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AMA submission to National Health Literacy Strategy Consultation (submitted via survey)

Does the Framework capture the important components? If not, please describe what else is needed.

- Yes
- **No, and I recommend changes. Please specify.**
- Other. Please specify.
- Not my area of expertise/experience

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) agrees with the main framework for the National Health Literacy Strategy, in principle. However, it is recommended that there is also reference to how to dispel and respond to medical misinformation, particularly the type that flourishes through digital media. Over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen the ease with which medical disinformation can be distributed on a large scale.

This is problematic from a health literacy perspective as it has the potential to harm health and obstruct well-informed decision making about seeking health care.

The AMA maintains that all forms of media have the potential to distribute helpful and constructive information around health and wellbeing, however this is not always the case. As such – it is important for the Health Literacy Strategy to acknowledge the role of media, particularly digital media in the communication of accurate and easily accessible health information.

Is the proposed vision appropriate for the National Health Literacy Strategy?

- **Yes**
- No, and I recommend changes. Please specify.
- Other. Please specify.
- Not my area of expertise/experience

The AMA reiterates the importance of fully developing the equity lens in this Strategy, noting the cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity of the population.

Are the key principles captured? If not, what is missing?

- **Yes**
- No, and I recommend changes. Please specify.
- Other. Please specify.
- Not my area of expertise/experience

Are the aims the right ones for achieving the vision of the National Health Literacy Strategy?

- **Yes**
- No, and I recommend changes. Please specify.

- Other. Please specify.
- Not my area of expertise/experience

The AMA's position statement relating to [Health Literacy \(2021\)](#), outlines actions that would assist in improving health literacy outcomes across Australia. Our position addresses the issues surrounding health literacy, in calls to action targeted at the medical profession, media bodies, as well as state, territory and federal governments. It calls for a multi-sector collaborative approach to addressing the health inequalities associated with poor health literacy. Our position acknowledges that targeted education programs, continued funding for research, and easily accessible, up-to-date health information for all Australians is the way forward, in a health literacy approach that acknowledges the diverse needs of Australians.

Do you have any example actions that could be considered under each aim?

The AMA makes the following recommendations regarding actions to support Aim 1:

- Medical Colleges and employers in the health sector to support doctors to implement evidence-based communication techniques to improve health literacy in their patients. This should include time and funding for professional development and training in health literacy.
- The Australian Government to fund the Australian Bureau of Statistics to conduct further iterations of the Health Literacy Questionnaire as part of the National Health Survey.

The AMA makes the following recommendations regarding actions to support Aim 2:

- The Australian Government to invest in long-term, robust online advertising to counter health misinformation, including on social media channels. This should include promotion of vaccine safety, as well as campaigns on the health risks associated with alcohol, junk food, tobacco and other drugs.
- The Australian Government to collaborate with all state and territory governments to extend the current 'Health Direct' website to provide a single, accessible national source of verified health information. The website should incorporate the ability for individuals in each state and territory to find appropriate health services in their local area and provide a full range of translated material for those from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Reputable health sources, such a 'Health Direct' need to be the first sites to show up on search browsers, to help counter access to misinformation.
- Social media companies to acknowledge their public health responsibility and work actively to counter health misinformation on their platforms.

The AMA makes the following recommendations regarding actions to support Aim 3:

- The Australian Government to collaborate with all state and territory governments to extend the current 'Health Direct' website to provide a single, accessible national source of verified health information. The website should incorporate the ability for individuals in each state and territory to find appropriate health services in their local area and provide a full range of translated material for those from linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- State and territory health departments to acknowledge the importance of health literacy at a high level and take practical actions within their health services to improve it. This should include the provision of accessible health information, easily navigable design of public health facilities, and dissemination of education and health promotion campaigns.

Are the categories for the leaders and partners who will mobilise health literacy action appropriate?

- Yes
- No, and I recommend changes. Please specify.
- **Other. Please specify.**
- Not my area of expertise/experience

Further to our above comments and in addition to the suggested partner list, the AMA suggests that more emphasis is needed on the role of the media and its role in mobilising accessible and accurate health information. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen that all forms of media have significant capacity to disseminate health information to the general public.

We also note the importance of engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers and communities through engagement with a broad range of health and other community-controlled organisations. It is essential that health literacy objectives are informed by community needs, culturally appropriate and understood by the community to empower individuals and families to advocate for their own health and wellbeing needs.

With this media capacity, comes the risk of false information being perpetuated and targeted at the vulnerable, those with poor health literacy skills. The National Health Literacy Strategy needs to make sure all media sources are included, as an important component of improving health literacy, with media outlets being an important partner in the implementation of the strategy.

Please provide any other observations and advice that you have not had the opportunity to make on the Framework:

The AMA commends the focus on consultation with diverse peak organisations at this early stage of the development of the Strategy. We support the focus of the equity lens, noting that not all communities and individuals are able to access and understand health care at the same rate – for a range of reasons. More broadly – we would like to emphasise the linkages with social and cultural determinants to health literacy. The AMA’s 2020 position statement on [Social Determinants of Health](#) makes the following key points:

- A person’s health is shaped by the social, economic, cultural and environmental conditions they live in.
- Health inequities typically arise because of inequalities within society, they are avoidable and can be associated with forms of disadvantage such as poverty, discrimination, and access to goods and services.
- In order to achieve health equity, the focus must not only be on treating disease and modifying risk factors, but on the underlying social determinants of health that influence population health and wellbeing.
- To combat the impact of the social determinants of health, on health inequality, investment must be made through collaboration of the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to improve the health literacy of Australians.

Finally – we note the importance of a clear implementation plan to support the Strategy achieve its goals. The AMA welcomes this initial investment towards the *National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030*, and we look forward to working with the Department as work continues to improve the health and wellbeing of all Australians across preventive health priority areas.

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