

**Department of Health and Human Services**  
**Plain Writing Act Compliance Report**  
**April 2017**

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 was enacted “to improve the effectiveness and accountability of Federal agencies to the public by promoting clear Government communication that the public can understand and use.” The Department of Health and Human Services continues to implement the law by rewriting existing documents in plain writing, and writing new documents using plain writing principles, as well as initiating and expanding plain writing programs within HHS agencies.

The HHS divisions contributing to this year’s report are:

Administration for Children and Families (ACF)  
Administration for Community Living (ACL)  
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)  
Assistant Secretary for Financial Resources (ASFR)  
Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (ASPA)  
Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE)  
Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR)  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
Departmental Appeals Board (DAB)  
U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)  
Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)  
Intergovernmental and External Affairs (IEA)  
National Institutes of Health (NIH)  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH)  
Office for Civil Rights (OCR)  
Office of Inspector General (OIG)  
Office of Medicare Hearings and Appeals (OMHA)  
Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC)  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

The following are examples of the Department’s continuing effort to fully implement the Plain Writing Act, organized by HHS division.

**ACF:**

ACF Executive Secretariat (Exec Sec) led efforts to accomplish ACF’s 5-year plan to train all staff to write using plain language. The plan started with incorporating plain writing into the most public materials, such as website content, public talking points, and news releases, and later expanded to include funding opportunity announcements (FOA), informational memos, correspondence, and other official communication.

The plan started in 2012, and through its completion in 2016 ACF met its communication goals by:

- Informing and raising awareness about plain language among ACF staff.
- Providing comprehensive rewriting and editing of all website content and key division talking points about program accomplishments.
- Using plain language in all press materials, including press releases, op-eds, and guest blogs.
- Building plain language into personnel infrastructure of ACF, including orientation, training, and personnel evaluations.
- Establishing practices in Exec Sec to ensure consistent use of plain language in routine organizational documents, including informational memorandums, Presidential Proclamations, correspondence, and all information and policy memos.
- Establishing and implementing plain language use in all FOAs.
- Implementing plain language use in reports published by Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation.

Since the 2016 plain writing report, Exec Sec credits the plain writing training and priorities to the significant improvements in the readability of approximately 90 ACF FOAs. Exec Sec also developed a review processes and steps to ensure plain writing is preserved when edits and additions are made to documents.

ACF continues to develop new goals in the use of plain language by meeting with office heads to establish methods of communication and determine needs for further training. In October 2016, Exec Sec offered two 2-day seminars on plain language, open to all ACF staff members. More than 40 employees attended, including staff from offices responsible for writing FOAs, informational memos, correspondence, and other official communications. Additional writing and editing classes were also made available to ACF staff to improve their plain writing skills.

Since the 2016 plain writing report, ACF has also incorporated the routine use of readability tools in all ACF offices to train new team members and staff in plain writing. ACF identified plain writing training for use in new staff orientation, and worked with its managers to incorporate plain writing requirements in personnel evaluations.

The Office of Communications (OC) and Exec Sec established editorial standards and guidance for the consistency and promotion of plain language in all written products. These standards apply to any piece of content available to the public in print or online. The guide helps content authors use proper structure and formatting to increase the ease by which the document is scanned and read for content. In addition, OC requires regular content audits by program offices. Through these audits, program offices rewrite overly complicated resources to help users better understand the information.

OC maintains a quality, trustworthy website, by recently implementing Siteimprove's Quality Assurance module. This module identifies, locates, and prioritizes broken links, misspellings, and instances of poor readability or plain language. OC and program offices use the module to evaluate and improve targeted content, and set goals to measure plain language use over time.

## **ACL:**

ACL continues to apply plain writing standards to all new writing for general audiences. This includes all direct e-mails to subscribers of *ACL Updates*, blog posts, most information on the ACL website, public remarks, recent *Transition* information, and all social media (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube). Since the 2016 plain writing report, ACL sent more than 300 e-mails using plain writing to more than 50,000 subscribers. ACL's Facebook and Twitter updates are simple and clear, and video captioning routinely uses plain writing practices.

ACL provided training for the staff with a seminar called *Writing for Impact*, which included an emphasis on plain writing. ACL's Office of External Affairs (OEA) collaborates with program staff to translate technical writing to plain writing. Since the 2016 plain writing report, OEA offered a plain writing workshop to its staff to improve their plain writing skills, and ACL shared links to online plain writing training websites with all staff.

