

HEALTH LITERACY IN A HEALTHY CITY

Making the Case and Taking Action



Anne McCusker
anne@belfasthealthycities.com

Health Literacy is 'linked to literacy and entails people's knowledge, motivation and competences to access, understand, appraise and apply health information in order to make judgements and take decisions in everyday life concerning health care, disease prevention and health promotion to maintain or improve quality of life during the life course'
(Health Literacy: The Solid Facts, WHO Europe 2013)



HEALTH LITERACY: A PRIORITY FOR BELFAST

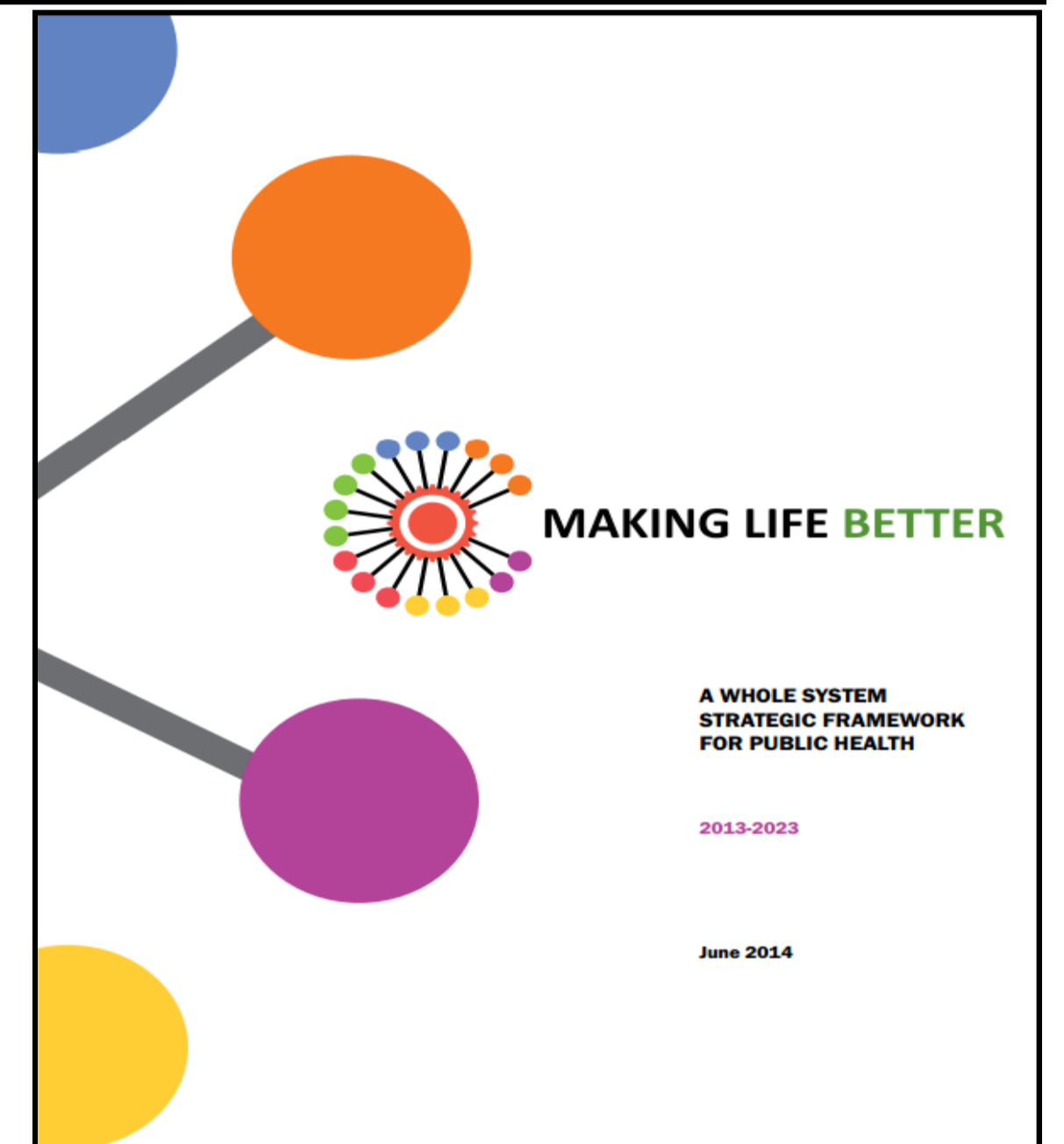
WHO European Healthy Cities Network
Phase VI (2014-2018)
of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network: goals and requirements

Health Literacy is a core theme for Belfast as a member of WHO European Healthy Cities Network Phase VI (2014-2018) and highlighted within Northern Ireland Executive's strategy *Making Life Better - A Whole System Framework for Public Health 2013-2023*.

