



iNTERVENE

Health Literacy and Digital Health Literacy as Key Drivers of Health Transformation

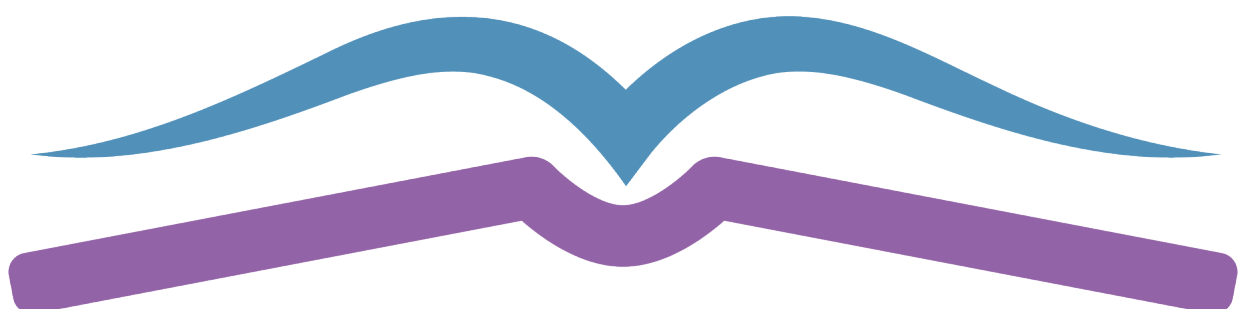
A policy brief by the
iNTERVENE project



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INTRODUCTION



Health literacy and digital health literacy are increasingly recognised as crucial elements in the evolving healthcare landscape. As healthcare systems shift towards digital platforms, it is imperative that individuals are equipped with the skills necessary to assess, comprehend, and effectively utilise health information.

This policy brief is informed by a recent cluster activity that hosted a roundtable discussion organised by the iINTERVENE project. The event brought together representatives from several key initiatives, including eCAN Plus JA, CAREWAY, TRANSITION, EUCanScreen, and CURTAIN. The discussion was facilitated by two members of the EU Cancer Mission, alongside the Coordinator of the iINTERVENE project.

This brief aims to illuminate the critical importance of health literacy, outline the challenges currently faced, highlight ongoing initiatives, and provide actionable recommendations for enhancing these essential skills. By fostering health literacy and digital health literacy, we can empower individuals to navigate the complexities of the healthcare system, ultimately leading to improved health outcomes and a more informed populace.

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1. The Need for Enhanced Health Literacy

Informed Decision-Making

Individuals equipped with strong health literacy skills are better positioned to make informed decisions regarding their health, engage in preventive measures, and adhere to treatment plans.



1.1 Empowerment

Improved Health Outcomes

This empowerment translates into better health outcomes and an enhanced quality of life, fostering a more proactive approach to healthcare.



Participation in Preventive Care

Research shows that patients with higher health literacy are more likely to participate in cancer screenings and adhere to treatment recommendations, leading to reduced mortality rates.



1.2 Impact on Health Outcomes

Navigating Health Systems

Health literacy significantly influences individuals' ability to navigate complex health systems and access necessary services, ultimately affecting their overall health trajectory.



2. Challenges in Health Literacy

Policy Gaps

Despite its critical importance, health literacy is often overlooked in healthcare policies, resulting in gaps in education and support for individuals lacking these essential skills.



2.1 Underestimation in Policy and Practice

Widening Health Disparities

Without proper health literacy, even the most advanced healthcare innovations may fail to reach their full potential, exacerbating existing health disparities.



Overwhelming Choices

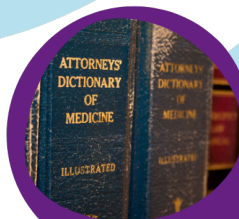
The vast amount of health information available online can overwhelm individuals, particularly those with low literacy skills, making it challenging to discern reliable sources from misinformation.



2.2 Complexity of Information

Understanding Medical Terminology

Many patients struggle with medical jargon, treatment options, and their rights within the healthcare system, leading to confusion and disengagement.



3. The Role of Digital Health Literacy

Digital Resource Utilisation

Digital health literacy encompasses the ability to effectively use digital health resources, including telehealth services, online patient portals, and health applications.



