Health literacy and Digital Literacy: importance and next steps

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This presentation

Definitions: digital literacy, digital health literacy, health literacy

Health literacy: Prevalence and socio-economic determinants

Digital technology and digital skills

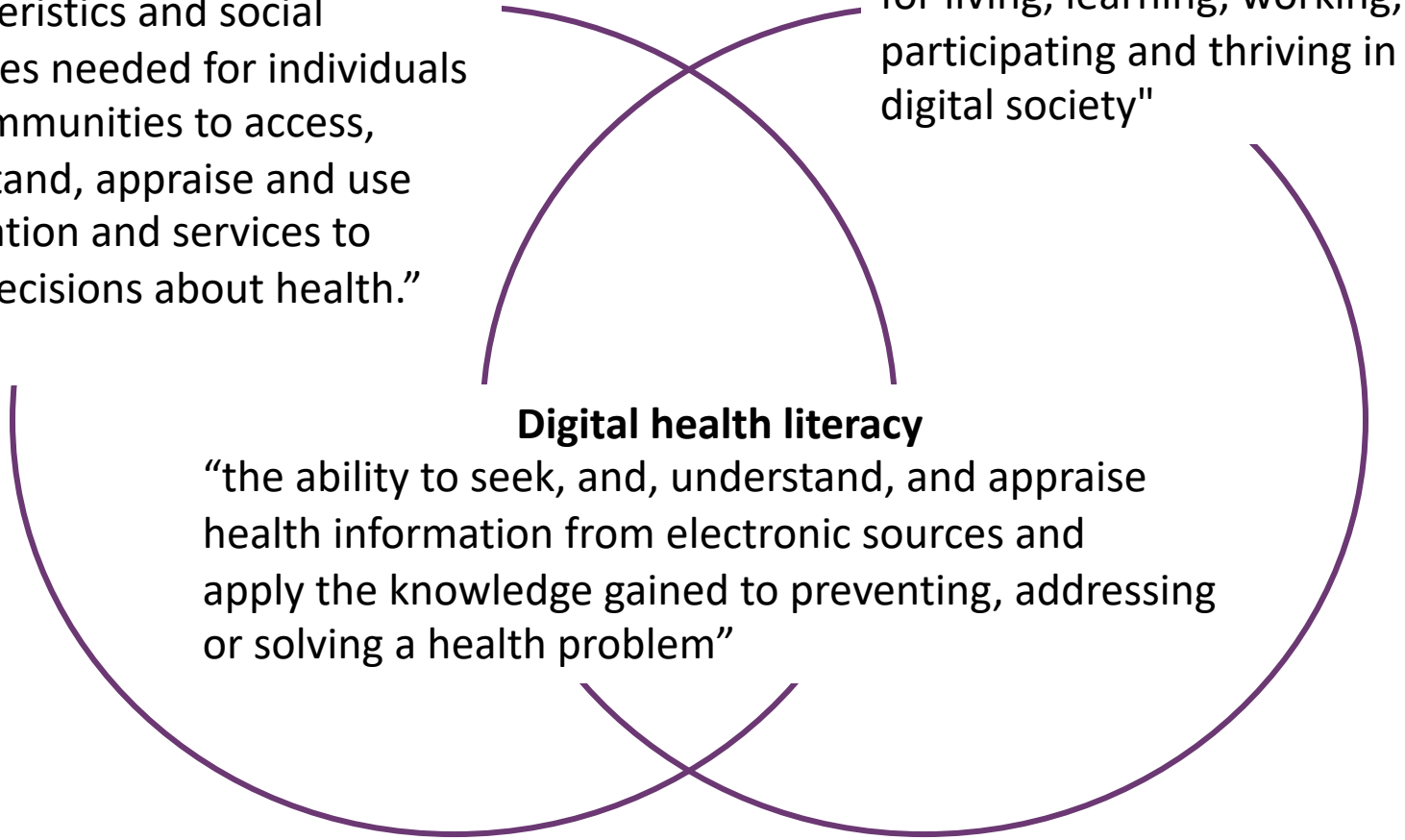
Digital technology and health

Report recommendations – redressing the balance

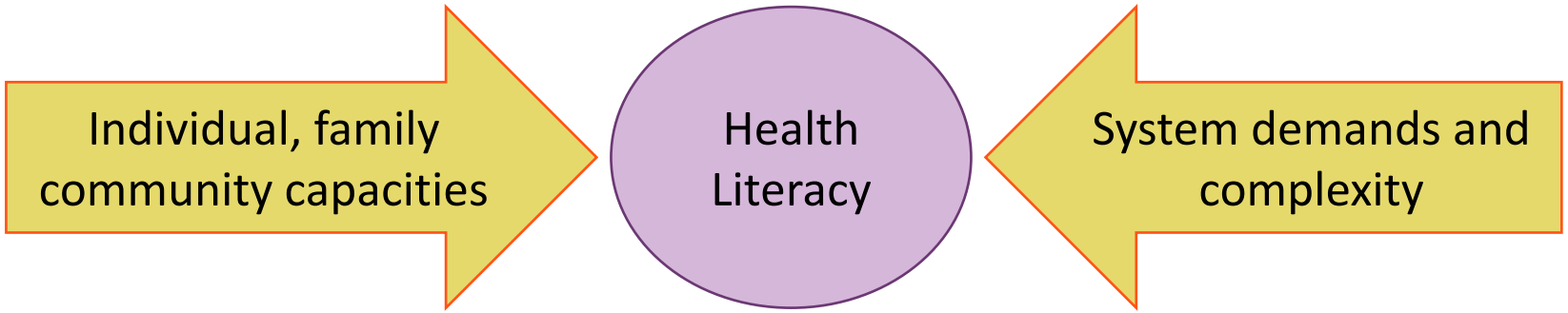
Some thoughts

Health Literacy
“refers to the personal characteristics and social resources needed for individuals and communities to access, understand, appraise and use information and services to make decisions about health.”

Digital literacy
“those capabilities that fit someone for living, learning, working, participating and thriving in a digital society"

