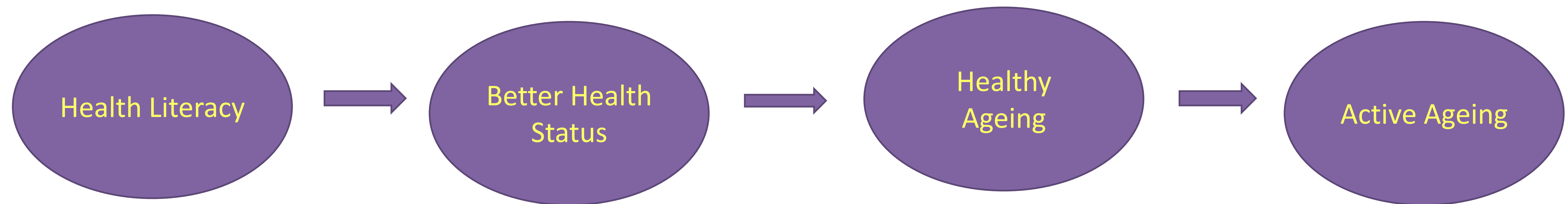


# HEALTH LITERACY AS A POTENTIAL INDICATOR FOR THE ACTIVE AGEING INDEX: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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## What is health literacy?

The ability to obtain, read, understand and use healthcare information to make appropriate health decisions and follow instructions for treatment (Nutbeam, 2000)

## Types of health literacy

**Basic/functional literacy:** Sufficient basic skills in reading and writing to be able to function effectively in everyday situations (most common type that is used in public health studies and intervention programmes)

**Interactive health literacy:** More advanced cognitive and literacy skills which, together with social skills, can be used to actively participate in everyday activities, to extract information and derive meaning from different forms of communication, and to apply new information to changing circumstances

**Critical health literacy:** The ability to critically analyze information and use this information to influence, inspire and take action to create change in the community

## How do we measure it?

In the measurement of health literacy, different measures are used including health-related knowledge, attitudes, motivation, behavioural intentions, personal skills and self-efficacy. All these personal and social skills determine the level of health literacy, and health status respectively.

### **Common measurement tools:**

TOFHLA (Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults), REALM (Rapid Estimate for Adult Literacy in Medicine), Newest Vital Sign, FCCHL (Functional Communicative and Critical Health Literacy)

## Health Literacy and Ageing

Age-related factors that affect health literacy declines can be enlisted as:

### **Physical and mental factors:**

- The decline in the capacity for processing information
- Dementia and cognitive impairments
- Increase in the chronic diseases
- Declining physical and mental health
- Auditory and visual impairments

### **Socio-economic factors:**

- Lower chances of education and literacy level
- Loss of employment (retirement) and income
- Declining social networks and social capital

## Why do we need health literacy in the Active Ageing Index?

Since healthy ageing is an important part of active ageing, health literacy becomes an important concept for older people.

Health literacy can benefit people both at the individual and community level

Health literacy should be included in the Active Ageing Index based on the following 3 reasons: 1-Health literacy becomes more important with ageing, 2-Health literacy is an interacting concept, 3-Health literacy is a dynamic concept.

### **1-Increasing importance of health literacy with ageing:**

In old age, the ability to understand and process health information becomes more essential and crucial as the consequences might be more dramatic or even fatal.

Health literacy decreases with age due to physical, cultural, economic and environmental factors.

### **2- Health Literacy as an Interacting Concept:**

There is a positive relationship between health literacy and health status

Even though health status might primarily be dependent upon individual and behavioural factors environmental, social and economic factors should also be taken into account

It might be argued that the indicators of access to health care, physical safety, financial security and life-long learning are considered as the economic, social and environmental factors. However, mental well-being, social connectedness, use of ICT, educational attainment are the factors that contribute to the health status and respectively active ageing. Some of these dimensions are included in the index, however, they are all covered under different sub-domains and these items should be brought together as a determinant of health status to reflect the intertwined relationship between healthy ageing and health literacy.

### **3-Dynamism of the concept:**

"Health literacy" as a concept is not a solely a combination of different abilities. It is an added value that emerges with the interaction of all these indicators as a whole.

For a comprehensive definition of health literacy among older people, the incorporation of interactive and critical health literacy concepts is a must.

### **Practicalities**

There is no current health literacy dataset that comprises Europe as a whole. European Health Literacy Survey (HLS-EU) which is conducted in 8 European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, and Spain) can be used for initial analysis and inclusion of health literacy in the AAI index.