a process which ensures that patients understand the information. 	

Activity	Progress	Status
2.6 Support health professionals to stay abreast of health system reforms	NT PHN regularly communicates with health professionals to ensure they are provided with relevant health system reform information. This information is provided by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to primary health care providers by the primary care support team in Darwin and the regional coordinators in in Nhulunbuy, Katherine and Alice Springs • NT PHN's fortnightly e-news • Regular continuing professional development events • The annual Compass Conference • Social media posts 	

Health Pathways Case Study

Health Pathways is a local clinical pathways website developed by NT PHN to help clinical teams, particularly general practitioners to, among other things, access information on locally available services to support their patients and the delivery of care to their patients. Health Pathways provides links for clinicians to local services such as the Aboriginal Interpreter Service, Interpreting and Translating Service NT, and the National Relay Service.

Health Pathways help clinical teams, particularly general practitioners, to navigate complex local variation in referral pathways and management of conditions for their patients. Developed by local general practitioners and health services in collaboration with hospital specialists, the pathways walk through clinical patient management with a reminder of the locally agreed best practice diagnosis and management skills for a condition. The pathways align and link to Remote Primary Health Care Manuals where these exist. Health Pathways is designed to be used during a general practice consultation. Each pathway provides clear and concise guidance for assessing and managing a patient with a particular symptom or condition. Pathways also include information about making requests to services in the local health system and provide links to information and resources for patients.





There are currently 453 localised pathways providing information on local management protocols, referral pathways and linking to local health resources for patients and providers.




Objective 3 - Create and sustain a health information library for validated accessible consumer information

Activity	Progress	Status
<p>3.1 Develop a process for validating existing consumer health information including developing or adapting a readability/language tool, a consumer feedback tool, and a common language glossary</p>	<p>In 2020 NT PHN commissioned Zest to deliver a health literacy toolkit designed for quality management of consumer health information resources. The toolkit aims to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigorous and evidence-based – to ensure consumer health information materials meet quality criteria • Adaptable to a range of cultures – to reflect the needs of different NT communities • Suitable to a wide range of information types – including text and multimedia • Sustainable – able to be managed without additional resourcing <p>The toolkit contributes to health literacy in the NT by helping health professionals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a shared understanding of best practice for consumer health information resources • know where to look for consumer health information and avoid duplicating existing resources • understand how to meet the health information needs of communities they serve. <p>3.6 Develop an online library to support health professionals and consumers to search for validated consumer health information, and embed links to library in other NT PHN resources</p> <p>NT PHN also commissioned a report scoping options for a centralised repository of validated consumer health information to support the health information needs of diverse communities. This activity responded to the ongoing challenges reported by stakeholders in accessing relevant, reputable health information despite the wealth of information available online. The objective of the proposed repository was to create a centralised portal for trusted consumer health information for the NT, enabling health professionals to find relevant information to help them support their patients, and for consumers to find trusted health information relevant to their needs. While the report identified potential ICT solutions, an assessment of the human resources needed to develop and maintain the resource identified that ongoing costs were prohibitive against a backdrop of existing national databases and the HealthPathways website.</p>	
<p>3.2 Conduct a consumer health information stocktake to identify consumer health information resources that are aimed at and/or provided to consumers in the NT, and engage with organisations across NT that create these resources</p>		
<p>3.3 Develop a process for providing feedback to organisations regarding consumer health information resources</p>		
<p>3.4 Test existing consumer health information using this process and provide feedback</p>		
<p>3.5 Develop or adapt a toolkit for health professionals and organisations to create new consumer-friendly health resources, including a readability/language tool, a consumer feedback tool and a common language glossary</p>		
<p>3.6 Develop an online library to support health professionals and consumers to search for validated consumer health information, and embed links to library in other NT PHN resources</p>		

Objective 4 - Improve collaboration and integration of health literacy activities across NT health system and organisations