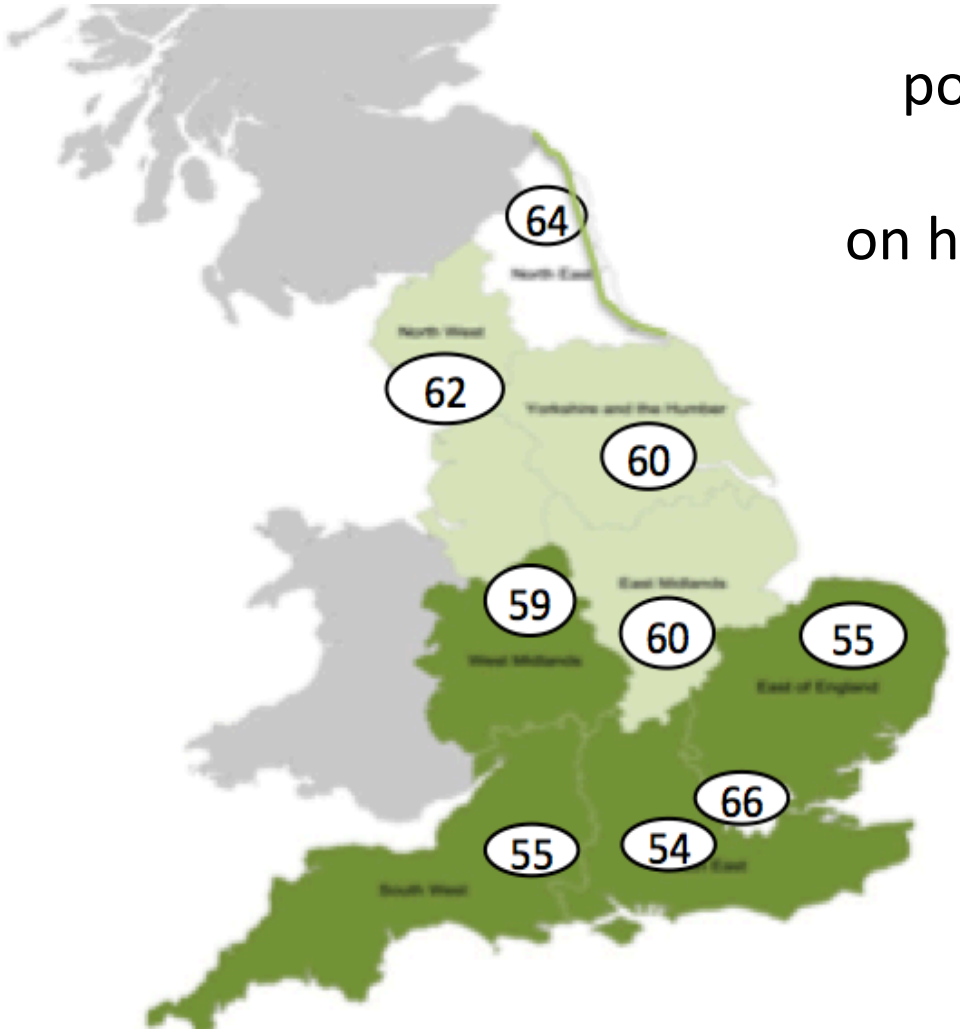


Digital health literacy
“the ability to seek, and, understand, and appraise health information from electronic sources and apply the knowledge gained to preventing, addressing or solving a health problem”



Source: Parker R. Measuring health literacy: what? So what? Now what? In Hernandez