

# DOES HEALTH LITERACY CHANGE OVER TIME? A LONGITUDINAL EXAMINATION OF THE HEALTH LITERACY OF PEOPLE EXITING SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER TREATMENT

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**Introduction and Aims:** Health literacy is an individual's ability to adequately access, understand and utilise health information enabling effective navigation of the healthcare system. Low health literacy is a problem for people living with substance use disorders, often being associated with poorer health outcomes. The study aims to examine this population's health literacy over time and its role in treatment outcomes.

**Design and Methods:** 161 participants were recruited from NSW residential substance use disorder treatment services. Participants completed a questionnaire upon entry into the residential service and again at 6-months post-treatment discharge. Health literacy was measured using a multidimensional tool and analysed using Latent Profile analysis. Health outcomes e.g. substance use, psychological distress and quality of life, were also measured.

**Key Findings:** Participants fell within three health literacy profiles termed lowest (n= 52, 22.5%), moderate (n=111, 48.1%) and highest health literacy (n=68, 29.4%). For the lowest and moderate profiles, there were significant improvements in health literacy score at 6-month's. At baseline and 6-month's the lowest health literacy group had significantly higher levels of psychological distress and lower quality of life than the highest group.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** This study was the first to examine multidimensional health literacy levels of a substance use disorder population over time. The study found that although health literacy can be improved, people who fall within the lowest and moderate health literacy profiles do not catch up to those with highest levels of health literacy. Even with health literacy improvements, people with lowest levels of health literacy have poorer health outcomes.