

Making way-finding easier

A fact sheet for quality managers

This fact sheet describes how you can take steps to review and improve your organisation's way-finding and navigation. Making your service easier to navigate will improve your health literacy environment and also help you meet some of the requirements of the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards.

Key points

- How your organisation supports people's way-finding influences navigation, understanding and use of your services
- A review of way-finding systems involves ensuring signage, printed information, and building design and features are person-centred, easy to understand and use
- Creating a positive way-finding experience involves working with people who use your services in the review and design of way-finding systems.

Why improve way-finding within your organisation?

Way-finding is the system that helps people to find their way from one place to another, and affects how people reach your health service. Depending on the ease, or difficulty of that process it can cause stress and frustration for consumers, their families and staff.

Investing in understanding consumers' experience of way-finding in your service and throughout the healthcare journey is a useful method of identifying where there might be barriers to health literacy within your service, and where improvements to design, service, delivery processes and consumer information may be required.



Many of the strategies in this fact sheet recommend involving both consumers and staff in your review of way-finding. The results of the review may feed into the development of your organisation's health literacy improvement plans discussed in Fact Sheet 2 - Making health literacy part of your policies and processes.

What affects way-finding?

There are many factors that affect the ease of consumers finding their way to, and around, your organisation. The NSW Clinical Excellence Commission developed a [Health Literacy Guide](#) which presents an overview of the interaction between health literacy and way-finding in health care.

Using this guide can help you to consider how way-finding affects consumers before they enter your health service, when they arrive and during their visit. Some of the things the guide prompts you to think about include the following.

Before entering a hospital or health service:

- Do admissions and reception staff provide easily accessible information with directions from the consumer's home, including public or private transport options, maps, and names of doctors or services they will require for their visit?
- Do maps of the facility use consistent naming conventions?

Arriving and during a hospital or health service visit:

- Does the signage use words commonly used by consumers to describe the care they are receiving (for example, Kidney Ward rather than Nephrology Ward)?
- Is information about the hospital or health service available at reception or other admission areas?
- Is education and training provided to reception, admissions and ancillary services staff to empower them to provide appropriate and timely information to consumers?

How to understand and improve your way-finding

Conduct a First Impressions and Walking Interview

The [First Impressions](#) and [Walking Interview](#) are activities that focus on a consumer's first impression of your health service. First Impressions is an assessment of the initial contact with, or about, the health service and can reflect impressions gained by a consumer through a phone call, visit to the web page, and the walk to the entrance.

The Walking Interview is a conversation between two people, an observer (a consumer and/or a staff member who is newest to the organisation) and a guide (a staff member who might be more familiar with the organisation). The conversation should involve:

- Observations of the environment at the main entrance (or in a larger facility the entrance to a specialty area) or at a commonly used area such as the car park
- Discussion about the ease of accessing available help for seeking directions to areas such as diagnostic imaging and pathology
- Exploration of the literacy demands or assumptions that consumers face as they access services
- Reflections and next steps for sharing the observations and insights of participants.

The initial focus of these activities is on aspects of the physical environment; however, it may also highlight where improvements to organisational processes and information could be needed.

Conduct a self-assessment of the physical environment

ENLIVEN has developed a [Health literacy self-assessment tool](#) based on the Institute of Medicine's *Ten Attributes of Health Literate Organisations*. Attribute 7 describes elements of health literate organisations – those that provide easy access to health information and services and navigation assistance. The self-assessment process for Attribute 7 asks you to identify whether your organisation:

- Has facilities with features to help consumers find their way
- Uses easily understood language and symbols on all signage
- Uses signage in commonly spoken languages for the region
- Responds to navigational queries in an effective manner without assuming things such as map-reading skills or car ownership
- Assists consumers to complete relevant forms and documents.

State and territory guidance on way-finding

Some state and territory health departments have developed way-finding policies that provide guidance on expectations, and strategies to improve the consumer experience of way-finding including:

- Victorian Department of Health and Human Services - [Improving the Patient Experience Program: Wayfinding and signage guidelines](#)
- Queensland Health – [Wayfinding Design Guidelines](#)
- NSW Ministry of Health – [Wayfinding for Healthcare Facilities](#).

Links with the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards

Currently, the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards include a number of actions related to health literacy and supporting partnerships with consumers. These actions focus on ensuring that consumers are involved in reviewing information that is prepared within the organisation and that they are engaged in the governance of the organisation.

The NSQHS Standards (second edition) will be released in late 2017 and health services will need to be assessed against this edition when they are accredited from January 2019. The NSQHS Standards (2nd ed.) have a much more overt focus on health literacy. There are new actions in the Clinical Governance Standard that focus on the physical environment, including signage and way-finding. There are also actions within the Partnering with Consumers and Comprehensive Care Standards which focus on developing and providing easy-to-understand information, sharing decision making, engaging in partnerships for care planning, and the delivery of comprehensive goal-directed care.

Further information

Further information and resources about health literacy, including other fact sheets in this series, are available on the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care website.

Website: www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/patient-and-consumer-centred-care/health-literacy/.

Resource list

Clinical Excellence Commission. Health literacy guide. Sydney: Clinical Excellence Commission. Available from: <http://www.cec.health.nsw.gov.au/quality-improvement/people-and-culture/person-centred-care/partnering-with-patients/health-literacy>

Rudd, R. The Health Literacy Environment Activity Packet, First Impressions & Walking Interview. Online tools. Health Literacy Studies. Boston, MA: Harvard School of Public Health, 2010. <https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/135/2012/09/activitypacket.pdf>

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Queensland Health. Queensland Health Wayfinding Design Guidelines. Brisbane: Queensland Health, 2010. Available from: https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/150991/qh-gdl-343-6-1.pdf

NSW Ministry of Health. Wayfinding for Healthcare Facilities. Sydney: NSW Government, 2014. Available from: http://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/PDS/pages/doc.aspx?dn=GL2014_018