3.1 Navigating Digital Health Tools

Engagement in Care

As healthcare increasingly adopts digital solutions, individuals must be adept at navigating these platforms to actively participate in their own care.



Active Health Management

Enhancing digital health literacy empowers individuals to take a proactive role in managing their health, which can lead to improved healthcare experiences and outcomes.



3.2 Empowerment through Technology

Facilitating Communication

Digital tools can enhance communication between patients and providers, making it easier for patients to ask questions and seek clarification.



4. Challenges in Digital Health Literacy

4.1 Access and Equity

Digital Divide

Disparities in access to technology and the internet can worsen existing health inequalities, particularly among vulnerable populations, such as low-income individuals and those in rural areas.



Resource Limitations

Many individuals lack the necessary resources to engage with digital health tools, hindering their ability to benefit from digital health advancements.



4.2 Trust in Technology

Privacy Concerns

Patients may harbor reservations about using digital health tools due to concerns regarding privacy, data security, and the reliability of online information.



Building Trust

Fostering trust in these technologies is crucial for encouraging their adoption and consistent use in healthcare.



5. Current Initiatives and Strategies

Focus on the European Code Against Cancer

European Code Against Cancer

Launched by the European Commission, this initiative provides 14 evidence-based recommendations aimed at reducing cancer risk, empowering individuals to make informed lifestyle choices and preventive decisions.



5.1 Evidence-Based Recommendations

Multilingual Resources

The code is available in all EU languages, ensuring that reliable cancer prevention information is accessible to diverse populations.



5.2 Accessibility

Clear Communication

By prioritizing clear communication, the code aims to enhance health literacy across different cultural contexts.



6. Health Literacy Projects

Investment in Health Literacy

The EU4Health programme funds various health literacy projects, with an investment exceeding 5 million euros, focusing on specific cancers such as breast and prostate cancer.



6.1 EU4Health Programme

Tailored Educational Materials

These projects aim to create customised educational resources for targeted populations to improve cancer health literacy.



Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Initiatives promote collaboration among healthcare professionals, educators, and community organisations to develop effective health literacy programmes.



6.2 Collaborative Approaches

Cultural Sensitivity

Engaging diverse stakeholders ensures that materials are culturally sensitive and responsive to community needs.



7. Innovative Training Programmes

TRANSITION Project

Initiatives like this focus on training healthcare professionals in developing the digital skills necessary for effective cancer care, offering accredited modules covering critical topics such as digital security, patient empowerment, and empathetic communication.



7.1 Workshops and Training Modules

Patient Involvement

Involving patients and caregivers in the training process ensures that the curriculum reflects real-world experiences and needs, fostering trust and facilitating the sharing of information among diverse populations.



7.2 Community Engagement



8. Recommendations

8.1 Integrate Health Literacy into Policy

Policy Frameworks

- Health literacy should be prioritised within health policies, with dedicated funding and resources allocated to enhance both health and digital health literacy.
- Policymakers must recognise the essential role of health literacy in achieving broader health outcomes and equity.

Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Partnerships among healthcare providers, educational institutions, and community organisations are vital for creating a cohesive approach to health literacy.
- Collaborative initiatives can leverage resources and expertise to develop comprehensive programmes.

8.2 Promote Community Engagement

Tailored Educational Materials

- Develop and disseminate culturally sensitive materials that resonate with diverse communities, ensuring accessibility and comprehension.
- Ensure materials are available in plain language and formats that are easy to understand.

Engage Trusted Community Figures

- Collaborate with community leaders and health advocates to promote health literacy initiatives and facilitate discussions on health topics.
- Building trust within communities is essential for effective health communication and engagement.

8.3 Leverage Technology for Education

Digital Platforms

- Utilise digital platforms to deliver health education and resources, ensuring individuals can easily access and comprehend health-related content.
- Invest in user-friendly tools that enhance engagement and facilitate communication between patients and healthcare providers.

