Health literacy across Europe; policies, interventions and actions on health literacy improvement in Europe uncovered in the HEALIT4EU study

Prof. dr. Jany Rademakers
NIVEL / CAPHRI-Maastricht University

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EPHORT consortium

- **NIVEL**: Netherlands Institute for Health Services Research (consortium leader)
- **RIVM**: National Institute for Public Health and the Environment
- **EPHA**: European Public Health Alliance
- **Subcontracted experts**: from 26 Member States
Main objectives of HEALIT4EU

Provide a state-of-the-art insight into:

1. **Intervention studies on HL** that are performed in EU Member States (→ effectiveness and cost-effectiveness)

2. **Existing policies, programmes and actions on HL** that are (being) implemented in EU MS

3. The possibility to estimate health literacy levels in the EU by using a **multivariable prediction model**
HL intervention studies in EU

Systematic literature review

- Intervention study
- Using *objective or subjective* HL measure
- Conducted in one or more of the EU MS
- Describes an outcome measure related to HL

4,258 publications found; 20 studies included
→ no study about cost-effectiveness
Publication year of selected studies (n=20)
Member state (n=20)

- United Kingdom: 8
- Germany: 7
- Austria: 2
- Ireland: 1
- Netherlands: 1
- Sweden: 1
Promising interventions

• tailor their efforts to the needs of patients in general or low-literate groups specifically (→ involvement)

• address critical and/or interactive skills and competencies (and not knowledge only)

• have a positive impact on the personal level (knowledge, motivation, self-confidence, stronger feelings of control)
Existing policies, programmes and actions in EU Member States

• Mapping exercise resulted in 82 policies and actions in 16 countries

• 6 countries have a national policy on HL: Austria, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom → but: not a requirement for the development of programmes and activities
### Category of policies / actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>n</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
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<td>Subsidy</td>
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<td>Guideline</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>Programme – intervention</td>
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<td>Programme – research</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>Programme – other</td>
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<td>Advocacy Network</td>
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More than one answer was possible, thus the total n>82 and %>100
Distribution in Europe

- **Most active countries**: Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom
- **Recently** also Austria, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands
- **Concept has not ‘caught on’** in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem definition</th>
<th>Agenda setting</th>
<th>Policy development</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Policy evaluation</th>
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| Nr of initiatives | 12 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
Overall conclusions HEALIT4EU

- In recent years HL **definitely gained attention** in EU

- In most countries HL **is just starting being addressed** through policies or activities

- Current evidence **does not enable** firm statements about the effectiveness of interventions, policies and programmes; but
  - interventions should be **tailored to the needs** of the patients / groups with inadequate HL
  - interventions should target **critical and/or interactive** skills and competencies
Recommendations (I)

• More attention for development and evaluation of HL interventions in a European context

• HL can be considered a useful complement to more general health promotion and education policies (‘tailored interventions’)

• Health literacy research funding should give more attention to (a) the quality of the studies and (b) the need for specific kind of evidence
Recommendations (II)

- A more programmatic and evidence-based policy to HL in individual EU MS and further exchanges of knowledge and best-practices at EU level

- Policies on HL should also address the context in which people have to be “health literate”
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