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Health Information Hub

Plain Language can Advance St. Mary's Strategic Plan and Priority Health Issues

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Overview

- Health Literacy
- Maryland Consumer Health Information Hub
- Plain Language
- Plain Language Resources



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Health Literacy



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Health Literacy is multi-faceted

- **Personal health literacy: degree to which individuals**

- Find
- Understand
- Use
- Decide for self and others

- **Organizational health literacy: degree to which organizations enable individuals**

- Find
- Understand
- Use
- Decide for self and others



Why low health literacy matters



Less likely to use preventive health services



Less able to care for their chronic conditions



Have difficulty navigating the healthcare system



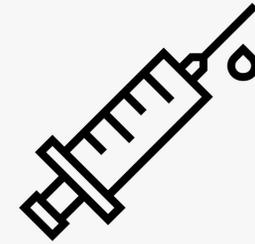
Use more healthcare services; have more hospital visits & longer hospital stays



More likely to engage in unsafe or inappropriate use of prescription or over-the-counter medications



Have higher mortality rates



Why health literacy matters

- We make decisions every day that affect our health
- Sometimes we know the answers, other times we're dealing with unfamiliar and complex (health) information
- We must find health information, evaluate it for credibility and quality, analyze risks & benefits, and make informed decisions



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Factors that affect how people understand and use health information



Communication skills of public health and clinical professionals



Level of complexity of health information



Cultural & linguistic suitability of health information and services



Public health infrastructure that facilitates and supports healthy behaviors



Health literacy level of individual



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Maryland Law HB1082

- Requires State Agencies and Local Health Departments to use **plain language** in public communications about health, health insurance, safety, and social services
- Also requires information to be in languages your constituents use (language access)
- Designates the Horowitz Center for Health Literacy as the Hub



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Consumer Hub purpose

- Increase the supply of plain language information for all Marylanders
- Increase Marylanders' demand for plain language information
- Increase the public's access to information about health and understanding of this information for decisions across the lifespan



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Plain language is the law

- **Maryland Consumer Health Information Hub (HB1082, 2022)**
 - Plain language activities
 - Language access activities
 - Information access activities
- **Overall goal: advancing health literacy in Maryland**
- **Governor Moore Executive Order (2024)**
 - State plain language plan
 - Plain language standards
 - Agency POCs
 - Content reviews
- **Overall goal: Communicating with Marylanders in accessible, easy to understand way**





Plain Language



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What is plain language?

Plain language is communication that...

- Your audience understands the **first time** they hear, see, or read it
- Enables your audience to
 - Find what they need
 - Understand what they find
 - Use what they find to meet their needs



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Plain language in brief

- **Established techniques to make information easier to understand and use**
 - Everyday words
 - Short sentences
 - Active voice
 - Pronouns
 - Headings, lists, and text chunks
 - Visuals
- **Audience-focused**
 - What do different groups of people want to know?
 - How much information for which purposes?
 - Where and how is information distributed?



Plain language relevance

- Plain language can help St. Mary's County residents more easily
 - Find forms, programs, services, call centers, websites, and more
 - Apply for benefits and services
 - Complete applications
 - Get their questions answered without program jargon
 - Navigate websites



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Plain language can help St. Mary's County advance priority health issues

- Behavioral Health – Mental Health and Substance Use
- Chronic Disease
- Environmental Health
- Violence, Injury and Trauma



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Plain language supports your work

Behavioral Health Strategies

Action Team Level

- Promote healthy coping mechanisms and preventative care and screenings for mental health.
- Increase awareness of local behavioral health resources and programs.
- Conduct asset mapping and gap analysis of local behavioral health services.
- Collect qualitative input and conduct analysis on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health.
- Support targeted case management for priority populations within social services.
- Increase peer support in the community.
- Identify local baseline for those who are scheduled for services but do not engage.
- Decrease stigma associated with behavioral health through communications campaigns, public outreach, and anti-stigma training.
- Provide cultural competency training for clinicians.
- Support education around language disparities, health literacy, and health equity.



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Chronic Disease Strategies

Action Team Level

- Develop a resource guide of quit tobacco resources and promote a variety of cessation resources.
- Educate the community on the risks of secondhand and thirdhand smoke exposure.
- Address tobacco related disparities.
- Increase the number of lifestyle change programs available in the community and promote programs that are already available.
- Expand the implementation of healthy cooking, teaching kitchens and healthy eating education and skill-building opportunities.
- Collaborate with partners to establish support groups for people with diabetes.
- Support education around language disparities, health literacy, and health equity.
- Support insurance education and enrollment efforts.
- Conduct asset mapping and gap analysis of local exercise opportunities.
- Promote local exercise opportunities and facilities.
- Promote regular monitoring of blood pressure.
- Support community-wide media campaigns and programs to promote increased fruit and vegetable consumption and healthy diets.
- Support community-wide education and awareness on hypertension.
- Promote Green & Healthy Homes initiative and host trainings for parents.
- Collaborate with partners to establish support groups for people with cancer.
- Promote cancer screenings including home screenings.
- Support community-wide education on cancer risk factors.
- Establish a Food Prescription program.
- Expand More to Explore program to include nutrition program and education.



