Appendix: Sample of How One Organization Implements the 10 Attributes of a Health Literate Organization

Organizational Health Literacy Assessment
St. Vincent Charity Medical Center, Cleveland, Ohio
2007 – present

Attribute 1: A health literate organization has leadership that makes health literacy (HL) integral to its mission, structure, and operations

A health literate organization:	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	No	Example(s)
We have an explicit commitment to health literacy in our mission statement, policies, and programs.	X			• Gained support from senior leadership from our past 3 administrations • Added and embraced HL principles into our policy manual • Provided a dedicated section on HL on our website
We allocate fiscal and human resources related to health literacy.	X			• Created the Health Literacy Institute (HLI) with a dedicated budget (since 2007)
We prioritize clear and effective communication across all levels of the organization and across all communication channels.		X		• Follow (per policy) HL principles through all communication channels • Plan to complete a new Access to Care initiative aimed to improve overall scheduling and our patients' access experience (2020)
We identify and train health literacy champions throughout the organization.	X			• Participate in ongoing HL training and projects. Members of HLI represent interdisciplinary fields and serve as HL champions.

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Attribute 2: A health literate organization integrates health literacy into planning, evaluation measures, patient safety, and quality improvement

A health literate organization:	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	No	Example(s)
We conduct health literacy organizational assessments.	X			• Conducted 3 comprehensive assessments since 2007 • Added and embraced HL principles into our policy manual • Provided a dedicated section on HL on our website
We assess the impact of policies and programs on individuals with limited health literacy.		X		• Developing plans for performance improvement project to assess effect of teach-back on patient understanding post-discharge
We factor health literacy into all patient safety plans.		X		• Creating policy to include HL as a standing agenda item for our Clinical Patient Safety Committee

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Attribute 3: A health literate organization prepares the workforce to be health literate and monitors progress

A health literate organization:	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	No	Example(s)
We designated an office or official responsible for developing, implementing, and committing resources necessary to train the organization's employees.	X			• Assigned our Director of Organizational Development to a second role as the Director of HLI (2007)
We set and meet goals for ongoing formal and informal health literacy training for the entire workforce and evaluate the impact of that training.	X			• Continue to set goals for HL training and HL month activities annually (ongoing since 2007) • Include mandatory staff training on HL topics (complete with pre- and post-test evaluation) • Completed a 3-part performance improvement project to assess staff teach-back utilization (2018)
We incorporate health literacy into orientation and annual competencies.	X			• Include HL in staff monthly orientation, annual electronic competencies

Attribute 4: A health literate organization includes populations served in the design, implementation, and evaluation of health information and services

A health literate organization:	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	No	Example(s)
We collaborate with members of the target community when designing, pilot testing, and developing programs, services, and materials.	X			• Conduct ongoing evaluation for understandability and use of our print products • Work closely with adult learners from our local adult learning center
We obtain feedback on health information and services from individuals who use them.	X			• Added an active patient representative to our HL team

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Attribute 5: A health literate organization meets needs of populations with a range of health literacy skills while avoiding stigmatization

A health literate organization:	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	No	Example(s)
We have created a physical environment that is welcoming and does not require a high level of health literacy to understand and navigate.	X			• Completed a navigation tracer with adult learner students to evaluate comprehension of our signage (2012) • Made changes in our signage based on tracer results (2012) • Completed post- signage change navigation tracer (2014)
We provide alternatives to written materials (using innovation and technology) and use written information to reinforce spoken communication.	X			• Provide video channels to our inpatients who don't read well or prefer multimedia delivery of health messages • Provide plain language print materials with our verbal instructions
We adopted health literacy universal precautions, such as offering everyone help with filling out forms or reading information.	X			• Follow HL universal precautions (per policy). Staff are trained and use plain language during patient encounters and teach-back. Staff offer our patients plain language print materials.

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Attribute 6: A health literate organization uses health literacy strategies in interpersonal communications and confirms understanding at all points of contact

A health literate organization:	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	No	Example(s)
We promote the use of plain language.	X			• Trained and continue to train all staff on plain language (per policy) and require all staff to incorporate plain language with our patients
When teaching, we limit messages to 2 to 3 at a time.		X		• Include the concept of "chunk and check" in all our HL trainings • Plan to develop an evaluation of all staff to determine actual use
We foster a culture that emphasizes the verification of understanding of all communication, such as the teach-back or show-me methods.	X			• Create a culture where teach-back is embraced by all staff • Offer ongoing training on effectively using teach-back • Conducted a performance improvement project to verify staff's use of teach-back (2018)

Attribute 7: A health literate organization provides easy access to health information and services and navigation assistance

A health literate organization:	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	No	Example(s)
We use easily understood language and symbols on all signage.	X			• Designed signage to reflect plain language. For instance, our signs state "x-ray" vs. "radiology."
Our signage is written in commonly spoken language(s) for the region.	X			• Designed our signage to be in both English and Spanish
We have navigators to facilitate scheduling appointments with other services.	X			• Employ a full-time patient navigator to facilitate our patients' follow-up appointments

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Attribute 8: A health literate organization designs and distributes print, audiovisual, and social media content that is easy to understand and act on

A health literate organization:	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	No	Example(s)
We use tools that assist in developing easy-to-understand print and online materials and/or employ staff or consultants with health literacy expertise when developing new materials.	X			• |Trained our interdisciplinary HL team in developing/writing plain language materials • |Revised all current patient materials to an average 6th grade reading level • |Ensure all patient-facing materials are evaluated by HLI prior to distributing to our patients (per policy)
We involve consumers in the design and pilot testing of materials.	X			• |Include adult learning students in evaluation of our materials when needed • |Added a patient representative to our HL team
We use a quality translation process to produce materials in languages other than English.	X			• |Secured the services of a trained plain language translator to ensure our Spanish materials are easy to read, are culturally appropriate, and follow plain language guidelines

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Attribute 9: A health literate organization addresses health literacy in high-risk situations, including care transitions and communications about medicines

A health literate organization:	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	No	Example(s)
We prioritize high-risk situations (e.g., informed consent for surgery and other invasive procedures).		X		• Create informed consent forms that follow effective plain language writing and design principles (ongoing process)
We emphasize high-risk topics (e.g., conditions that require extensive self-management).	X			• Created a plain language guide to assist staff as they implement effective teach-back; conduct plain language discharge instructions with patients; and conduct effective post-discharge calls • Added questions to our electronic documentation screen to guide staff as they instruct patients on chronic heart failure. Included prompts to remind staff to use teach-back. • Created a NEW verbal and written plain language approach to managing high-risk conditions post hospital stay for some conditions **Examples include:** Our interdisciplinary team developed new plain language print materials on **diabetes** self-management and created plain language pre-test and post-test knowledge surveys to determine the patient's utilization and comprehension. Our pharmacists taught medicine self-management using plain language and teach-back to patients with congestive heart failure.

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Attribute 10: A health literate organization communicates clearly what health plans cover and what individuals will have to pay for services

A health literate organization:	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	No	Example(s)
We provide staff and resources to find out whether a treatment is covered and what out-of-pocket expenses there will be for any procedure or service.	X			• Provide the Experian Passport tool (through our Access Department) to help our patients determine their treatment coverage and out-of-pocket expenses
We communicate the out-of-pocket costs for health care services **before** they are delivered.	X			• Universally use plain language to explain/review the patient's treatment costs and out-of-pocket fees during the scheduling process. Our staff also uses plain language to explain insurance terms at this time.

Survey adapted from:

Institute of Medicine (2012), Attributes of a Health Literate Organization

Enliven (2013) Enliven Organizational Health Literacy