

B.C. HEALTH LITERACY NETWORK

OPERATIONAL PLAN 2014-2015

Background

The British Columbia Health Literacy Network was established in 2011 following two Roundtables on health literacy organized by a multi-sectoral planning committee of people and organizations interested in the issue. It was established to pursue the following three goals articulated in a Strategy paper developed by the planning committee:

- 1. The BC population has increased skills to better access, understand, communicate and evaluate health information in order to make informed decisions about their health.*
- 2. The BC Health system has structures and expertise to support members of the public with different levels of health literacy.*
- 3. Stakeholders from different fields and sectors are working collaboratively in an innovative and articulated manner.*

In order to pursue these goals, a number of networks and organizations from various sectors committed to health literacy agreed to a structure consisting of a Steering Committee of representatives from the various types of networks and organizations interested in health literacy and an Advisory Committee of all of the networks and organizations. Since the establishment of this structure, the Steering Committee, hosted by the Public Health Association of B.C. (PHABC), has met almost monthly to keep abreast of developments related to health literacy in British Columbia (and elsewhere) and to organize a number of activities in pursuit of the above goals. These activities have included a two-day summer school on health literacy, two “community of practice” meetings, three workshops, two think tanks and the production of a discussion paper on “An Intersectoral Approach to Health Literacy” posted on the PHABC website. The Advisory Committee has met several times to review the work of the Steering Committee and offer advice regarding the activities and direction of the Network.

Recently, the Steering Committee set up three working groups to help identify priority initiatives for the Network over the next two years. These working groups presented their findings and recommendations in a teleconference in November 2013 and their reports provide some of the input used in developing this operational plan for the next two years. In addition, a workshop on the above mentioned Discussion Paper was held at the November 2013 conference of the PHABC and also provided some of the input to the plan. The reports from the three working groups and from the PHABC workshop were reviewed by the B.C. Health Literacy Network Steering Committee, which agreed on the following Operational Plan for 2014-2015.

Operational Plan

The operational plan is intended to strengthen the Network's ability to achieve the three strategic goals noted above and is organized in relation to these goals.

1. Increasing health literacy skills of B.C. Population: The Steering Committee recommends that the BC Health Literacy Network undertake the following activities to help increase the health literacy skills of the B.C. Population:

- Organize a “Deliberative Dialogue Event” between community members, healthcare administrators/decision-makers, practitioners, researchers, educators and policymakers to raise awareness of how diverse community members can play an active role in their health care, including patients, clients and families of diverse cultural & linguistic backgrounds.
- Request the Public Engagement Committee of the PHABC to consider and develop means of supporting the public to increase their health literacy skills.

2. Enhancing the development of structures and expertise to support members of the public with different levels of health literacy: The Steering Committee recommends that the BC Health Literacy Network undertake the following activities to enhance the development of structures and expertise to support members of the public with different levels of health literacy:

- Develop communication and participation strategies to increase awareness & sharing of health literacy activities, information and resources within BC, including bi-monthly calls with the Advisory Committee & other interested individuals, the development of an e-newsletter, and the identification of appropriate web space dedicated to housing relevant & accessible health literacy information & resources
- Raise awareness of health literacy among health professionals by distributing materials and by inclusion of health literacy in efforts that address self-management, self-care, shared decision making, prevention, health education
- Increase awareness of existing resources, professional development and educational opportunities in health literacy for practitioners that deliver health information to the public. One particularly promising approach would be to hold a conference to bring professional organizations, academic institutions, and employers together to discuss ways to promote health literacy as an essential capacity of each profession. This working conference would create an action plan including recommendations of tools, learning opportunities, resources for employers, promotion of articles on health literacy in professional journals,

website access, and preceptor development. Other approaches might include: exploring with post-secondary education programs the feasibility of offering continuing education from existing programs and customizing them to local needs; certifying professional development programs for certain professions, such as physicians; increasing awareness of existing health literacy professional development programs, such as the Canadian Medical Association's online health literacy module, and efforts of the Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre; and creating a BC health literacy resource website for health care professionals of vetted health literacy tools, online curricula and educational opportunities.

- Assess current status of healthcare workers in relation to health literacy. This might include: Conducting a survey of health professional groups about whether or not health literacy is embedded in the competencies of their professions, presence in primary professional preparation, and any continuing professional development activities and certification; conducting a survey of health care professionals about their knowledge and awareness of health literacy, techniques and resources to address it; and exploring organizational competency for Health Literacy through the use of emerging tools that highlight the need for health literate health care professionals.
- Support and promote existing, emerging and upcoming BC work on health literacy. These include: the Practice Support Program of the General Practice Service Committee; The Intercultural Online Network; "It's Good to Ask" campaign of the BC Patient Safety Quality Council; and "Talk with Your Doctor and other Health Care Professionals"
- Offer a hands-on workshop where community agencies can use a health literacy tool developed by the BC Health Literacy Network to reflect on their own practices, highlight areas that need improvement, plan strategies to deal with the changes and ways to monitor changes and impacts.
- Focus on building infrastructure: Build on grass roots and connections; increase resources such as time dedication, paid facilitators, places to host.

3. Increasing the ability of stakeholders from different fields and sectors to work collaboratively in an innovative and articulated manner

- Seek funding sources and partnerships to promote health literacy among health care professionals and organizations
- Continue to develop partnerships: Connect academia with health authorities; Connect with community partners, support networks; include public and private education; connect at university level.

- Define and articulate what health literacy is in a concise way: Survey knowledge and awareness of health literacy in stakeholder organizations; focus on developing a common vision; get conversation started amongst stakeholders.
- Identify health literacy research agenda for BC: Create a forum to bring stakeholders (Funders, Government, Researchers, Frontline workers, and Information users, Health Literacy Networks) together to discuss and develop a research agenda. Could be a Workshop or Roundtable.

Resourcing the Plan

The resources currently supporting the work of the BC Health Literacy Network are mainly resources “in kind” donated by the participating organizations. For example, the PHABC has provided a home for the Network and access to teleconferencing support and BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services has provided some in-kind project management support through one of its employees. The Public Health Agency of Canada has also provided some financial support for particular activities such as workshops and think tanks.

Some of the activities noted above can be resourced by “in kind resources” but others such as events will require some external resources. Thus, the Network needs to seek resources from government bodies, health organizations and possibly the private sector to fully implement this plan.