L, ed. Measures of health literacy: workshop summary, Roundtable on Health Literacy. Washington, DC, National Academies Press, 2009:91–98.

Prevalence of low health literacy

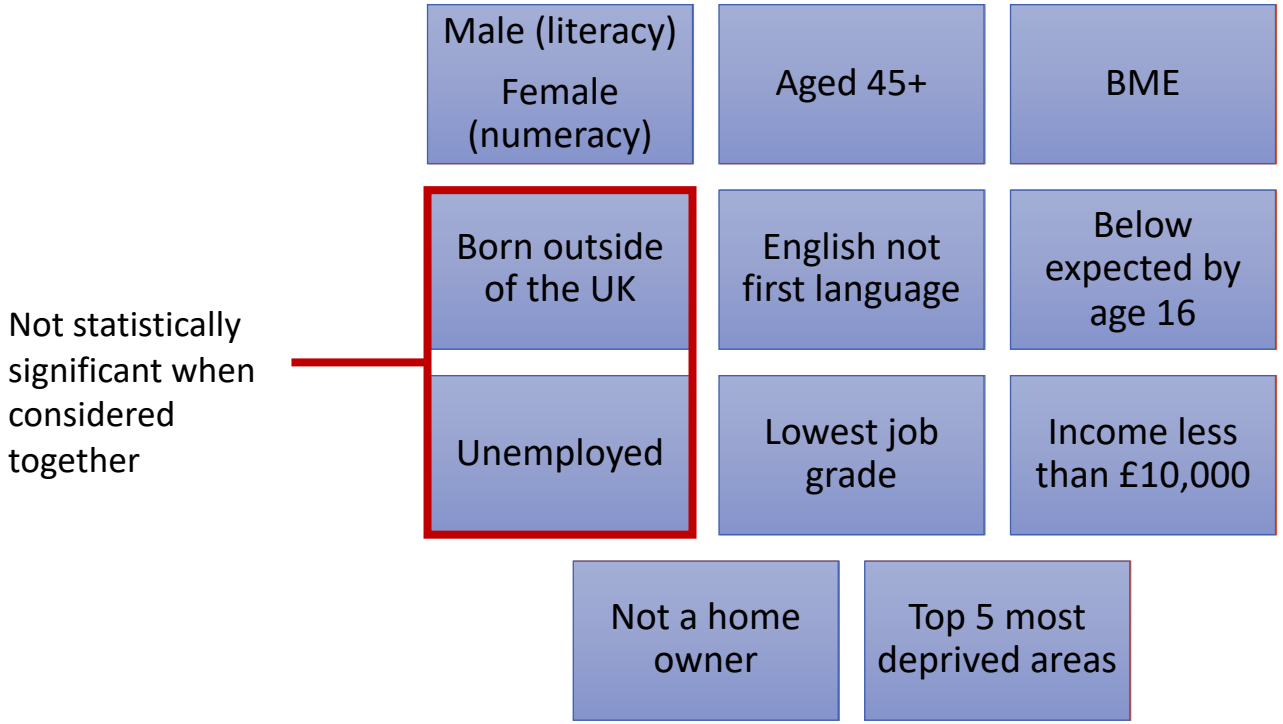


% of the adult working age population unable to fully read, understand, and act on health information in common circulation.