## **ASPA:**

Since the 2016 plain writing report, ASPA reviewed approximately 2,000 documents, mostly webpages on the [HHS.gov](https://www.hhs.gov) website, to make sure the content is in plain writing and easily readable. ASPA also surveyed the public for feedback of its website restructuring. In addition to the results, ASPA used usability testing, and performance metrics to improve the quality of the website's content. ASPA provides guidance to employees who create and review web content on plain language best practices. ASPA continues to use the Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level tools to review documents and assist StaffDivs and OpDivs by providing suggestions in plain writing, or in making content clearer.

## **CDC:**

Since the 2016 plain writing report, the CDC/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) Health Literacy Council developed guidance to help the CDC Centers, Institutes and Offices (CIOs) comply with the Plain Writing Act. CDC continues to promote the CDC Clear Communication Index (the Index), and the Federal Plain Language Guidelines as the agency's criteria for plain language.

CDC tracks staff training in plain writing and clear communication using the HHS LMS portal. CDC's fillable data forms continue to standardize data collection on plain writing across CIOs, and align with the goals and strategies outlined in the May 2016 CDC/ATSDR Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy. The data is compiled into an annual report card to assess progress implementing the CDC/ATSDR Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy.

In 2016, CDC published a new edition of *Everyday Words for Public Health Communication*, offering expert recommendations on how to reduce jargon and replace problematic terms to improve understanding in support of plain writing.

In this past year, CIOs wrote or revised 4,778 documents to meet plain language standards. Of these, 3,399 were new documents; 1,379 were substantially revised for plain language; and 749 were tested with the intended audience. Document types include:

- Abstracts, Articles
- At-a-Glance
- Blogs
- Brochures
- Campaign messages
- Contract documents
- Controlled correspondence, decision memos, briefing documents
- Director's Message
- Fact sheets
- Federal register notices
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs)
- Gov. Delivery Messages
- Guidance documents
- Infographics
- Letters
- Mobile apps
- Newsletters
- Posters
- PowerPoint presentations
- Press releases
- Reports
- Scripts for podcast, TV, radio
- Signs
- Social media messages
- Survey questions
- Training materials
- Vital Signs
- Web content

In 2016, CDC's continued implementation of the Index, which references the Federal Plain Language Guidelines and expands clear communication in plain writing. The Office of the Director and CIOs continue to include plain writing principles in the standard review and clearance criteria applied to public documents. CDC uses document scores to track and identify steps to increase clarity. Using plain writing software (StyleWriter) analysis, CDC continues to evaluate documents for plain language elements such as passive verbs, hidden verbs, complex words, and long sentences.

CDC uses data and feedback from the Associate Directors of Communication Science in the CIOs and the Health Literacy Council to measure the effectiveness of the plain writing program. In 2016, CDC introduced a revised flow chart diagram to show how various plain writing and

clear communication products are helpful at different stages of developing communication materials. CDC measured the effectiveness of the documents through audience testing such as focus groups, interviews, usability testing, and online surveys on its website. Four documents CDC revamped through improved plain writing were:

- National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion - Youth and Tobacco Use Infographic: <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/infographics/youth/index.htm#>
- Smokeout - <https://www.cdc.gov/features/ecigarettes-young-people/index.html#>
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health - Mining webpage revisions: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/mining/index.html>
- National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases - Division of Viral Diseases-Coronavirus website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/>

CDC/Office of the Associate Director for Communication coordinates plain language work and leads developing implementation for the agency. It also uses 2.5 employee positions for plain writing. Senior CDC officials reinforce plain writing by sponsoring training for staff, requesting briefings, inviting presentations at staff meetings, CDC intranet, newsletters, agency-wide announcements and reminding staff of the importance of plain writing and complying with the law. CDC includes plain writing as part of its strategic efforts in clear communication and health literacy, such as providing plain writing training to all employees through classes and online courses, such as through the CDC University.

In 2016, CDC updated its Plain Writing website (<https://www.cdc.gov/Other/PlainWriting.html>) to provide links to:

- Plain Writing Act of 2010
- Federal Plain Language Guidelines
- Federal plain language website
- Plain writing plan from the Department of Health and Human Services
- 2015 Plain Writing Act Compliance Report
- The Clear Communication Index

CDC's website also has information on how users can provide feedback on the use of plain writing in documents and materials, as well as examples of public documents CDC programs created using plain writing. Individual CIOs include plain writing ability in relevant job descriptions, and assess clear communication and health literacy skills of all new employees and contract hires who will be involved in drafting, editing, or clearing public health and safety information for the audiences CDC serves. CIOs may ask job candidates to provide samples of plain writing materials they have produced to determine the candidate's plain writing ability.

