

More health literacy needed to stamp out fake health news

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The Consumers Health Forum welcomes the AMA's position statement on health literacy as important recognition of the need for strong public support for people to have access to valid health information.

"CHF has long argued for more focus on health literacy to ensure people understand their own health and care needs so they have the power to make the best decisions for their health," the CEO of CHF, Leanne Wells, said.

"In the internet era when so much good and bad information floods people's screens, there is a need for a healthy information culture to overcome fake health news.

"We agree with the AMA that doctors, and health systems, have a vital role to play in improving health literacy by communicating effectively and sensitively with patients, encouraging discussion, and providing information that is understandable and relevant.

"Doctors can do more in this regard. CHF's recent Australia's Health Panel [Drop the Jargon](#) survey found that a lack of time in health appointments, was a major barrier to understanding in health care.

"We would support the AMA's call for an Australian Government-funded campaign to counter this misinformation and promote healthy choices, including information about vaccine safety and the health risks

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associated with alcohol, junk food, tobacco, and other drugs. But to be effective the campaign must have active involvement of consumers.

“We also support the recommendation for a national health literacy strategy recommended by the Mitchell Institute’s [Self-care for health: a national policy blueprint](#) launched by Minister Hunt in October 2020. The blueprint emerged from extensive consultations with clinicians, researchers and consumers.

“Health literacy is vital to consumers’ capacity to manage and feel in control of their health care. As one of the blueprint authors said, right now, up to 60% of Australians appear to lack the capacity to access, understand, appraise and use crucial information to make health-related decisions.

“Self-care by all, for all, needs to become standard behaviour and practice in the community. The same strong leadership from governments and health experts that has been so effective throughout the pandemic needs to be applied to improving the self-care and health literacy of all Australians,” Ms Wells said.

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