National average 61%

Rowlands G et al 2015.

Health literacy and social determinants of health



Rowlands G et al 2015:

The possibilities brought by digital technology advances

Self-care

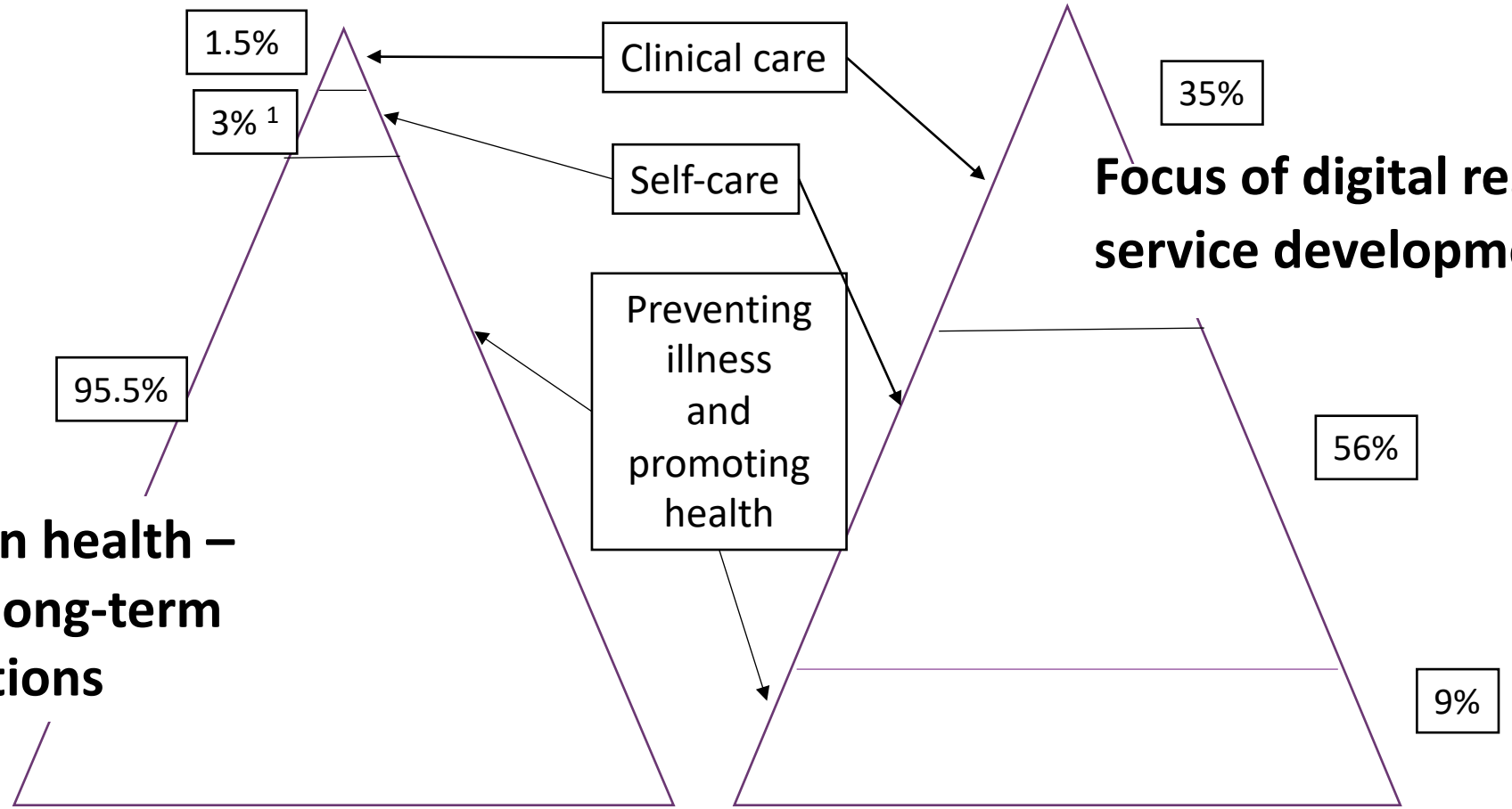
Better functionality with external access for patients, clinicians and researchers e.g.
Managing contacts (consultations, medication requests)
Access to records
E-health (e.g. websites) and m-health (e.g. apps)
Wearables (e.g. activity tracker, pulse monitoring)