CDC offers a plain writing award and an excellence in communication award in the annual agency awards program. Senior leadership and other supervisors in several CIOs reward staff who demonstrate and promote effective, clear communication and literacy skills through public recognition in senior leadership meetings and all-hands meetings, time off awards, and special CIO awards. CIOs created their own internal awards and recognition programs.

**DAB:**

In 2016, DAB hired a plain /legal writing specialist who oversees its plain writing program, by coordinating plain writing training. The specialist also leads DAB plain writing initiatives, including revising template language for covered documents and improving processes for providing feedback on plain writing. This past year, DAB took a new approach to plain writing training for staff by requiring employees to watch a plain writing video series, and for staff attorneys to complete a plain writing revision exercise. In addition to watching the videos, DAB staff attorneys completed a plain writing exercise to give them a chance to practice plain writing techniques in a relevant and familiar context, since they play a primary role in drafting decisions and other case-related documents. Ninety-five percent of DAB staff watched the training videos, and 100% of the staff attorneys completed the plain writing exercise. Additionally, DAB's new attorney training includes specific training on plain writing.

DAB requires staff to write all new case-related documents in plain writing as part of DAB's mission to "deliver products which are thorough, well-reasoned and written in concise, clear English." DAB uses template language when applicable, and develops or revises template language in accordance with plain writing principles. Additionally, DAB's plain writing specialist reviews the template language and revises it as necessary with plain writing.

#### **FDA:**

Since the 2016 plain writing report, FDA University (FDAU) offered 34 two-hour, instructor-led *Foundations of Plain Language* classes in support of plain writing with over 400 employees participating. FDAU focuses on 8 plain writing strategies outlined in its "Roadmap to Clarity, Investing in Plain Language at FDA," plan:

- Ownership
- Agency Outreach & Awareness
- Training & Education
- Plain Language Webpages
- Reporting
- Compliance
- Incentives & Awards
- Public & Stakeholder Participation

The *Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition* (CFSAN)/Office of Cosmetics and Colors published 4 new webpages using plain writing and substantially revised 6 others. The *Office of Regulatory Affairs* (ORA) created and revised approximately 91 pages of its website to comply with plain writing principles. ORA revised its Import webpages so that importers now reference step-by-step instructions in plain writing, which have resulted in less problematic importer entries and fewer problematic products in the U.S. The *Center for Veterinary Medicine* and CFSAN offer plain writing training to employees. The *Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research* offers, "*How to Write Effective Comments to Sponsors: A Plain Writing Workshop*" to staff.

## **HRSA:**

Since the 2016 plain writing report, HRSA made major revisions to its website, including a rewrite of the core content for the Maternal and Child Health Bureau and the Bureau of Health Workforce sites (consisting of approximately 90 webpages). HRSA also produces eNews for over 55,000 subscribers, twice a month, which is written to ensure plain language standards are met. HRSA uses a web ticketing system to track its conversion of existing documents into plain writing. Plain writing is measured using a combination of tools including expert review, Flesch scores, and usability testing. HRSA's plain writing enhancements were substantially improved on the following webpages:

- Entire site revamp for the Bureau of Health Workforce
- *About* section for the HIV/AIDS Bureau
- *About* section for the Office of Women's Health

HRSA's update to its plain writing website allows the public to submit documents and webpages that they think are unclear, jargon-filled, or difficult to understand. HRSA also has an intranet document, *Checklist: 10 Plain Language & Web*, which outlines tips for staff in writing in plain language. HRSA evaluates all of its public-facing documents for plain writing. The following three documents were produced using plain writing, and evaluations show they had the largest impact on the public:

- [www.hrsa.gov](http://www.hrsa.gov) (home page)
- [www.hrsa.gov/grants/apply/register](http://www.hrsa.gov/grants/apply/register)
- [hab.hrsa.gov/ryanwhite25](http://hab.hrsa.gov/ryanwhite25)

