2018 Plain Writing Act Implementation Update Survey

Note: Please provide the information requested below by COB Friday, March 23, 2017. Your responses will be included in our annual compliance report. Thank you for your help.

1. Points of Contact:

    a. Please confirm the senior official in your OpDiv or StaffDiv responsible for plain writing. Your current senior official is listed in the chart at the bottom of the Department's plain writing webpage: http://www.hhs.gov/open/plain-writing/.
        Name & Title: Dogan Eroglu, Ph.D., Associate Director for Communication Science, Office of the Associate Director for Communication (OADC), CDC
        Email: Dogan.eroglu@cdc.hhs.gov
        Phone: 404.498.6119

        Note: We will include the name and e-mail address of this person on the Department's plain writing webpage.

    b. Please identify any other personnel working on plain writing in your agency whom we may contact to follow up to your responses to this survey.
        Name & Title: Jennifer C. Harris, M.S., Health Communication Specialist, Office of the Associate Director for Communication (OADC), CDC
        Email: JCHarris@cdc.gov
        Phone: 404.498.6613

2. What steps has your agency taken since March 2017 to begin or continue implementation of the Plain Writing Act?

    a. What *new* activities have you taken to further implement the Act?
        The CDC/ATSDR Health Literacy Council, comprising representatives from across CDC and under the leadership of OADC, met 5 times in 2017 to develop guidance to help Centers, Institutes and Offices (CIOs) comply with the Plain Writing Act and the CDC/ATSDR Health Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy, which supports the use of plain language. In 2017 the OADC hosted 4 technical assistance session to provide solutions to challenges council members and other communication representatives had implementing plain language and health literacy strategies.

        In 2017 we customized design guides that were introduced in 2016 to meet the specific needs of various divisions and programs. This was done to help staff and programs create fact sheets, data sheets and press releases in accordance with the CDC Clear Communication Index.

We made 4 in-person plain language trainings available to all employees, and employees have 24/7 access to several plain language classes at all times through online courses. During 2017, individual CIOs offered multiple in-person plain language training sessions. In 2017, reviews of tools and resources that we periodically conduct resulted in minor updates to training materials.

In 2017 we used a SharePoint system referred to as the "Health Literacy Reporting System" to collect data for a full year. This system standardizes data collection on plain language and health literacy initiatives across divisions and CIOs. Items in this system are directly aligned with the goals and strategies outlined in the CDC/ATSDR Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy, which we revised and updated in May 2016. The data collected through this system are compiled into an annual report card to assess progress implementing the CDC/ATSDR Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy, which includes activities promoting plain writing.

b. Since March 2017, what types of documents and how many (estimate is acceptable, please specify) of each has your agency written in plain writing? Please also specify how many of each were new and how many were substantially revised.

Our CIOs wrote or revised 953 documents meeting plain language standards. Of those documents, 657 were new and 289were substantially revised for plain language. 139 of these documents were tested with the intended audience. Document types include:
o Articles (Internal)
o Blogs
o Campaign messages
o Contract documents
o Briefing documents
o Fact sheets
o Federal register notices
o Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
o Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs)
o Gov. Delivery Messages
o Guidance documents
o Infographics
o Mobile apps
o Newsletters
o Posters
o PowerPoint presentations
o Press releases
o Reports
o Scripts for podcast, TV, radio
o Signs
o Social media messages

- o Training materials
- o Vital Signs
- o Web materials
- o Web pages

3. Measurement:

   a. How do you track the conversion of existing documents into plain writing?