Preventing illness and promoting health

E-health
M-health
Wearables

Clinical care

Telemedicine and telehealth (remote monitoring of an individual e.g. sensors to monitor falls)
Higher quality and accuracy in collecting and sharing health data across platforms

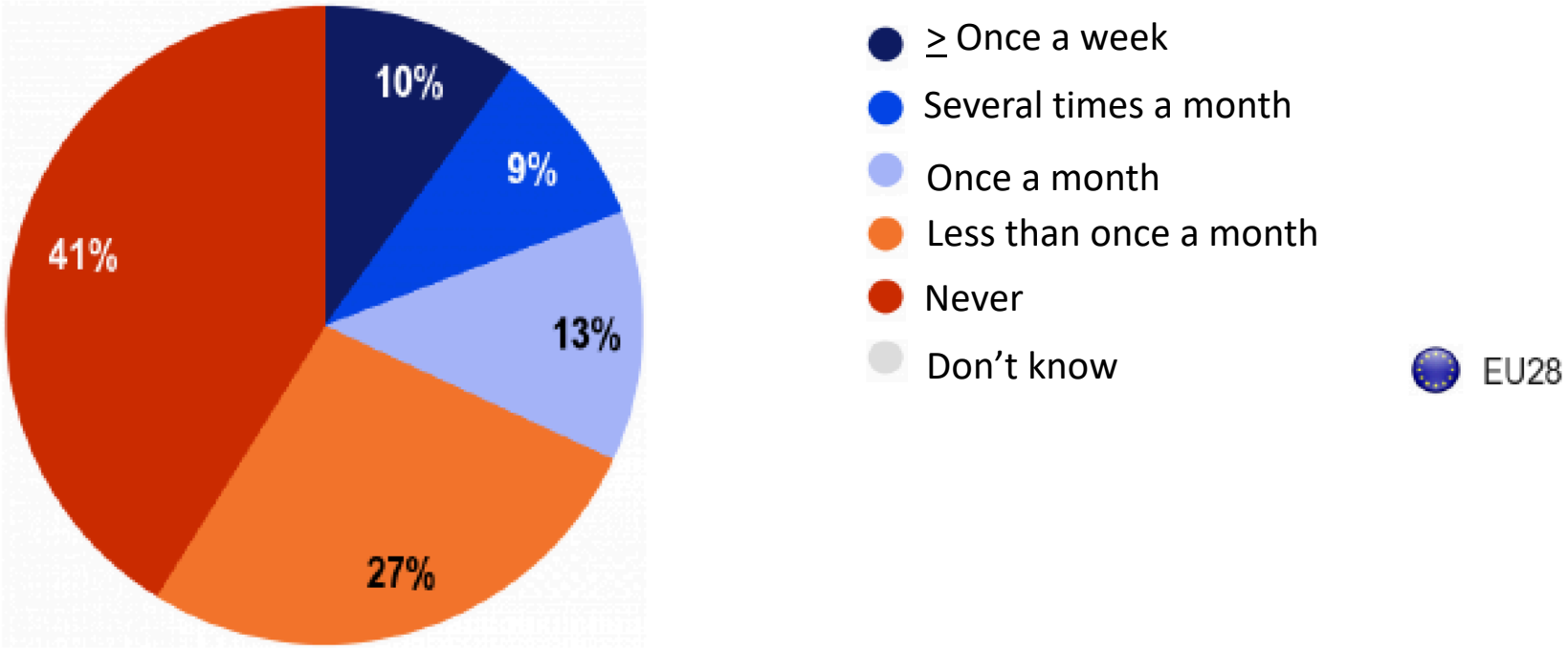


Time spent on health – people with long-term health conditions

Focus of digital research and service development

1. Jonas DE, Ibuka Y, Russell LB. How much time do adults spend on health-related self-care? Results from the American time use survey. J Am Board Fam Med. 2011;24(4):380-90