Health Literacy implies achievement of a level of knowledge, personal skills, and confidence to take action to improve personal and community health by changing personal lifestyles and living conditions.

The benefits of improved health literacy are felt between government departments, across society as a whole and throughout the lifecycle.

Higher levels of health literacy promote access to good health related information, better health choices, less risk taking behaviour, better self-management and less hospitalisation.



DEVELOPING HEALTH LITERACY IN BELFAST

RAISING AWARENESS OF HEALTH LITERACY IN BELFAST

A cross sectoral working group was established with key partners to identify priorities for health literacy in Belfast. The working group is facilitated by Belfast Healthy Cities and chaired by a member of the Belfast Healthy Cities Board. Key partners include:



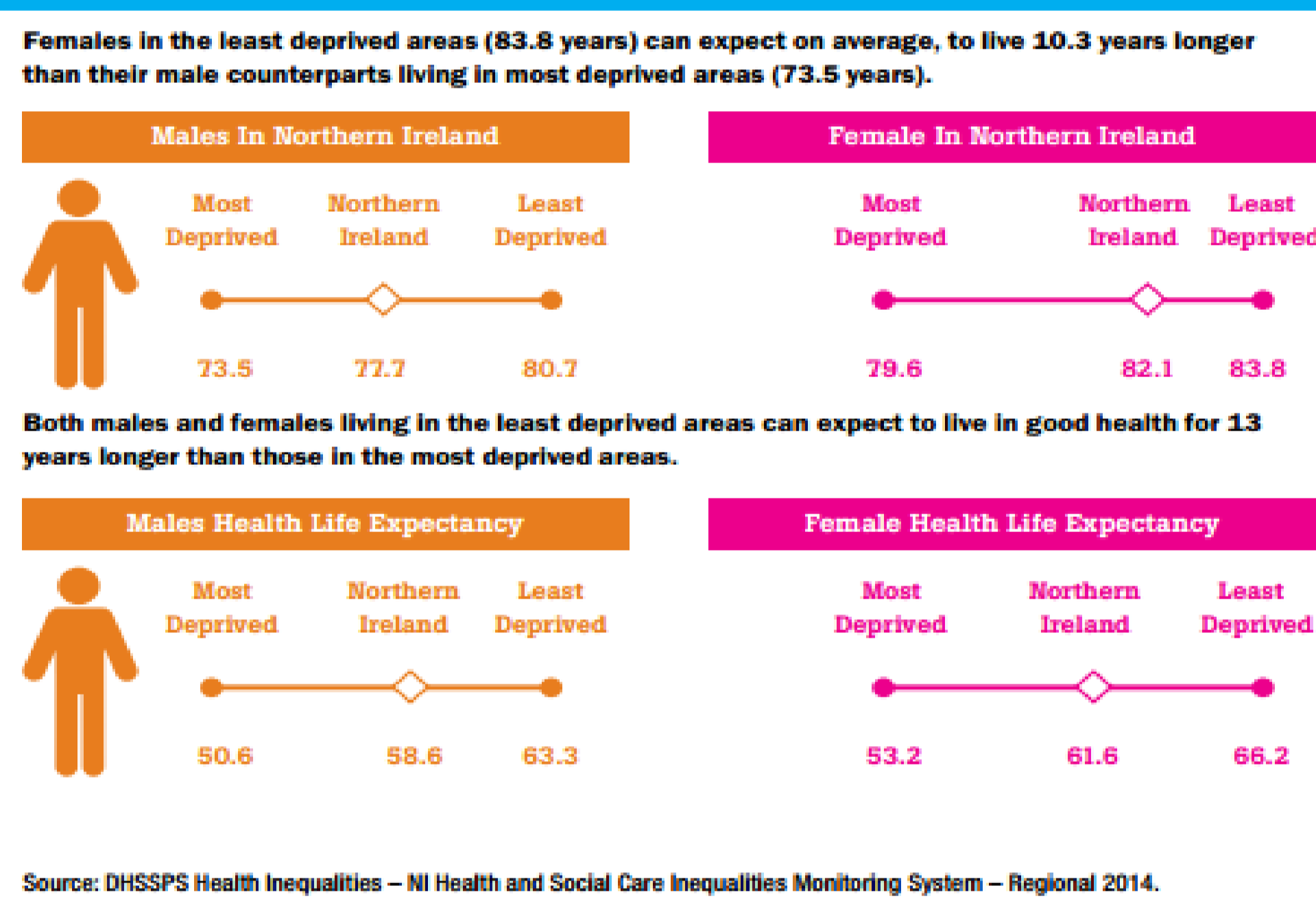
ADULT LITERACY LEVELS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

