The Ministry of Health developed this Framework in May 2015 because the Ministry is committed to a health system that enables everyone in New Zealand to live well and keep well. Building health literacy is an important part of this.

The Framework outlines expectations for the health system, health organisations and all of the health workforce to take action that:

- supports a ‘culture shift’ so that health literacy is core business at all levels of the health system
- reduces health literacy demands and recognises that good health literacy practice contributes to improved health outcomes and reduced health costs.

**Key points**

- The Framework is not currently mandated by the Ministry. Instead the Framework defines the Ministry’s expectations and provides guidance to organisations which are being encouraged to use the Framework.
- The Framework is a way of thinking and working not a list of activities.
- This Framework is aligned to the Ministry’s Equity of Health Care for Māori Framework.
- Primary care practices are likely to find the Framework challenging to apply because they operate as small businesses even though they are largely funded by the Government.

**New Zealand’s Framework for Health Literacy**

**A framework for health literacy**

This framework reflects how each part of the health system can contribute to building health literacy so that all New Zealanders can make informed decisions about managing their health, or the health of those they care for.

**Health system**

Health system leadership sets the expectation that good health literacy practice helps individuals and organisations to live well, keep well and get well. What success looks like: The health system responds to its role in reducing health literacy demands placed on people when they access health care.

**Actions**

- Provide strategic guidance to the health sector to support health literacy activities that are based on evidence and concern the whole system.
- Incorporate health literacy thinking into advice and system design.
- Establish a health literacy group and health literacy champions that are mandated by or include senior leaders.
- Choose communication approaches that:
  - are evidence based;
  - make the most of consumer-focused technology to meet the needs of individuals and families;
  - reduce health literacy demands in the health system.

**Health system leadership**

The health system builds an evidence base that identifies the changes needed to improve health literacy, reduce demands and support effective innovations.

What success looks like: The health system has a sophisticated approach to building health literacy and builds knowledge that identifies hurdles to accessing health care at every point of contact. These problems are then prioritised for meaningful action.

**Actions**

- Build understanding of the impact of health literacy on New Zealand population(s), furthering the work of Kōrero Mātauranga Health Literacy and Māori: Results from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey.
- Build the evidence base effective ways to build health literacy and reduce health system demands, and share information about innovations.
- Develop evaluation methods that take account of the complex nature of health literacy.
- Develop partnerships with and between research, education and practice communities to build and share knowledge of health literacy. Some examples of collaborating agencies are the Health Quality and Safety Commission, the Health Research Council and the Ministry of Education.

**Health system**

Health organisation leadership is about ensuring that health literacy is a core organisational value that helps drive quality improvement and achieve health equity.

What success looks like: Health organisations consider health literacy is a part of all aspects of their work. This is visible in the way that organisations communicate, provide information, present their facilities, and interact with people.

**Actions**

- Facilitate staff access to a comprehensive programme of workforce development in good health literacy practice.
- Grow health literacy leadership, cultivate champions and delegate authority for health literacy oversight.
- Organisations responsible for setting professional standards recognise the link between cultural competency and health literacy, and they apply this to professional development programmes.

**Health organisation leadership**

Health organisations must build knowledge about how they can improve health care organisational value and health literacy friendly.

What success looks like: Health organisations encourage individuals and families to provide input into how the organisations do things, at every point of the patient journey.

**Actions**

- Review the status of health literacy in an organisation using the six dimensions of a health literacy organisation (see tools such as the Review of Health Literacy: A Guide for health organisations).
- Share knowledge with other health organisations that are undertaking a health literacy review.
- Use tools such as Roaeri Atawhai: A guide to developing health education resources in New Zealand to review existing resources.

**Health organisation leadership**

Health organisations must express their commitment to health literacy by creating an environment that reduces health literacy demands.

What success looks like: Health organisations provide access to health education services where good health literacy practice is taken seriously and used consistently.

**Actions**

- Develop, implement and resource action plans to build health literacy in a long term, sustainable way.
- Make the health care environment easy for people to find their way through with wear and clear signs and directions, use of plain language, including reader-friendly print and web-based information.
- Routinely invite individuals and families to provide input and feedback on the services they use.
- Gather information from individuals and families to check that they are not stigmatised or labelled as having low health literacy, and that they feel confident navigating their way around the services.

**Health organisations**

The health workforce is about being seen by peers, individuals and families as effective communicators, who champion good health literacy practice.

What success looks like: Every member of the health workforce raises awareness of health literacy and promotes good health literacy practice, with a view to new and existing health organisations to better communicate with people.

**Actions**

- Approach health literacy in a way that recognises levels of health literacy differ between individuals and can be different for an individual at different times of their life.
- Promote and coordinate action to raise awareness of, and build skills in health literacy practice across the health workforce and across the health system.
- Work in ways that build health literacy skills of individuals and families.

**Health workforce leadership**

The health workforce can contribute to improved understanding of good health literacy practice.

What success looks like: Health workforce members are knowledgeable about how health workforce members can build health literacy in their practice and among individuals and families.

**Actions**

- Undertake training in effective health literacy communication (evidence-based) methods as a core part of professional development.
- Provide resources that are appropriate for the target audience and use a variety of media and approaches (including different technologies).
- When developing health education resources, seek feedback from individuals and families and use reference material such as Roaeri Atawhai: A guide to developing health education resources in New Zealand.

**Health workforce leadership**

Health organisations encourage individuals and families to access and navigate appropriate, quality and timely health services.

**Actions**

- Provide strategic guidance to the health system on how to help individuals to make informed decisions about managing their health, or the health of those they care for.

**Health organisations**

The health workforce must be committed to good health literacy practice as a routine part of how they do things.

What success looks like: Individuals and families are supported to obtain, process and understand health information from everyone they have contact with in the health system, and are empowered to make informed decisions.

**Actions**

- Build capacity for the health workforce to use plain language and proven health literacy practices (see for example, Three steps to better health literacy).
- Create an environment where individuals can speak freely about their health care relevant to people in the health workforce.
- Assume that most individuals and families will at times have difficulty understanding and applying complex health information, and work on ways to make it less difficult.

**Health organisations**

**Individuals and families**

Individuals and families are able to make informed decisions, and can access and navigate appropriate, quality and timely health services.