

## **Pfizer Health Literacy Position Statement**

Pfizer is committed to improving health literacy because of the positive impact it can have on individual and public health. As a biopharmaceutical company, we have a responsibility to address the often-overlooked barrier of low health literacy so that patients, caregivers and their loved ones can better recognize and understand their health conditions and lifestyle changes that maybe be necessary. Improving health literacy will enable patients to be more informed and engaged in discussions related to treatment options and may lead to the optimal use of medications and increased adherence. By providing patients and caregivers with health information that is presented in such a way as to maximize understanding and informed choice, we can help ensure that patients are able to benefit from breakthrough medicines and vaccines and achieve better health outcomes.

Health literacy is defined as “the cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health.”<sup>1</sup> Low health literacy is associated with adverse health outcomes due to lower treatment adherence, increased emergency department use,<sup>2</sup> higher mortality and a lower ability to recognize common signs and symptoms of illness.<sup>3</sup>

A variety of systemic factors, including socioeconomic status, education, age, race/ethnicity and disability status<sup>2</sup>, impact the safe and appropriate use of healthcare and medicines. At its core, health literacy is an issue of health equity, which is defined as allowing every individual to attain their full potential level of health by helping to ensure that no person is “disadvantaged from achieving” this potential level of health “because of social position or other socially determined circumstances.”<sup>4</sup>

Health literacy assessment methods and data vary, and much research on the topic has relied on self-reporting. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy found that only 12% of US adults have proficient health literacy.<sup>5</sup> The scale used in this assessment involved tasks spanning three domains of health-related content: clinical, prevention and navigation of health system.<sup>5</sup>

Low and limited health literacy rates are common in both developed and developing countries. A study using survey data from eight European countries found that 47% of participants had either insufficient or problematic levels of health literacy based on their responses to a survey tool rating the perceived difficulty of a given task.<sup>6</sup> The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, which includes self-reported background questions and task assessments, indicated that almost 60% of adults in Australia have low health literacy.<sup>7</sup> In Brazil, a study using the Short Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization (2009). “Health Promotion.” Accessed December 14, 2020.

<https://www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/7gchp/track2/en/>

<sup>2</sup> Healthy People 2020 (2020). “Health Literacy.” Accessed December 7, 2020. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/health-literacy>

<sup>3</sup> Pfizer. “Overview of Health Literacy and Clear Health Communication.” Accessed December 7, 2020.

<https://www.pfizer.com/health/literacy/public-policy-researchers/overview-of-health-literacy>

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization (2020). “Health Equity.” Accessed December 9, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/healthequity/index.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Kutner, M., Greenberg, E., Jin, Y. & Paulsen, C. (2006). The Health Literacy of America’s Adults: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy. (NCES 2006-483). US Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006483.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Sørensen, K., et al. (2015). Health Literacy in Europe: Comparative Results of the European Health Literacy Survey (HLS-EU). *European Journal of Public Health*, 25(6), 105-1058. <https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/article/25/6/1053/2467145>

<sup>7</sup> Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (2013). Consumers, the health system and health literacy: Taking action to improve safety and quality. Consultation Paper. Sydney: ACSQHC.

<https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/Consumers-the-health-system-and-health-literacy-Taking-action-to-improve-safety-and-quality3.pdf>

demonstrated that up to 32% of respondents have limited functional health literacy.<sup>8</sup> Data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) program in Zambia indicated that up to 65% of respondents aged 15-49 have low health literacy.<sup>9</sup>

The increase in the amount and variety of medicines and treatment options, coupled with the increasing complexity of science, technology and modes of communication, has created the potential for the health literacy gap to widen even more. These changes have in turn spurred greater urgency to address low levels of health literacy.

Pfizer recognizes that now more than ever is the time for the entire healthcare ecosystem, including healthcare providers, payers, biopharmaceutical companies, regulatory bodies and academic organizations, to engage in a focused effort to empower a more health literate population. Health literacy is an ever-evolving concept relevant across the continuum of health, ranging from preventive care, to disease screening efforts, the delivery of healthcare services, access to medicine and drug information and beyond. By ensuring that information is not simply accessible, but understandable, useable and able to motivate action, organizations may equitably enable individuals to make informed and shared decisions. When shared with healthcare providers, there is a greater investment in these decisions, which can thus lead to better health outcomes.

