

Factsheet

The WHO Action Network on Measuring Population and Organizational Health Literacy (M-POHL)

M-POHL
December 2023

About M-POHL

M-POHL was launched in February 2018 and has currently (in 2023) 23 participating member countries, 5 observer countries from the WHO European Region, and in addition observers from Asian countries. M-POHL as a WHO Action Network is closely cooperating with WHO-Europe. M-POHL member countries are represented by a policy representative and a research expert (principal investigator). Policy representatives are usually appointed by the Ministry of Health or an other public policy body and should be part of national decision making processes in relation to health literacy measurements and interventions. Principal investigators should also be appointed by the Ministry of Health, have experience with population-based measurements and should be related to a research institution.

M-POHL is governed by a General Assembly and by two international co-chairs for research and for policy. These two M-POHL co-chairs who are elected by the M-POHL General Assembly have international expertise in measuring health literacy and implementing health literacy policies.

In the governance and work structure of M-POHL roles, responsibilities and decision structures in the M-POHL Action Network are outlined in detail.

M-POHL's overall aim is to support evidence-informed policy by supporting the availability of high-quality internationally comparative data on health literacy (HL) as a comprehensive and relational concept. This entails both the institutionalization of periodical comparative surveys on population HL and of organizational HL or HL-sensitive healthcare organizations, settings, and systems, to facilitate the identification and selection of specific aspects of HL that can be improved by health policies and strategies.

M-POHL's first project was the European Health Literacy Population Survey 2019–2021 (HLS₁₉) which was conducted in 17 countries. It demonstrated the relevance of general HL and specific HLs for considerable proportions of adult residents with low HLs, a social gradient for HLs, and significant potential effects of HLs on health-relevant indicators. Based on the HLS₁₉ results, recommendations to improve HL were developed (see <https://m-pohl.net/Results>). In 2022, a project on measuring organizational HL was started.

Why participate in M-POHL?

M-POHL as an international Action Network with its focus on measuring and improving HL in populations and organizations (see workplan for 2023 – 2027 below) contributes to the much-needed evidence on HL. M-POHL connects expertise from research and policy and fosters evidence-based policy decisions. It puts HL on the international and national agenda sustainably. Thus, participating in M-POHL offers high-level international exchange on up-to-date HL developments, data, evidence, and experiences to improve research and national policies, as well as participating in framing the international HL agenda in close cooperation with WHO and other international bodies. Such agenda-setting for HL is needed more than ever since the orientation in the field of health is becoming increasingly challenging due to several dynamic trends, including health threats induced by the climate crisis, the chances and challenges of the digital transformation, pandemics like Covid-19, mental health challenges in the context of the current global multi-crisis, and the fast-growing medical and health knowledge and technologies.

HL can help to mitigate the effects of these crises on health on different levels: HL guides and empowers individuals to increase their chances for health. HL data on population HL and on health literate organizations, as well as evidence for effective interventions to improve HL, support decision makers to develop national interventions on improving HL in populations and organizations, including healthcare systems.

Workplan of M-POHL 2023–2027

M-POHL suggests three projects for the timeframe 2023 – 2027 to ensure that its aims are met:

- » Project 1: Health Literacy Survey 2024–2026 (HLS₂₄)
- » Project 2: Assessing Organizational Health Literacy (OHL)
- » Project 3: Evidence Based Policy and Practice (EVPOP)

In addition, the M-POHL Action Network is also responsible for the management of the archive and results of the previous M-POHL project HLS₁₉ (and in the future also of other completed projects). The administration and coordination work of M-POHL is provided by an International Coordination Center (ICC). The ICC is located at the Austrian National Public Health Center.

Funding of M-POHL's international activities

Funding of M-POHL: There is no specific country membership fee for participating in M-POHL for the period from 2023 – 2027. Costs for the administration and organization of the M-POHL network

are covered for that period by project fees of the member countries participating in M-POHL projects.

Funding of M-POHL projects: M-POHL member countries have the right to participate in all M-POHL projects. For each project, project participation requires signing a Joint Project Agreement and the payment of the project fee which covers the international coordination (ICC fee), administration, and support of the project.

The funding of all related activities needs to be in line with WHO funding rules. This applies to all actors involved in the project. In case of the involvement of non-state actors, they will have to meet the funding criteria outlined in the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors (FENSA) (see https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/wha69/a69_r10-en.pdf).

Citation: M-POHL (2023): The WHO Action Network on Measuring Population and Organizational Health Literacy (M-POHL). Factsheet. International Coordination Center of M-POHL and its projects at the Austrian National Public Health Institute, Vienna