   CIOs report using a variety of electronic systems to track and monitor documents such as: eClearance, Documentum, Sharepoint and Activator. CIOs use these systems to enter Clear Communication Index scores (a number between zero and 100 that indicates how many clear communication criteria the document has addressed), make descriptive notes about plain writing revisions completed or needed, and upload supporting documentation that can be seen by reviewers in clearance roles as the document progresses through the clearance sequence.
   CIOs also used the "Plain Language Assessment" service offered by OADC that uses software to analyze text for plain language elements: passive verbs, hidden verbs, and sentence length. The software provides basic suggestions on how to clarify text. OADC then runs a 2nd analysis to determine if the appropriate changes have been addressed by the CIO.

   b. How do you measure whether covered documents use plain writing?
   The Office of the Director and the 11 CIOs include plain language principles in the standard review and clearance criteria applied to public documents before we release them. Each of the 11 CIOs has an Associate Director for Communication Science who is responsible for this communication review. The agency Communication Director may also review sensitive, complex or emergency response public materials and apply plain language criteria.

   In 2017, CDC continued implementing the Clear Communication Index that includes 4 questions and 20 items that research shows affect clear communication. The Index references the Federal Plain Language Guidelines and expands the items we consider for clear communication. Staff use the Index to score documents on a scale of zero to 100. We track document scores and use them to identify steps we can take to increase clarity.

   c. How do you measure (i) the effectiveness of the plain writing program for your office; and (ii) the effectiveness of your plain writing documents (i.e., whether the public can easily understand and use them)?

   We measure effectiveness of the plain writing program through data and feedback from the Associate Directors of Communication Science in the CIOs and the Health Literacy Council. We promote use of a flow chart diagram that shows how our various plain language and clear communications products can be helpful at different

stages of developing communication materials. When time and funds allow, we measure effectiveness of our documents through audience testing, such as focus groups, interviews, usability testing, and online surveys on our web site. We use standardized customer satisfaction measures to track user satisfaction with CDC web pages.

d. What obstacles are there to measuring these aspects of your plain writing program?

Given the large number of documents produced by CDC, a dedicated team of reviewers would be necessary to track the extensive review process and measure writing quality for all documents.

Although testing documents with the intended audience and asking for customer feedback on our plain language use are the ideal ways to measure our plain writing program, these are resource-intensive activities. Individual programs often don't have enough resources to thoroughly audience-test all documents they produce.

Results from the American Customer Satisfaction Index items provide only general level information about customers' satisfaction with our website, but we can't match responses to specific documents or get feedback on plain language use in documents.

4. Examples:

a. Please submit three documents that your agency has substantially altered and improved through plain writing, since March 2017.
NIOSH- Keep Workers Safe on the Road- Infographic
https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/motorvehicle/ncmvs/pdfs/CMVSInfographic.pdf
OSTLTS- PHHS Block Grant- Webpage:
https://www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant/granteehighlights.htm
NCCDPHP- Quitting Can Make You A Winner- Webpage:
https://www.cdc.gov/features/greatamericansmokeout/index.html

b. Please submit three documents that your office intends to revise or rewrite.
NCBDDD- Act Early: If You're Concerned - Webpage:
https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/concerned.html
NCIRD- Prevent Seasonal Flu - Webpage:
https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/index.html
NCHHSTP- About DASH: Healthy Youth - Webpage:
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/about/index.htm

c. Please provide the top three documents using plain writing from your office that have had the largest impact on the public.
NCEH/ATSDR- Natural Disasters and Severe Weather - Webpage:
https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/index.html
NCCDPHP- Unfit to Serve: Obesity is Impacting National Security- Infographic:
https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/downloads/unfit-to-serve.pdf

NCBDDD- Zika Pregnancy and Birth Defects Surveillance- Website:
https://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/zika/pregnancy.html

5. Training

   a. Has your agency been using the LMS Plain Writing training?
      https://lms.learning.hhs.gov/Saba/Web/Main/goto/GuestOfferingDetails?offeringId=dowbt000000000025313
      No. We use the NIH online training, the content of which appears to be the same.
      Staff have the option of taking the NIH Plain Language online training directly from
      the NIH site, or registering and completing an in-person plain language course in the
      Learning Portal.

   b. How do you determine who should take it?
      Plain writing is part of CDC's strategic efforts in clear communication and health
      literacy. CDC has an internal Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy (update in
      progress), which is based on the HHS National Action Plan to Improve Health
      Literacy http://www.health.gov/communication/HLActionPlan/.

