



Optimising health literacy  
to improve health  
and equity

## Health Literacy and Ophelia

---

This brochure provides an overview of the Ophelia approach to measuring health literacy and the development of new community-driven interventions.

**Health literacy** is broadly defined as a person's ability to seek, understand and use health information and healthcare services.

Low health literacy is known to lead to poor health outcomes and health inequalities. Health literacy has become a key topic of interest to health researchers, clinicians, service providers, policy makers and, of course, people engaging or trying to engage in health and health services.

To date, there have been few attempts to develop systematic ways to understand and improve how organisations and practitioners respond to people with low health literacy.

**Ophelia** aims to improve health and equity by optimising health literacy.

Ophelia is a modern, whole-of-system, approach to developing grounded health literacy interventions.

The approach seeks to ensure appropriate health services are available, health information is accessible, individual health outcomes are improved and health inequalities are reduced.

# The Ophelia Approach

Ophelia uses a **co-creation** approach where a wide range of patients, practitioners and policy makers work together to develop health literacy interventions.

Many people who work in the community and health sectors have outstanding commitment and success in supporting people with limited health literacy abilities. The Ophelia approach identifies what our best practitioners and managers do on a daily basis and builds upon this experience and knowledge.

The approach is grounded in the real world settings of practitioners and focussed upon building sustainable responses.

## THE OPHELIA PROCESS:

- considers the different health literacy needs of people across cultures and personal situations.
- systematically gathers knowledge and best practice across organisations.
- co-creates interventions such that they are locally owned, appropriate for the intended settings, and implementable.
- tailors health literacy responses for each identified health literacy need.
- pilot tests new health literacy interventions to inform subsequent, larger scale, implementation.
- includes the development and facilitation of 'communities of practice'.

## Better measurement of health literacy

The **Health Literacy Questionnaire (HLQ)** is a new tool developed by the Ophelia team to generate a thorough understanding of the health literacy needs of all people in our community.



Previous tools to measure health literacy have been mostly based on reading or comprehension skills only and do not provide enough information to guide intervention development.

The HLQ was developed over six years and finalised in 2013 after extensive testing in Victoria and internationally.

The HLQ is a comprehensive measure that focuses on nine separate domains of health literacy, which provide a detailed profile of the health literacy challenges a person might experience.

The systematic data, collected directly from the people we care for on a daily basis, is used to develop interventions, to support and empower individuals with low health literacy and to improve the health system's response to local needs.

### NINE DOMAINS OF HEALTH LITERACY

1.

Feeling understood and supported by healthcare providers

2.

Having sufficient information to manage my health

3.

Actively managing my health

4.

Social support for health

# Ophelia Victoria

Ophelia Victoria is a **three year collaboration** between Deakin University, the Victorian Department of Health and Monash University. The project aims to improve health outcomes and improve health equity for people across a broad range of organisations.

Ophelia Victoria is being conducted across eight sites: Barwon Health, Bass Coast Community Health, Bayside City Council, Central Bayside Community Health, City of Greater Dandenong, Eastern Health, Ovens & King Community Health, Royal District Nursing Service.

People with health problems and seeking services from the Ophelia Victoria sites will include those living with chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease and arthritis, where health literacy is important in long-term management.

## PROJECT STAGES

**Baseline Measurement** – Information about the health literacy needs of the full range of people engaging in health services is collected using the Health Literacy Questionnaire (HLQ). This baseline data is analysed and presented to project sites for open discussion, interpretation and decision-making about local priorities.

**Co-creation of Interventions** – The study team works closely with frontline practitioners, managers and people receiving services to identify and collate their local wisdom and innovative ideas. This is the start of generating new interventions to respond to identified health literacy needs.

**Pilot and Implement** – Following pilot testing of interventions, using multiple 'Plan, Do Act, Study' cycles, the study team works with organisations to develop and implement larger scale trials.

Stage 1  
Baseline  
Measurement

Stage 2  
Co-creation  
of Interventions

Stage 3  
Pilot and  
Implement

## OPHELIA VICTORIA OUTCOMES

The major outcome of Ophelia Victoria will be a Health Literacy Response Framework which can be used by other organisations. The framework will include three complementary elements:

- 1. Client-level and service-level information tools** – These tools will enable organisations across Victoria to directly measure their health literacy needs, assess challenges and develop their own interventions and solutions.
- 2. Resources, training and guidelines** – These resources will assist other organisations to understand and respond to identified health literacy challenges of their clients. This will include tested approaches to reorientating services which systematically respond to community needs.
- 3. Learnings from 'communities of practice'** – These learnings will be collated into a repository of strategies and intervention options suitable to be used 'off the shelf'. These tested resources will be suitable to directly implement with individuals and across groups and populations.

5.

Appraisal of health information

6.

Ability to actively engage with healthcare providers

7.

Navigating the healthcare system

8.

Ability to find good health information

9.

Understand health information well enough to know what to do

## Ophelia will benefit ...

---

**Patients and health consumers** – Individuals and communities involved in Ophelia are likely to benefit through improved health literacy health outcomes and health equity. The broader community will also benefit from increased recognition of health literacy needs and the development of tailored and effective interventions.

**Practitioners and clinicians** – Practitioners participating in Ophelia benefit by developing their skills and insights around understanding and addressing health literacy issues. They will have better tools and processes to support their clients to find, understand and use health information and manage their health care.

**Organisations** – Organisations adopting the Ophelia approach will gain insights into the different health literacy needs of their clients. Organisations will increase their capacity to identify service gaps, particularly for those clients with low health literacy profiles. They will then be able to implement initiatives that respond to individual patient and organisational health literacy needs.

**Policy makers** – Ophelia directly addresses the needs of policy makers by providing an evidence-based, systems orientated and sustainable response to identified health literacy needs at the individual and organisation levels.

## Ophelia in other countries

---

The Ophelia approach is also being applied in other countries and the Health Literacy Questionnaire has already been adapted and translated into multiple languages.

Specific partnerships have been established with academics, policy makers, health organisations and government agencies in Thailand, Taiwan, USA, England, Denmark, The Netherlands, Germany and others. The Ophelia team is also working with the World Health Organization to introduce the approach into several South East Asian countries.

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT OPHELIA

VISIT [WWW.OPHELIA.NET.AU](http://WWW.OPHELIA.NET.AU)

TEL +61 (03) 9244 6517