

27. Framework for Health Literacy Promoting Institutions: Healthcare Institutions

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Health Literacy contributes not only to promoting health and preventing diseases, but also to the effectiveness and efficiency of health services, and is, therefore, an essential tool for the sustainability of the National Health Service (SNS). As such, health literacy is one of the top priorities of the Directorate-General of Health (DGS).

With regards to the Portuguese context, the SNS has been modernising itself, seeking to improve health literacy levels among the Portuguese population and has been implementing various measures and initiatives with this aim.

Inspired on the discussion paper released in 2012 by Brach et al., the DGS has decided to develop a sequence of Frameworks dedicated to promoting health literacy in different institutions and organisations. Starting with healthcare institutions, the aim is then to follow onto other sectors and institutions, for example, once the Framework for Health Literacy Promoting Institutions: healthcare institutions is finalised, the DGS will, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, produce a Framework for health literacy promotion in educational institutions.

The Framework for Health Literacy Promoting Institutions: Healthcare Institutions describes 10 attributes of health literate healthcare institutions that make it easier for people to navigate, understand, and use information and services to take care of their health. By creating health literate healthcare institutions, we are empowering not only the 49% of the Portuguese population who have problematic and inadequate health literacy levels but also the majority of Portuguese who have difficulty understanding and using currently available health information and health services.

Each attribute is described and exemplified with actions that can be taken up to achieve the attribute. This Framework is relevant for healthcare institutions and healthcare professionals to know what actions need to be taken to close the gap that currently exists between citizens' health literacy skills and the healthcare system's complexity, to improve the institution's linguistic and cultural competence, to create an environment that promotes health literacy, to improve the quality of health care provision and, consequently, to promote the citizens' health.