      Goal 1 of our internal Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy focuses on strategies
      for clear communication and staff training. All staff who are involved in development
      or review of public documents are required to complete at least basic plain language
      training and Clear Communication Index training. Each CIO is asked to implement
      this requirement within its unit."

      Staff training in plain language and clear communication is tracked in the HHS
      Learning Portal. Although some classes are hosted without being tracked in the
      Learning Portal, OADC makes a considerable effort to help CIOs enter training
      offerings in the portal, as well as confirm and credit attendees. OADC staff members
      run reports in the Learning Portal to provide CIO specific staff training data.

   c. What percentage of employees completed the training?
      •   In 2016 our achieved method of data collection showed that 90% of employees
      involved in creating or clearing public health and safety information had completed at
      least basic plain language training.
      •   In 2017 CIOs identified 2,908 employees involved in creating or clearing public
      health and safety information for CDC audiences in 2017. Of this staff 1047
      employees were trained in 2017 alone.
      •   465 additional staff members (not FTEs) were also trained

   d. What specific feedback have you received from those who already completed the
      training? No feedback

   e. How do you expect to use this training this year?

We have three online options for basic plain language training. We recorded and captioned one of the "Introduction to Plain Language" & "Basic Plain Language Skills" classes and posted it on the agency intranet. Also, we promote the NIH online plain language training course. We have five CDC-developed online health literacy courses for health professionals: Writing for the Public, Using Numbers and Explaining Risk, Creating Easier to Understand Lists, Charts, and Graphs, Speaking with the Public and Fundamentals of Communicating Health Risk.

We expect to continue encouraging staff to either attend pre-recorded and in-person training or complete the NIH online training. CDC scientists perceive the NIH training as credible and relevant and improves compliance with the training requirement. We also recommend more advanced trainings to staff who have already taken this training.

    f.   If you do not use the LMS Plain Writing training, please describe, in detail, any plain writing training/programs you did use.
In addition to the in-person basic plain language and NIH online courses, CDC University offers health literacy, clear communication, plain language and web development courses to staff on a periodic basis and consults with CIOs to schedule training based on need. We track plain writing trainings in the LMS such as Basic Plain Language Skills, Scientific Writing, and Clear Communication Index offerings. We also have four CDC-developed online health literacy courses for health professionals: Writing for the Public, Using Numbers and Explaining Risk, Creating Easier to Understand Lists, Charts, and Graphs, and Speaking with the Public. These can be found here: http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/gettraining.html

6. Agency Support, Incentives, and Recognition

    a.   How have senior officials in your agency reinforced the requirements to write documents in plain writing? Has your agency's leadership issued Plain Writing Act-related directives? If no, what is your plan to do so?

CDC reinforces compliance with the Plain Writing Act through Office of the Director level coordination of plain language activities and an agency operational policy. The Office of the Associate Director for Communication (OADC) is in the CDC Office of the Director and coordinates plain language work for the agency. OADC supports 2.5 positions in health literacy and plain language. OADC led the agency in developing an operational policy to implement the Act at CDC.

Senior agency officials reinforce plain writing by sponsoring and releasing staff for training, requesting briefings, inviting presentations at staff meetings, and reminding staff of the importance of plain language and complying with the law. CDC leadership continually reinforces the importance of complying with the Plain Language Act through the CDC intranet, newsletters, and agency-wide announcements.

b. (If applicable): How has your agency updated its website devoted to plain writing over the past year?
CDC's agency website for Plain Writing was last updated in September 2017 (http://www.cdc.gov/Other/PlainWriting.html. The website describes what we are doing to use plain writing, and provides links to the Plain Writing Act of 2010, federal plain language guidelines, federal plain language website, the plain writing plan from the Department of Health and Human Services, the 2015 Plain Writing Act Compliance Report, Everyday Words for Public Health Communication and the Clear Communication Index. The website also has information on how users can provide feedback on the use of plain language in documents and materials, as well as examples of public documents CDC programs have created using plain language.

