

Health Literacy and the Health Literacy Alliance of SA

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Health literacy is the degree to which people have the ability and the capacity to obtain, process and understand health information and the services needed to make appropriate health decisions. It has a direct influence on people's access to crucial information about their rights and health care and ability to participate in their own care, the health service and health system. It is incumbent on the relevant systems, services and professionals to provide access and opportunity for all citizens. Health literacy is necessary for the development of social capital and seeks to address health inequalities.

The South Australian Health Literacy Alliance sprang from an interim recommendation of Adelaide Thinker in Residence, Professor Ilona Kickbusch. Formed in early April 2007, the Alliance has grown to comprise a membership of 49 from a broad range of backgrounds and disciplines from university, health, education, research, clinical, government and community sectors. It seeks to provide leadership and support for developing and applying the concept of health literacy as a means of equitably improving health & wellbeing. It also endeavours to investigate of the level of health literacy in the community, the impact on the health status and its cost to the community. The Alliance was formally launched in October 2007 by Professor Kickbusch and recently became a participant of a European Health Literacy Research Network with co-participants in Switzerland, Canada, Ireland, England and U.S.A.

Professor Kickbusch stresses the importance of health literacy in relation to equity. In line with the social determinants of health, this is fundamental in avoiding a two-tier health system and a two-tier society, and in promoting sound healthy choices in the context of everyday life.