have improved amongst working age adults (ages 16-65) since last measured in 1996.

The proportion of Northern Ireland's working age population performing at the lowest levels of literacy has fallen from 23% in 1996 to 18% in 2012.

(DEL (2013) The International Survey of Adults Skills, 2012: Adult literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills in Northern Ireland)

Life Expectancy by Deprivation 2010-12



'Health literacy is a key determinant of equity, there are opportunities to develop it within schools, networks and social networks to increase knowledge, information, communication and access to services.'
Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland



A workshop, **Health Literacy in a Healthy City: Making the Case and Taking Action** was held to explore and develop a common understanding of health literacy within the context of Belfast. Presentations included models of practice locally in Belfast and experience from Ireland, Scotland and England. The workshop, facilitated by WHO Expert Adviser and Health Impact Assessment Specialist, Erica Ison, identified a list of actions to take forward the topic.

DEVELOPING A HEALTH LITERACY BASELINE

40% of Irish people have limited Health Literacy (EU Health Literacy Survey, 2012)

43% of English adult working-age population cannot fully understand and use health information containing only text. (Royal College of General Practitioners, 2014)

Existing tools for measuring health literacy were considered to develop a baseline level of healthy literacy in Belfast (see below Newest Vital Sign, REALM, TOFHLA).



INCREASING HEALTH LITERACY: THE BELFAST APPROACH

HEALTH LITERACY CASE STUDIES

A template for evaluating and recording casestudies on health literacy has been developed and tested on existing case studies from partner organisations.

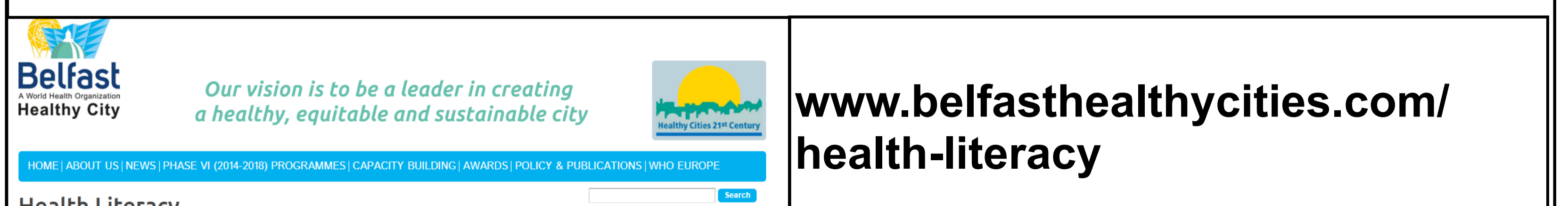
The information recorded by applying the template will be recorded for reference in an online resource bank.

A set of essential and desirable criteria have been developed by the group to enable identification of a suitable pilot project.

IDENTIFIED VULNERABLE GROUPS

- older people
- pregnant women
- lower socio economic groups
- migrant population
- young people
- low literacy groups
- people with long-term conditions

HEALTH LITERACY ONLINE RESOURCE



An online resource bank of information will be available to shape future practice, providing examples of local and national health literacy projects to enable local organisations to incorporate health literacy as a core part of their work.

The working group partners are developing of a set of guiding principles to enable organisations to incorporate health literacy at all levels.