We continue to ask CIOs to launch and maintain their own intranet sites offering key writing resources, links to plain language tools, material development resources, or to refer staff to the Nation Center for Environmental Health's online clear writing resources and toolkit. OADC maintains an intranet site regularly updated with upcoming plain language training opportunities and plain language promotion materials.

c. Please describe incentives or rewards you provide to employees to encourage the use of plain writing.
CDC offers a plain language award and an excellence in communication award in the annual agency awards program. Each CIO can nominate one employee or team for these awards. Senior leadership and other supervisors in several CIOs reward staff who demonstrate and promote effective, clear communication and literacy skills through Performance Management Appraisal System (PMAS) ratings, public recognition in senior leadership meetings and All Hands meetings, time off awards, and special CIO awards.

CIOs have created their own internal awards and recognition programs. For example, the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD) and the Office for State, Tribal, Local and Territorial Support (OSTLTS) added a clear communication award category to their annual award programs.

d. Do you include plain writing ability in relevant job descriptions (i.e., employees who draft, edit, or clear any document)? Please provide examples.
Yes, our CIOs include plain writing ability in relevant job descriptions, and assess clear communication and health literacy skills of new federal employee hires and contract hires, who will be involved in drafting, editing, or clearing public health and safety information for the four audiences CDC serves. Some CIOs ask job candidates to provide samples of plain language materials they have produced.

e. Do you nominate documents for recognition as recipients of *ClearMark Awards* by the Center for Plain Language? If so, what documents? If not, why not?
Yes, the following documents were 2016 ClearMark Award finalist:

- **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health**- [Keep Workers Safe on the Road](#)
- **National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases**- [Advanced Molecular Detection (AMD) Scientific Superheroes](#)
- **National Center for Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities-** Pregnancy and Birth Defects Task Force Communications and Policy Team

7. Please provide any Plain Writing-related best practices used by your OpDiv/StaffDiv to comply with the Plain Writing Act.
   a. We sample and conduct independent document reviews for clear communication. In 2017, we helped CIOs create their own review teams and health literacy work plans to expand the number of documents getting independent review.

   b. We continue to standardize and disseminate the application of plain language and clear communication elements with the Clear Communication Index, a scoring rubric applied to an increasing number of public materials.

   c. We emphasize the need for on-going training in plain language. Plain language skills should be periodically refreshed and advanced through on-going training. Specific individuals and types of employees that would benefit from advanced trainings are identified and trained.

   d. We recognize staff and programs for effective plain language use. In addition to an agency plain language award, many CIOs offer their own plain language and clear communication awards. Finally, staff skills in plain language are recognized through the ClearMark competition.

8. What support from the Department and or other HHS organizations would be most helpful in continuing to make your plain writing program stronger?
   a. The Department can help us by consistently and visibly promoting the use of plain language in all public communication across all HHS divisions and with other federal departments and agencies. Plain language should be the default practice, instead of an afterthought or something to argue about during clearance, so that managers and staff eventually develop plain language "defaults" and built-in processes.
   b. The Department can develop measures that "protect" plain language documents and make sure that documents created in plain language stay in plain language through the clearance process within HHS and across departments.
   c. The Department can offer plain writing consulting for programs that need to supplement their plain writing capacity.
   d. Anything the Department can do to reduce the burden to test documents with audiences and get feedback on plain language use will help. The Department can identify ways to make it easier and less costly for us to do audience testing and collect customer feedback.

9. *Other.* Please provide any additional comments, suggestions, or materials concerning plain writing.

No additional comments.