

MEDIA RELEASE
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New survey results shine a light on health literacy in Australia

New survey findings show a significant number of consumers need to be supported to feel more in control of their health care. [The report](#), commissioned from the Consumers Health Forum (CHF) by NPS MedicineWise, defines and measures health literacy in Australia. It also identifies gaps which are preventing people from accessing the best possible health care.

“Health literacy is core to us delivering more equitable health outcomes,” said Leanne Wells, CEO of CHF.

“The report shines a light on Australians’ health literacy — people’s ability to find, understand and use quality information about medicines,” she said.

The survey of more than 1,500 respondents found that approximately one in five consumers:

- Rarely or never felt comfortable asking their doctor, pharmacist or nurse when they needed more information.
- Rarely or never felt comfortable asking the health professional to explain anything they didn’t understand.
- Found the information a health professional gave them always or often confusing.

A further 28 per cent said they found such information confusing sometimes.

However, just over 70 per cent of respondents said they always or often felt comfortable communicating on such matters with health professionals.

Ms Wells told the recent [2021 National Medicines Symposium](#) that the survey results supported efforts for higher levels of consumer medicines literacy.

“We need to increase consumers’ capacity to manage and feel in control of their health care, including around medicines. This is a challenge when we know that 60% of Australians* appear to lack the capacity to access, understand, appraise and use crucial information to make health related decisions,” said Ms Wells.

“It’s really important that we strive to improve medicines literacy because we know people at higher risk of medication-related harm are people with multiple conditions, people who are taking lots of medications and people with English as a second language,” she said.

NPS MedicineWise CEO Adj A/Prof Steve Morris says as part of its role as the steward of quality use of medicines, NPS MedicineWise is working closely with CHF to put consumers firmly at the centre as we work to improve the quality use of medicines in Australia.

“As the report explains, it’s increasingly recognised that engaging consumers as partners in the development of health literacy resources, information and tools is essential to the success of these interventions,” he said.

“It is important to take into account varying levels of health literacy when we design information and health programs,” said Ms Wells.

“This way we can ensure we can best equip consumers with the information, access and agency to feel they are in control and making informed decisions about medicine choices,” she said.

Mr Morris says CHF and NPS MedicineWise are working together under a [formal agreement](#) to build on their collaboration of the past 20 years to ensure consumers are at the centre of quality use of medicines and better health decision-making.

Read the Final Report from the Consumer Health Literacy Segmentation and Activation Research Project on the [NPS MedicineWise website](#).

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