Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA)  
Request for Proposals  
Research Grant Funding Opportunity  
(Updated 1-12-24)

Introduction

The Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA) is opening its next funding cycle for small research grants (up to $25,000) to advance the field of health literacy. IHA is committed to seed funding that can lead to scientific discovery aimed at generating evidence directly tying health literacy best practices with desirable outcomes - cost savings, improved patient-provider communication, provider trust, better quality, and safety in healthcare, and/or reduction in healthcare disparities, as examples.

The Goals of IHA’s Small Research Program

- Facilitate rigorous study of health literacy initiatives in community or patient education programs that incorporate health literacy interventions.
- Support wrap-around research funding for healthcare systems to examine processes and services reengineered with health literacy best practices (i.e., discharge processes with teach-back)
- Provide seed funding for research studies that support the early career development of health literacy researchers and provide data and results from pilot studies to (potentially) obtain large-scale NIH grants.
- Build strategic partnerships for collaborative research between IHA and partners to address the difficult unanswered research questions in the field of health literacy (i.e., ROI)

Timeline

- RFP Announced: November 28, 2023
- **Due Date for Full Proposals: February 9, 2024 (second extension)**
- Selection Committee Review and Scoring: February 12 through March 4, 2024
- Convene review panel, if needed, for discussion of disparate scores: March 5 through March 8, 2024
- IHA Executive Team Decisions: March 11 through March 13, 2024
- Grant Awardees Announced: March 14, 2024
- Commence Projects (anticipated project start date): March 15, 2024
- Duration of Projects: 12 to 24 months as determined by the researchers’ study.

Background

Healthy People 2030 describes two components of health literacy — personal health literacy and organizational health literacy. Individual health literacy is defined as “the degree to which individuals have the ability to obtain, understand, and act upon health information and services needed to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.” Organizational health literacy is
defined as “the degree to which organizations equitably enable individuals to find, understand and use health information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.”

Despite the attention given to health literacy by the federal government over the last several decades and the research within the field, most organizations today are not health literate organizations. The lack of organizational resource allocation for building health literacy expertise and diffusion is partially fueled by the gaps in health literacy research. As an example, The Joint Commission rejected a proposal from the National Council to Improve Patient Safety Through Health Literacy, to elevate health literacy to a national patient safety goal because there is “limited evidence that interventions to address health literacy improve quality and safety.”

Many research studies have found an association between limited health literacy and:

- More frequent ED visits,
- Hospitalizations and readmissions,
- Poor medication adherence, and
- Lower rates of preventive care services.

However, less is known about the specific components of health literacy interventions that result in successful, replicable, and scalable improved patient outcomes. Research is lacking in establishing a causal relationship between health literacy interventions and desirable health outcomes as these studies are high cost requiring RCTs and comprehensive patient population data.

Healthcare experts and researchers have cited the need for high quality, implementation research to inform interventions that are effective for mitigating limited health literacy. Studies are needed to assess the effectiveness of processes and products in health care that have been reengineered using health literacy best practices.

More research is needed evaluating the organizational health literacy guides for applicability and effectiveness in practice. Rigorous research linking such practices as teach-back and clear patient communication to a reduction in hospital readmissions is needed to facilitate broad adoption by managed care and hospital systems. There is a need to explicate the pathway from improved provider communication using health literacy principles, leading to increased patient trust in the provider, leading to increased patient engagement and uptake of preventive screenings and vaccinations. This may result in decreased avoidable hospitalizations and late-stage cancer diagnoses.

Importantly, there is also a need for research that links improvements in health literacy with a reduction in health disparities. Public health information that is not understandable and actionable by at least a third of the population serves to continue the historically embedded practices that lead to wide-spread health inequities. Adaptations of patient education and information for web and patient portals must be studied to ensure such practices do not further increase health disparities and inequities.¹

¹ The gaps in health literacy research described in this section of the RFP are examples and not intended as an exhaustive list of all studies for consideration.
Who is IHA?

IHA is a 501(c)(3) healthcare public benefit charity dedicated to empowering people to better health through advances in health literacy as a pathway to health equity. IHA fulfills its mission through numerous activities.

IHA hosts national and regional conferences on health literacy in practice, policy, and research; publishes the *What To Do For Health* series of easy to read and use self-care books and micro-pubs on health topics of emergent need such as anxiety and chronic disease management; administers the Health Literacy Solutions Center, with more than 15,000 members from all over the world; created the rigorously designed, accredited Health Literacy Specialist Certificate program; publishes a peer-reviewed, open access journal, *Health Literacy Research and Practice*; and has initiated a small research grant program.

