

3.D. Round table: Improving equity in health: Understanding and responding to health literacy as a social determinant

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Organised by: EUPHA-HL, -HP, -GH, -DH, -ETH, IUHPE Working Group on Health Literacy, WHO Action Network on Measuring Population and Organizational Health Literacy, TU Munich (Germany)
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Evidence of a social gradient in health literacy has been found in all reported national population surveys in Europe. This workshop will examine the explanations for this social gradient and explore ways to optimise the contribution that health literacy makes in mediating the causes and effects of established social determinants of health. This will include consideration of practical approaches to improving health literacy in socially disadvantaged populations as a contribution to reducing health inequities within and across European countries. The workshop will explore the concept of critical health literacy and the potential to improve public awareness of and capacity to act on the wider social determinants of health. It will also draw upon existing evidence from interventions that demonstrate the feasibility of improving health literacy among higher-risk and diverse populations. This will include consideration of approaches to improving frontline professional skills and support; approaches to organizational and systems health literacy, working directly with people to develop critical skills in accessing, understanding and applying health information; and ensuring that in public health policy, priority is proportionate to need - reaching and engaging the population groups disproportionately affected by low health literacy. Recognising that research remains underdeveloped and the effects of interventions on health inequity are largely untested, the workshop will also consider where the most important research gaps exist and where future health literacy research should be prioritised. The workshop chair will provide introductory and summary remarks

to the workshop. The co-chair will manage the panel discussion and audience participation in the workshop. The individual panel members will make 3-minute introductions to key issues from different perspectives examining the mediating and moderating role of health literacy in addressing the social determinants of health. The panel is made up of individuals from academic and policy roles and at different career stages who can offer complementary perspectives on these issues. Following the presentations, the co-chair will present some follow-up questions to the panel before engaging directly with the workshop participants for an open discussion scheduled to last for 30 minutes of the workshop.

Key messages:

- Improving health literacy is not a panacea for entrenched inequities in health but can help moderate the impact on health of other social determinants and provide an important practical response.
- Public health policy and practice intended to improve health literacy should prioritise reaching and engaging the population groups disproportionately affected by low health literacy.

Speakers/Panelists:

Gill Rowlands

Newcastle University, Newcastle, UK

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Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

Ana Rita Pedro

NOVA National School of Public Health, Lisbon, Portugal

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