

Towards Better Health Literacy Status in Malaysia

ISSUE

Health Literacy (HL) is essential to ensure significant health outcomes

"The 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP) especially in improving the delivery of healthcare services where the strategies, among others is to improve health literacy and health awareness among Malaysians" - RMK-12, 2021 [2]

Health literacy refers, broadly, to the **ability** of individuals to "**gain access** to, **understand** and **use information** in ways which promote and maintain good health" for themselves, their families and their communities [1].

Limited health literacy are always associated with a range of adverse health effects [3]:

- adoption of risky health behaviours
- higher rates of chronic diseases
- poor disease management
- overall lower health status

This research highlight is based on **MHLS 2023** — **Malaysia Health Literacy Survey 2023**

Who is this publication for?

1. Policy makers in various sectors with vested interest in policy implementation.
2. Members of the organization who would be implementing the strategies suggested.
3. General public that will be the end user or receiver of the strategies.

Purpose of this summary

1. Share main findings of Health Literacy Level 2023
2. Recommend implementation strategies in increasing level of health literacy among population

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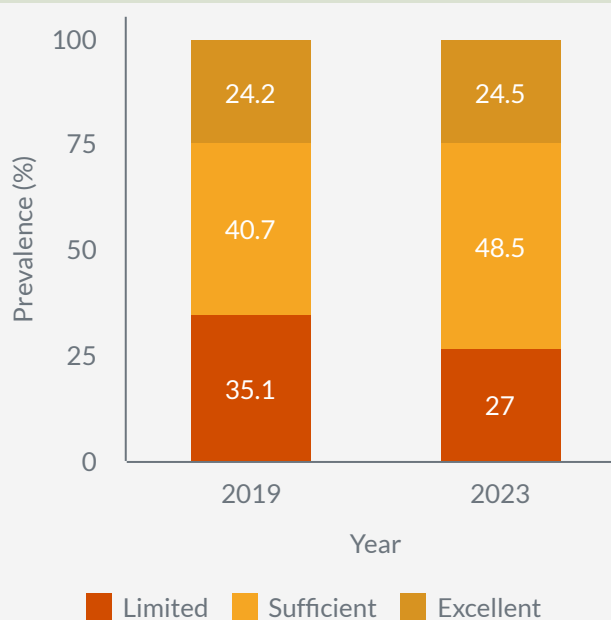


Figure 1 : Overall health literacy prevalence (2019 and 2023)

KEY MESSAGES

As compared to 2019, findings for 2023 :



Malaysian adults
STILL HAVE
LIMITED HEALTH LITERACY

High prevalence **STILL** shows among people with **LIMITED HL**:

Elderly Populations (>75 years old)

Year 2019 **68.0 %**



Year 2023 **51.0 %**



No Formal Education

Year 2019 **64.8 %**



Year 2023 **50.4 %**



Living in Rural Area

Year 2019 **41.5 %**



Year 2023 **31.4 %**



Despite the improvement in low health literacy, there is minor change in excellent health literacy. Improvement in sufficient health literacy still reflect the population being at the lower end of sufficient health literacy spectrum.

From 2019 to 2023, most Malaysians (48.5%) have sufficient health literacy level, as the average score is **36.5** which **STILL** indicate **lower end** of sufficient level score.

2019 2023

LIMITED

Score : 0 to 33
very difficult & fairly difficult

SUFFICIENT

Score : > 33 to 42
fairly easy

EXCELLENT

Score : > 42 to 50
very easy

....in accessing, understanding, appraising and applying health related information within the health care, disease prevention & health promotion domains

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Policy Maker

- To mainstream National Health Literacy initiatives across all sectors through integrated efforts collectively by developing National Health Literacy Policy [9,10].
- Strengthen multi-sectoral collaboration to improve all aspects of HL through enactment of initiatives under National Agenda for Healthy Malaysia (ANMS) [9,11,12].
- Strengthen governance of the Malaysian HL ecosystem across agencies through a "Whole-of-Nation" approach [10].
- Application of "behaviour insight" concept in planning health education and communication strategies to improve health status of groups that exhibits limited HL (lower education and rural groups) [7,8,9].
- Expanding reach of health promotion infrastructure and services to enhance public access to health literacy initiatives [13,14].

Health Care Provider (HCP) / Educator

- Simplify communications on tackling those with limited HL as to avoid stigmatizations on those who needs extra assistance [15].
- Improving the community comprehension by implementing interactive and critical concept of HL [16].
- Strengthen cross cutting partnerships between health sector and educators to improve the HL among elderly [17].
- Innovative approaches to attract community intention, directly increase understanding skill among community [18].

Community / Individuals

Empowerment of community /individuals:

- To inculcate self awareness for self care responsibility [16].
- To seek health information through proper channel eg. healthcare practitioner [19].
- To encourage self efficacy in improving communication with HCP [20].
- Encouraging / nudging community/ individuals behaviour using role model [21].

Methods:

This survey was conducted in conjunction with the NHMS 2023; using similar methodology of a cross-sectional survey with two-staged sampling and complex sampling analysis. A total 9758 adult household members participated. This survey used validated HLS-M-Q18; a compressed and adapted questionnaire from the European Health Literacy survey (HLS-EU-Q47). The survey assessed health literacy level (ability to access, understand, appraise & apply health information) in 3 domains; healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion. Data collection was conducted using a paper-based self-administered questionnaire. As this survey assessed aspects of literacy, thus initial screening was conducted by the data collection team to ascertain that the prospective participant were able to read and write prior to answering the survey.

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