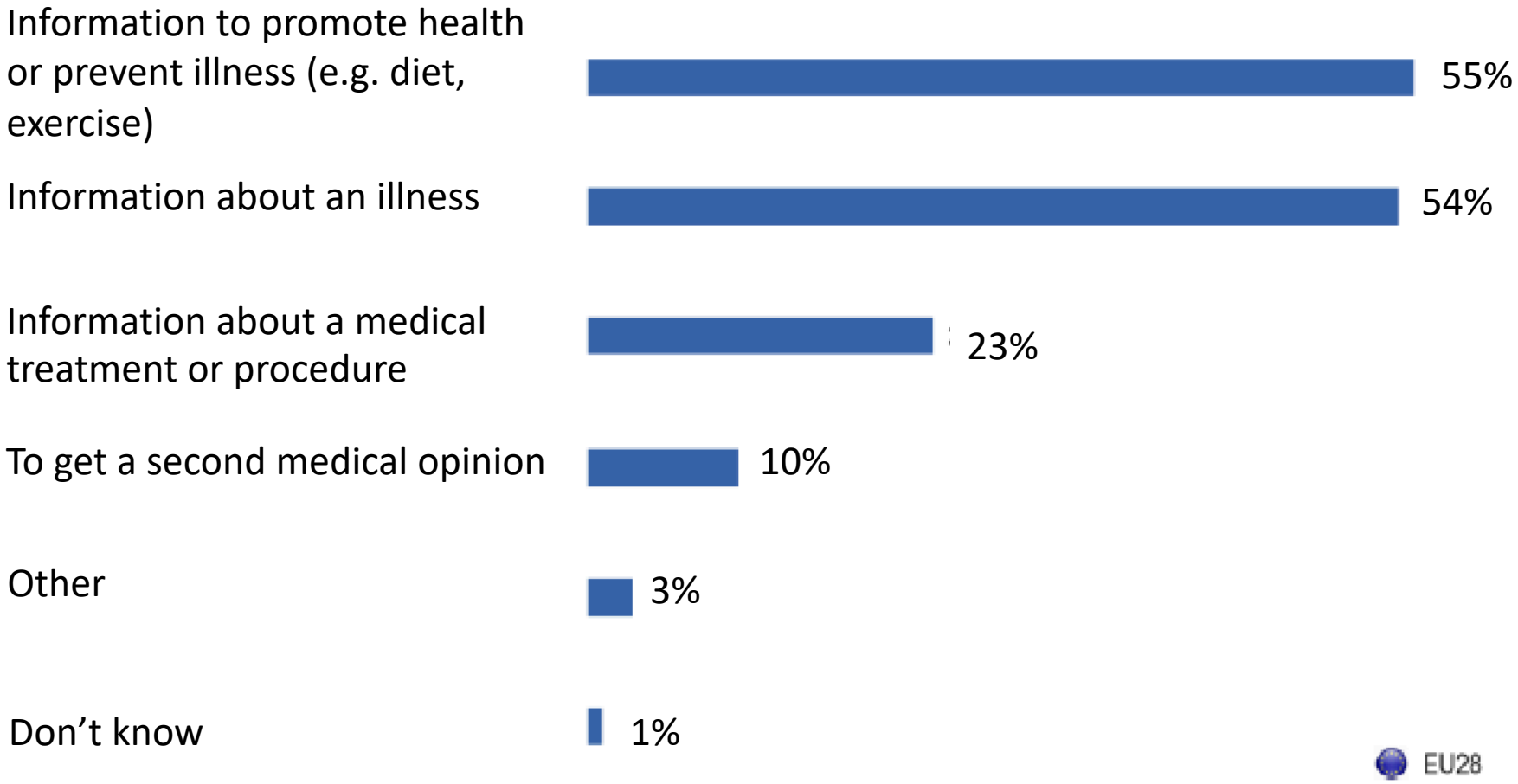
Prevalence of use of internet to search for health information (EU)