**Requirements of the Proposed Research**

- Research team may be an individual (supported by senior faculty) or an organization (non-profit status is not required).
- Research team can include international collaboration, but the research team must include a U.S. investigator or organization as the lead PI.
- Research must address an established research gap in the health literacy field.
- The study must involve a population with known health risks because of social, economic, and/or environmental life circumstances.
- The proposal must include a defensible and rigorous research component.
- Research must include support and commitment from the researcher’s organization/institution and study site (if applicable).
- The proposal must provide evidence of IRB approval, or a process is in place to obtain IRB approval, or a letter stating the study is exempt.

**Use of IHA products (*What to Do for Health* series and MicroPubs):**

Applicants may *(but are not required to)* incorporate the use of IHA products at no cost to the organization and without inclusion in the proposed budget. Your use of IHA products will not influence your score one way or another.

**Selection Criteria:**

Proposals will be reviewed initially for completeness. Incomplete submissions will not be reviewed and will be returned to the applicant noting the omission(s). Completed applications will be reviewed and scored by an independent panel of academic and healthcare professionals who are subject matter experts in the field of health literacy.

**Standardized selection criteria will be used** to ensure all proposals are evaluated in a manner that is fair, equitable, timely, and free of bias. Key selection criteria include the:
1. Potential to fill an unmet research need in advancing health literacy as evidenced by proposed rigorous research methods and analyses.
2. Feasibility of the project and the potential for tangible results within 12 to 24 months
3. Expertise of the project director, principal investigator, and other proposed team members
4. The quality and extent of patient/participant engagement and with populations experiencing known health risks because of social, economic, and environmental life circumstances.
5. Potential to scale intervention and impact innovation

The IHA Executive team will review all scored proposals and make final decisions on awardees.

**Grant Awardee Requirements:**

- Submit biannual progress reports and end of study report and meet with IHA research officer as needed and scheduled throughout the project.
- Share data and research findings consistent with academic open-access standards.
- Follow all state and federal laws to protect individual privacy, personal health information, and the rights of human subjects.
- Submit a manuscript for publication (*HLRP: Health Literacy Research and Practice* or other, similar peer-reviewed journal).

**Questions:** If you have any questions about this funding opportunity please contact Marian Ryan, PhD, Chief Policy, and Research Officer for IHA at mryan@iha4health.org.
Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA) Research Grant Application

Instructions: Please follow all instructions for your application.
- Include all headings below (bolded) in your document.
- Use 1-inch margins, 12-point font (Times Roman, Garamond) or 11-point (Arial), 1.5 line spacing.
- Please bundle your application including attachments into a single PDF.
- Send via email with a subject line of IHA_RFP, to rfp@iha4health.org.
- Your email will be date/time stamped as your submission date/time.

Reminder: deadline for submission: January 26, 2024, no later than 9 p.m. PDT

Study Title:

Abstract (Description of the Study [1 page]): summary of your proposed research (high-level overview) concisely describing how the proposed study will address the identified gap in knowledge.

Organizational Capacity and Key Personnel [1-3 pages]:
- Describe your organization and the study/population site.
- Describe key study team personnel and the nature and scope of work for each person on the team.
- Explain the support the study team will receive including but not limited to personnel resources, equipment/software, access to a study population and/or data, and other expertise. Describe a strong commitment from awardee’s and study site’s organizations.
- Describe the leadership of the project (Principal Investigator) to lead the study, monitor study progress and ensure its success.

Research Plan [up to 8 pages]
- Hypothesis and Aims (Study Goal and Objectives)
- Relevance and significance (how this project will address a gap in the field, why the study is important, and how this research will collect data to support a larger grant funded study)
- Study approach, design, and methods (linked to and appropriate for each aim/objective; call out any potential difficulties and explain how you will address them; describe data components, anticipated sample size and statistical analyses)

Project Budget Narrative [1-2 pages]
- Explain how the line items of fund allocation will be used to fulfill the respective aims of the study.
- Tell us how organizational support will be used to wrap-around the funding allocation for designated expenses (indirect costs cannot be funded via the grant).

Milestones and Deadlines [1 page]
- Produce a high-level work plan across time (12, 18, or 24 months from the award date)
- List key milestone activities and their associated anticipated dates
• Highlight critical activities of dependency for the successful completion of the study.

**Attachments:**

• Organization Chart
• A biosketch for Principal Investigator and each key member of the study team
• Project Budget [Excel spreadsheet]
• Letter of commitment from any study partner on whom the proposed study is dependent.