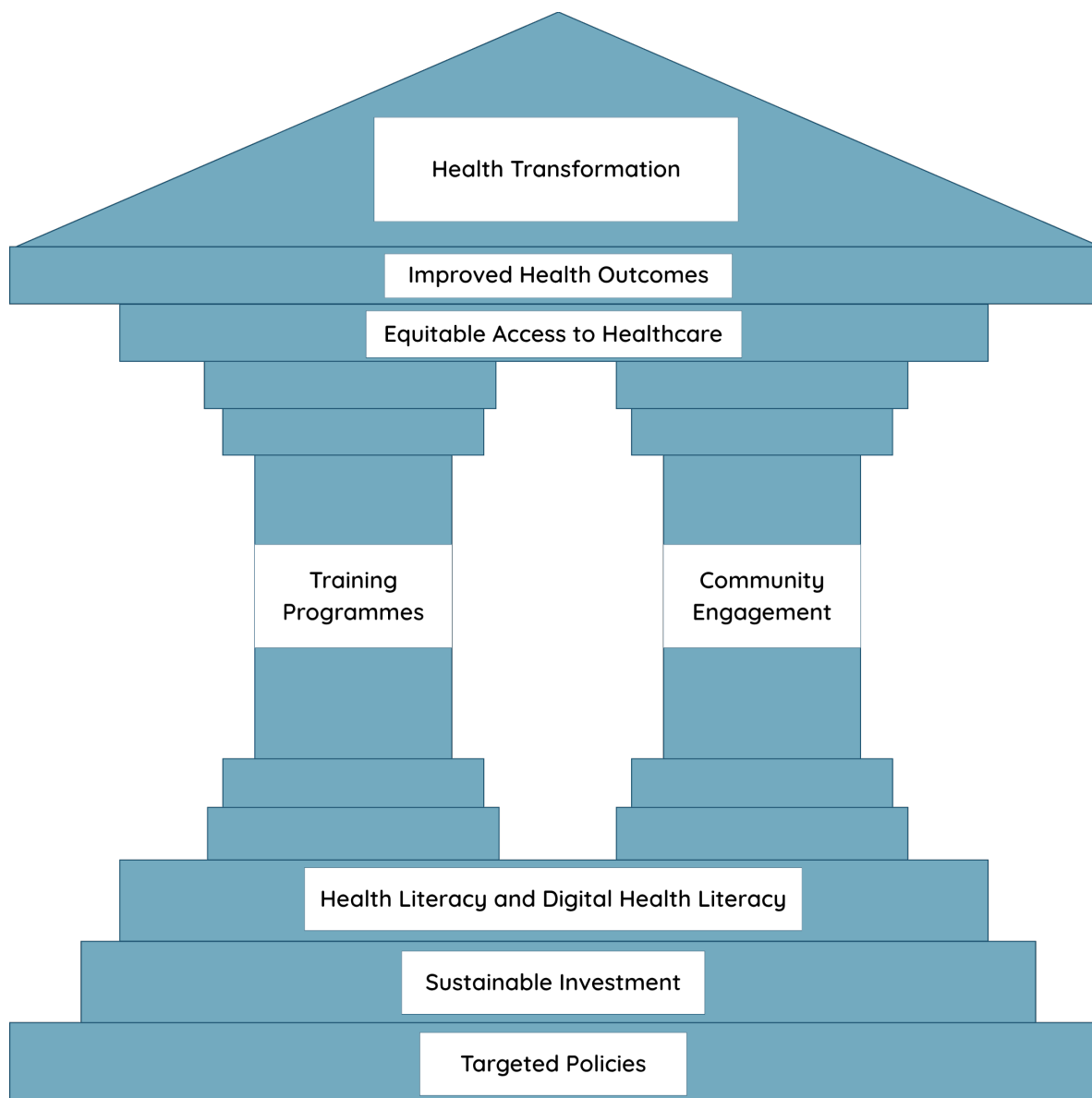
Training Programmes for Healthcare Professionals

- Provide ongoing training for healthcare professionals to improve their ability to communicate effectively with patients, especially in digital contexts.
- Focus on developing skills related to digital literacy, cultural competence, and patient empowerment.

This policy brief has been endorsed by the following EU funded projects



CONCLUSION



Health literacy and digital health literacy are foundational to driving health transformation and ensuring equitable access to healthcare. Addressing these skills through targeted policies, community engagement, and innovative training programmes will empower individuals and improve health outcomes across diverse populations. Prioritizing health literacy is not merely an academic exercise; it is a crucial investment in the future of healthcare that will benefit society as a whole. By working collaboratively, stakeholders can create a more informed, resilient, and empowered populace capable of navigating the complexities of modern healthcare.



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