Activity	Progress	Status
4.1 Support the design and delivery of policies, pathways and processes that reduce the complexity involved in navigating the health system	See the Health Pathways Case Study for further information.	
4.2 Commission health literacy programs that are designed and led by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services	<p>NT PHN commissions therapeutic and socio-cultural programs in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and commissions Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) to support these programs through workforce development.</p> <p>NT PHN commissions the Danila Dilba Health Service COVID Vaccine Engagement Service. The aim of this service is to conduct health promotion and vaccine education through a mobile service.</p> <p>Limited resourcing precluded commissioning additional health literacy programs between 2018 to 2021. NT PHN will continue to identify opportunities to support activities that increase provider awareness and engagement in health literacy.</p>	
4.3 Work with established health literacy groups in the NT and relevant stakeholders including consumers to establish a single health literacy reference group for the NT	<p>A NT Health Literacy Integration Forum was established to maximise the impact of strategic collaboration and sharing of health literacy resources and activities across the Northern Territory, for the benefit of all Territorians. The health literacy forum case study provides further information.</p> <p>This was placed on hold in 2020 due to staffing capacity however NT PHN remains committed to information sharing through existing communications such as NT PHN's eNewsletter.</p>	
4.4 Engage with and support existing initiatives that empower consumers to have more input into their healthcare	<p>NT PHN supports patient-centred care in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting accreditation of general practice defined as the provision of patient-centred, continuing, comprehensive, coordinated primary care to individuals, families and communities • Sponsoring awareness activities including World Suicide Prevention Day, Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation NAIDOC Week celebrations and Mental Health Association of Central Australia's Stress Less in the Park • Supporting the Aboriginal Investment Group's remote laundries project to provide free laundries in 	

Activity	Progress	Status
	<p>communities. This empowers community members to reduce the impact of scabies and skin disease caused by overcrowded housing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioning the Palmerston headspace service which was co-designed with young people and community stakeholders • Creating a Mental Health NT website for people to find and access the right mental health services and information. A promotional campaign to support this website included radio, social media, bus advertising and online advertising. • Sharing consumer resources through social media • Supporting the transition of services to community control by transferring identified health service funding from Top End Health Services to Red Lily Health Board to meet local needs • Including consumers with lived experience to co-design the Primary Health Care Accessibility and Inclusion Project and Movement Disorders Nurse Specialist Pilot • Employment of a lived experience staff member to ensure that NT PHN programs reflect the needs of consumers 	
<p>4.5 Work with Continuous Quality Improvement teams to ensure integration of health literacy into formal processes</p>	<p>NT PHN’s Pre-Qualification check for commissioned organisations requires information on patient rights, cultural safety, patient centred care and accreditation.</p> <p>NT PHN’s primary care support team supports primary health care providers to meet accreditation standards including health literacy. Accreditation requires health care providers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create and maintain an up-to-date practice information sheet that contains all the required information in language that is clear and easily understood • provide alternative ways to make the information available to patients who have low literacy levels (eg provide versions in languages other than English, and versions including pictures) • consider the patient’s cultural and linguistic background (eg you may need to use an interpreter to check that the patient understands everything that you have told them – teach back) • consider the patient’s level of health literacy and therefore their ability to understand the information • obtain patient consent for a third party (eg an interpreter) to be present at consultations when the patient needs help understanding their health information have a process which ensures that patients understand the information. 	

NT Health Literacy Integration Forum Case Study

The forum was established in 2019 and met on five occasions until February 2020. Membership included Charles Darwin University, Menzies School of Health Research, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT, Miwatj Health Service, NT Health, Aboriginal Interpreters Service, Fred Hollows Foundation, Aboriginal Resource Development Service and Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet.

The purpose of the forum included:

- Sharing information and expertise about health literacy resources and activities at national and local levels with a focus on strategic alignment of these activities
- Decreasing duplication of health literacy effort to maximise outcomes from limited resourcing
- Ensuring all health consumers are considered in the design and implementation of health literacy activities
- Utilising the collective knowledge base across the Northern Territory to ensure that all members have an opportunity to contribute to lessons learned and future planned health literacy initiatives.

In June 2019 a two-day workshop was held where stakeholders and forum members could share information and present on their health literacy initiatives. Presentations included:

- Health Lab – Menzies School of Health Research
- Culturally responsive communications – Charles Darwin University
- Diversity of languages in the NT – Aboriginal Interpreters Service
- Health Literacy Training – NT Health
- Health literacy among young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Males – David Anundsen
- My Health Record – iTalk Studios



Health Literacy Workshop participants – June 2019