Environmental Health Strategies

Action Team Level

- Support education around lead exposure prevention.
- Support education on improving indoor air quality.
- Advocate for decreased restrictions on local medical appointment transportation programs.
- Promote alternative transportation methods (public transportation, bicycling, walking, carpooling) and increase access to bike routes and off-road trails.
- Conduct mapping project and gap analysis of transit network with healthy food options.
- Promote and support housing renovation/building programs such as Christmas in July and Habitat for Humanity.
- Conduct asset mapping and gap analysis for local food resources.
- Establish a local surplus food donation program.
- Promote radon testing of all homes.
- Promote MDH radon test kit program.
- Promote policies and standards for broadband affordability.
- Promote and support community member advocacy efforts.



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Violence, Injury, and Trauma Strategies

Action Team Level

- Conduct local study to compare Philadelphia ACE survey and original ACE survey.
- Conduct trauma/resiliency assessment with local agencies and community partners.
- Expand community training on ACEs.
- Support the implementation of targeted outreach and support to LGBTQIA+ community around suicide prevention
- Expand community education and trainings on mental health and suicide (e.g. Mental Health First Aid).
- Decrease social stigma associated with mental illness treatment and support through communications campaigns, public outreach, and anti-stigma training.
- Develop resource guide for suicide prevention and mental health resources.
- Host suicide prevention learning series.
- Develop suicide prevention resource guides for youth for where and when to go for help.
- Support public and private schools in suicide prevention and intervention measures.
- Promote peer education around suicide prevention and intervention (e.g. Teen Mental Health First Aid).
- Develop a resource guide for SMCSO| to provide to homeless individuals.
- Establish a local baseline for the cause of motor vehicle accidents (distracted driving, intoxication, etc.).





Plain Language Resources



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Plain Language Resources

[Maryland Consumer Health Information](#)

Maryland Plain Language Resources

Plain language is a set of techniques that helps your audience understand your content the first time they read or hear it. Learn more about [plain language](#) and the [Federal Plain Language Guidelines](#).

+ **Plain Language Checklist**

+ **Plain Language Action Planning Guide**

+ **Plain Language Standards**

+ **Web Content Review Tool**

+ **Health Literacy Organizational Seal**



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Maryland Plain Language Checklist

The Maryland Consumer Health Information Hub law requires state and local agencies to use plain language in communications about health, safety, health insurance, and social service benefits information. Plain language is a set of techniques that help the audience understand the first time they read or hear the information. Plain language also helps translators understand the content and better convey meaning in other languages.

This checklist will help you see if written content is clear, actionable, and written in plain language. Checkmarks show if items are present or not; the notes provide details.

What is the title of this content?

Who is the audience for this content?

Which language(s) does your audience use?

Audience Focus

- Yes No
- Choose visuals that help the audience know what the content is about at first glance.
 - Choose titles that help the audience know what the content is about at first glance.
 - Choose introductory words that tell the audience who the content is for at first glance.
 - Begin with the most important message and order topics based on the audience's needs (what they need to know first, then background information).
 - Choose images that relate to the text and are culturally appropriate for the audience.

Notes:

Calls to Action

- Yes No
- State one or more clear calls to action for the audience. This can include "learn more."
 - Describe why the action is important for the audience.

Updated 03.05.25



- Yes No
- Break down the action into simple, easy steps.
 - Provide a phone number, website, and email address for more information or help.

Notes:

Literacy

- Yes No
- Use personal pronouns to speak directly to the audience, such as "your benefits," instead of using third person pronouns, like "the insured."
 - Use active voice.
 - Draft paragraphs with short, simple sentences.
 - Choose words that your audience recognizes and prefers. Avoid acronyms and jargon. If you need to use them, spell out acronyms, and define or explain unfamiliar terms.
 - Write in a friendly and conversational tone.

Notes:

Design and Formatting

- Yes No
- Choose simple (not fancy or unusual) fonts in at least 12 point.
 - Use *italics*, **bold**, and ALL CAPITAL text sparingly.
 - Present uncluttered pages with plenty of white space and dark type on a light background.
 - Add descriptive headings so the audience can quickly skim.
 - Chunk text and include bulleted or numbered lists.

Notes:

Language Access

- Yes No
- Translate vital health, safety, social services, and health insurance content using certified translators.
 - Provide translated plain language content for all Limited English Proficiency audiences.

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How to implement plain language in your organization

Step 1 : **Assemble a Team**

Step 2 : **Train the Team**

Step 3 : **Practice Using the Tools**

Step 4 : **Create Your Materials**

Step 5 : **Test Your Materials with Community Members**

Step 6 : **Monitor and Report Progress**



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Plain language promotes information access & sharing



Thank you!



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Questions?

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For information and resources
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