Range: Netherlands 74% to Romania 49%

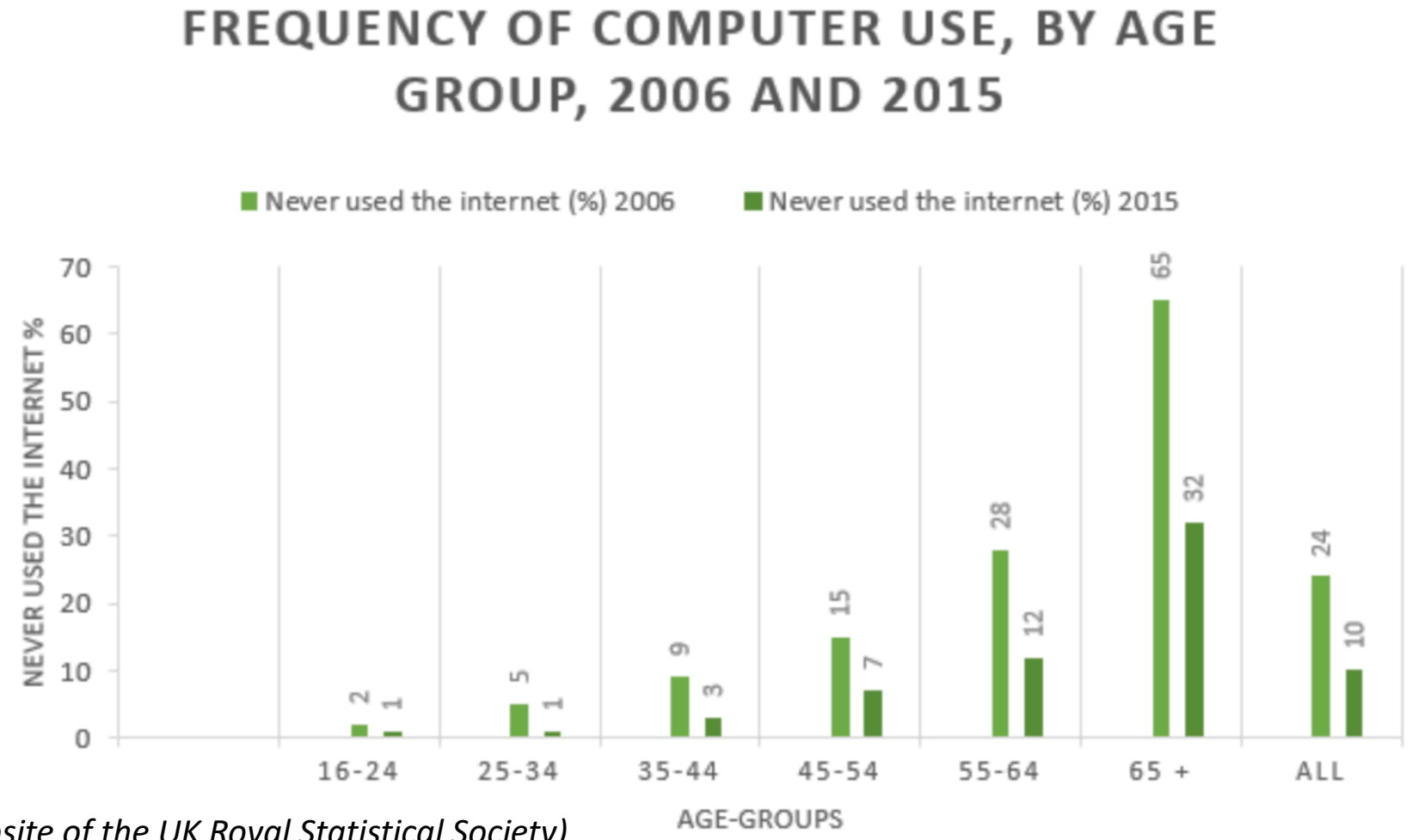
European citizens' digital health literacy. European commission. 2014

Reasons for using the internet



European citizens' digital health literacy. European commission. 2014

Social inequality and internet use



Significance (Website of the UK Royal Statistical Society)
https://www.statslife.org.uk/science-technology/2445-mind-the-gap-the-digital-divide-and-digital-inclusion

