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## Ireland partners in first EU Health Literacy Survey

**Experts gather at National Health Literacy Conference to discuss how Ireland can address the significant problem of health literacy**

**[Friday 25th June 2010]** Ireland is to engage as a partner in the first EU Health Literacy Survey it was revealed today at the MSD/NALA National Health Literacy Conference held in Dublin. Experts gathered to discuss how Ireland can address the significant problem of health literacy which is a person's ability to understand and communicate health information and therefore make more informed decisions about their own health.

The EU survey, which is to be carried out across eight different European countries in September, will provide the first real insight into the effect health literacy is having on society and allow steps to be put in place to ensure the issues are addressed. Ireland's participation in the survey was funded partly by the European Agency for Health and Consumers and partly by The Department of Health and Children (through National Lottery funding) and UCD. This commitment by the Department of Health ensures Ireland is at the forefront of the health literacy agenda within Europe.

"We are delighted to be a partner in the EU Health Literacy Survey, which will provide us with quality data to measure the full extent of the health literacy problem in Ireland and allow us to benchmark Ireland against other EU countries," said Áine Brady, T.D., Minister for Older People and Health Promotion, who gave the opening address at the conference. "The Department of Health and Children recognises the importance of adequate health literacy for every patient and hopes this research will help inform policy and strategies to improve patient interaction with healthcare professionals and health information in the future."

Speaking at the conference, world-renowned health literacy expert and Vice-Chancellor of Southampton University, Professor Don Nutbeam, shared his views on how to integrate policy into clinical practice saying, "This meeting has offered an opportunity to critically examine a range of practical ideas and policies that respond to the challenges posed by poor health literacy in Ireland. Translating these ideas into actions that will deliver real improvements in health for individual patients and the wider community in Ireland will require concerted action by government, community organisations and health practitioners."

Commenting on the announcement, Ms Inez Bailey, Director National Adult Literacy Agency, said, "Health Literacy is still a relatively new term but Ireland is making strides to ensure this is changing. Countries such as the US have led the way in terms of research into the effects of health literacy but thanks to the funding by the Department of Health, the European Agency for Health and Consumers and UCD the EU survey will now afford us the opportunity to have real information about the people most affected in Ireland by health literacy. We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with MSD, the Department of Health and UCD, the institute which is leading the research for Ireland, to help empower patients to be able to make more informed decisions about their health. "

The National Health Literacy Conference is being hosted by the MSD/NALA Health Literacy Initiative and is being attended by over 60 individuals from health, industry and academia.

The EU Health Literacy Survey findings will be published in February 2011 by Maastricht University, the University hosting the survey project. Some of the expected outcomes of the research include: the establishment of the first multi-national expert group on health literacy in Europe, development of policy implementation strategies for each country, and the creation of comparable data on health literacy in eight European countries.

As part of the survey, a Health Literacy National Advisory Panel has been established in Ireland and met for the first time today, following the conference.

For more information on health literacy or the MSD/NALA Health Literacy Initiative visit [www.healthliteracy.ie](http://www.healthliteracy.ie) and for more information on the EU Health Literacy Survey visit [www.health-literacy.eu](http://www.health-literacy.eu)

**ENDS**

#### **Notes to Editor**

##### **Definition of health literacy**

Health literacy involves a person being able to understand basic health information whether they receive it in writing, in person or over the phone. It also involves a person having the knowledge to understand their options and make informed decisions about their own health.

People working in the healthcare sector play an important part in improving health literacy by communicating more clearly and making information and services more accessible to patients.

According to the International Adult Literacy Survey, conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1997, over 50% of Irish adults are affected in some way by literacy difficulties.

### **About MSD**

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### **About the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)**

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is an independent member-based organisation committed to making sure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs. NALA was established in 1980 and has campaigned since then for the recognition of, and response to, the adult literacy issue in Ireland. It is concerned with developing policy, advocacy, research and offering advisory services in adult literacy work in Ireland. For further information visit [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)