While all players in the healthcare system should recognize and address low health literacy, the biopharmaceutical industry has a particularly important role, as we provide the vaccines and medicines critical for preventing, treating and even curing disease. With this understanding, Pfizer has committed to and engaged in ongoing efforts to increase health literacy since 2005, including but not limited to the following.<sup>10</sup>

Helping other groups to address health literacy by:

- **working to align on health terminology and glossaries of plain language terms** with leading health systems, academia and pharmaceutical companies;
- **using screening tools**, including the Newest Vital Sign, which healthcare providers can use to assess health literacy and tailor their communication to each patient's needs;<sup>10</sup> and
- **working together with payers** to deliver strategies that improve health literacy.<sup>10</sup>

Engaging in partnerships and collaborations to catalyze system-wide change by:

- **implementing strategic partnerships**, such as Partner4Better, which empowers healthcare providers with training so that they can help patients make informed decisions and encourage them to share these decisions with providers;<sup>10</sup>
- **forming a Health Literacy Clinical Research Working Group** and partnering with Harvard University to support the Multi-Regional Clinical Trial (MRCT) Center in their efforts to identify challenges and deliver solutions for increasing health literacy in clinical trials around the world;<sup>10</sup> and

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<sup>8</sup> Malik, M., et al (2017). "Health Literacy as a Global Public Health Concern: A Systematic Review." *Journal of Pharmacology & Clinical Research*. Accessed January 2021. [https://juniperpublishers.com/jpcr/pdf/JPCR\\_MS.ID.555632.pdf](https://juniperpublishers.com/jpcr/pdf/JPCR_MS.ID.555632.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Schrauben, S., Weibe, D. (2017). "Health Literacy Assessment in Developing Countries: A Case Study in Zambia." *Health Promotion International*. Accessed January 2021. <https://academic.oup.com/heapro/article/32/3/475/2950983>

<sup>10</sup> Pfizer Health Literacy Internal Landscape Executive Summary.

- **sponsoring organizations**, including the National Academies of Science Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) Roundtable on Health Literacy and Pharma Collaborative, which include workshops on communicating with immigrant populations and developing health literacy skills in vulnerable populations, among other topics.<sup>10</sup>

Ensuring our medicines are supported with the right materials by:

- **optimizing our patient- and caregiver-facing information** in accordance with Pfizer’s Clear Health Communication Initiative, including developing abstract plain language summaries (APLS) of studies, presenting studies in plain language at conferences and events and publishing our data in Open Access journals to help the general population understand and comprehend scientific research;<sup>11</sup> and
- **enhancing information about clinical trials** on Pfizer’s “Find a Trial” page, where patients can find information in plain language about Pfizer trials and a variety of study-related resources.<sup>12</sup>

It is important for all stakeholders in the healthcare ecosystem to take concrete action to address the systemic barriers to health literacy, including the creation of health literacy standards informed by research and the development of resources that are understandable and culturally appropriate for all patients. Pfizer also encourages:

- **the engagement of patients from all backgrounds** in sharing their ideas of what successful health literacy efforts should look like;
- **the work of patient organizations** conducting research and developing resources for populations at risk of low health literacy;
- **regulatory guidance** that establishes standards for health literacy best practices;
- **the involvement of payers** in health literacy efforts at multiple touchpoints, including developing communications standards, training staff with awareness toolkits and bringing health resources directly to communities; and
- **the efforts of technology companies**, such as search engines and social media companies, to optimize their content to meet health literacy best practices.

By integrating health literacy and including the patient voice in Pfizer’s mission, communications and operations, Pfizer is working to both become a health literate company in accordance with NASEM guidance<sup>13</sup> and to meet the needs of a global population with a range of health literacy skills to deliver on our purpose of *Breakthroughs that change patients’ lives.*<sup>TM</sup> We are dedicated to closing the health literacy gap and improving health by collaborating with stakeholders across the healthcare ecosystem. Together, our aim is to provide information to all who may receive our medicines or vaccines in a way that is accessible, understandable and can be used to inform the right decision for each individual.

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<sup>11</sup> Pfizer. “Abstract Plain Language Summaries.” Accessed December 10, 2020. <https://www.pfizer.com/news/press-kits/oncology/apls>

<sup>12</sup> Pfizer. “Find a Pfizer Trial: Clinical Trials.” Accessed December 14, 2020. <https://www.pfizer.com/science/find-a-trial>

<sup>13</sup> Institute of Medicine of the National Academies (2012). “Ten Attributes of Health Literate Health Care Organizations.” Accessed December 2020. [https://nam.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/BPH\\_Ten\\_HLit\\_Attributes.pdf](https://nam.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/BPH_Ten_HLit_Attributes.pdf)