Social inequality and internet use

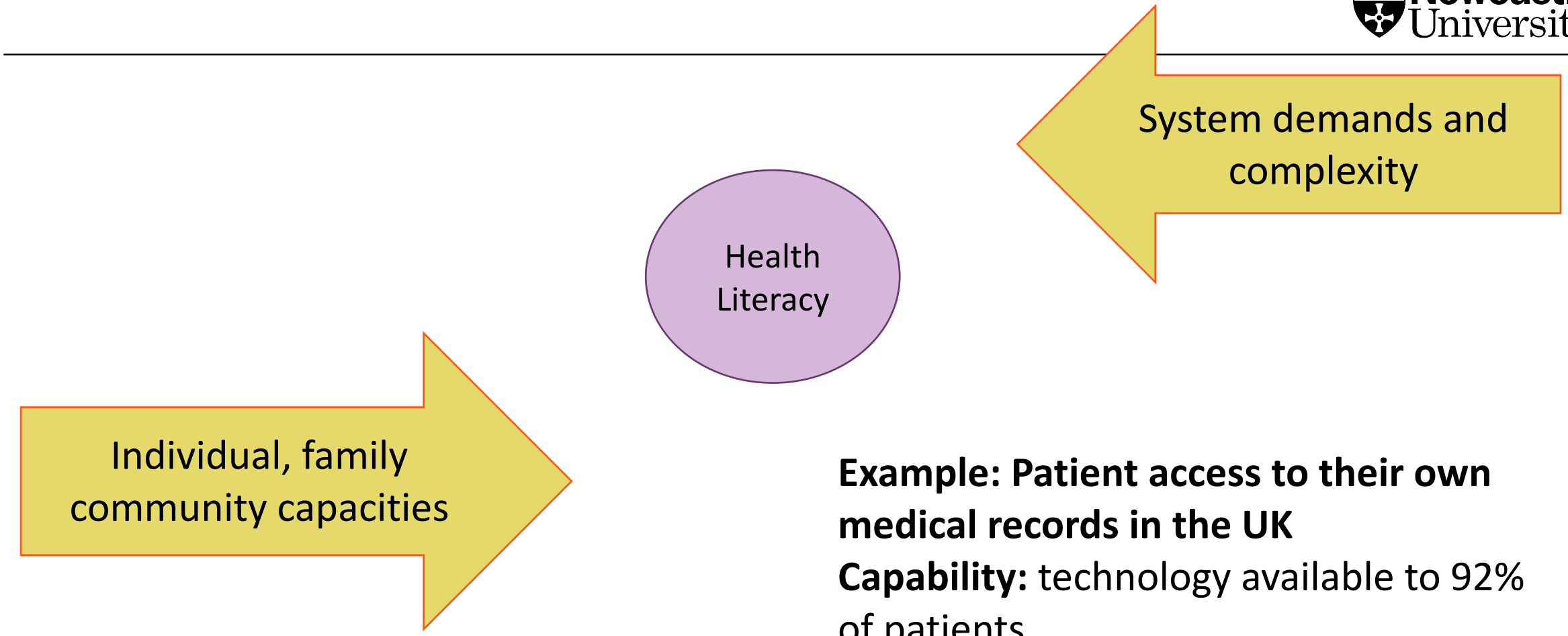
	Never used the internet?
No formal qualifications	55%
Degree level education	2%
Semi-routine or routine occupation	33%
Management or professional occupation	9%
Annual income less than £20,000	17%
Annual income more than £43,000	2%

Significance (Website of the UK Royal Statistical Society)
https://www.statslife.org.uk/science-technology/2445-mind-the-gap-the-digital-divide-and-digital-inclusion

Social inequality and internet use

Compared with people with higher health literacy, people with low health literacy are less likely to have access to the internet (Odds Ratio 10.75, 95% CI 7.08 to 16.33, p< 0.0001) or to use the internet to gather health information (OR 2.35, 95% CI 1.53 to 3.60, p p< 0.001) [1]

1. Estacio & Protheroe, 2017.



Example: Patient access to their own medical records in the UK

Capability: technology available to 92% of patients

Awareness: 5.2% of patients aware that this is available

Usage: 0.9% of patients used the service

Recommendation 1:
National strategies

Recommendation 3:
NICE guidelines

Recommendation 5:
'PIF TICK'

Recommendation 2:
Health Literacy
Friendly
Organisations

Health
Literacy

Recommendation 5:
'PIF TICK'

Recommendation 4:
Shared Decision
Making

Newcastle University

Health Literacy and Digital Literacy: some thoughts

- Both health literacy and digital literacy have social gradients
- People with low health literacy are also likely to have low digital skills – widening the social divide
- The 'Covid shock' has increased the importance of digital health literacy, and the health service is likely to retain many of the changes
- The PIF Recommendations address both sides of the balance – building patient skills and improving the organisation of the health service

BUT

- Do we also need to be building digital skills in communities to build health promotion and disease prevention skills in the wider community

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