HRSA's Learning Institute (HLI) writing team continues to offer the program, *Office Hours*, which allows staff to meet with a member of HLI for assistance with current or ongoing writing projects. In the spring of 2016, in support of plain writing, HRSA held an agency-wide plain writing webcast for staff. HRSA provides the LMS online plain writing course to all employees, and HRSA's Office of Communications (OC) offers ongoing plain writing training for web content contributors. HRSA's usability testing and customer satisfaction surveys improve its tools designed to promote the use of government plain writing standards. HLI offers three plain language courses:

- Business Writing Principles (Completed by 41 employees in 2016 with 3-offerings scheduled for FY 2017)
- Writing for Clarity (Completed by 19 employees in 2016, with 5-offerings scheduled for FY 2017)
- Writing Complex Documents (Completed by 45 employees in 2016, with 3-offerings scheduled for FY 2017)

## **IEA:**

IEA continues to ensure that documents prepared for external dissemination meet the requirements of the Plain Writing Act through reinforcement in all new electronic distribution,

including creating approximately 60 new electronic newsletters, which adhere to plain writing standards. Since the 2016 plain writing report, IEA took steps to work with ASPA's web team to ensure its website met Plain Writing Act requirements. Some examples of best practices of plain writing include the elimination of statutory and regulatory citations in letters to governors whenever possible, the inclusion of subheadings in lengthier letters to enable the reader to more easily follow the discussion, and relocating lengthy substantive text into an enclosure.

## **NIH:**

The *National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health* (NCCIH) communications staff is trained in or has received plain writing training. NCCIH has developed or updated science-based content items into plain writing for the public, including:

- 5 new fact sheets and portals
- 58 full content reviews of existing fact sheets
- 14 maintenance reviews of existing fact sheets and portals
- 11 new research spotlights
- Monthly Clinical Digests on a range of topics written specifically for health care providers

The *National Cancer Institute* (NCI) has many offices, divisions, and centers that incorporate plain writing into their communication and education programs. NCI produced many materials in plain writing in 2016, for lay, professional, and internal audiences, such as:

- Web content: *Imaging Basics* ([https://imaging.cancer.gov/imaging\\_basics/default.htm](https://imaging.cancer.gov/imaging_basics/default.htm))
- Social media: Twitter and Blogs
- Newsletters: *Center for Cancer Research, CCR Connections* (<https://ccr.cancer.gov/connections>)
- Videos: *Brain and Other Nervous System Cancer | Did You Know?* (<https://www.cancer.gov/types/brain/dyk-brain-cancer>)
- Infographics: *Precision Medicine in Cancer Treatment* (<https://www.cancer.gov/multimedia/infographics/precision-medicine/nci-precision-medicine-infographic>)

The *National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute* (NHLBI) applies plain writing best practices when developing all of its health education, media, and communications products. The NHLBI website has over 140 *A to Z Health Topics* (more than 20 in Spanish) that provide lay audiences with information on different health topics related to heart, lung, blood, and sleep disorders. NHLBI used plain writing to completely rewrite 50 *Health Topics*, and published one new *Health Topics*. NHLBI used plain writing to create new infocards, infographics, health care professional resources, and other communications products for the public, including producing three short videos about its 2016 Orloff Science Award recipients. In these videos, located on the YouTube channel, NHLBI used plain language to explain its research to the public. NHLBI wrote 24 plain-language media products (20 press releases; three *Spotlight on Research* patient-interest stories; one media availability) to communicate significant findings or clinical success stories of NHLBI-supported research.

The *National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism* (NIAAA) requires employees who regularly write, edit and review written materials to take the online NIH plain writing course. Across NIAAA, communication staff members create health education materials using a range of plain writing principles set forth in the Plain Writing Act. Since the 2016 plain writing report, NIAAA produced more than 50 documents in plain writing for diverse public and professional audiences, and over 370 social media posts using plain language, including:

- 46 press releases and “new and noteworthy” research write-ups
- 2 Alcohol Alerts
- 2 Alcohol Research Current Review journal issues
- 3 issues of *Spectrum* webzine
- 377 tweets for an estimated 1.06 million unique impressions

The *National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases* (NIAID) is using plain writing to update and revise seven fact sheets on global research. NIAID uses plain writing to regularly post to social media about job openings and research findings, and has created more than 15 videos for the NIAID YouTube channel explaining NIAID research. NIAID offers guidelines and best practices for plain writing to all staff on its intranet site, as well as a classroom training series.

The *Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development* (NICHD) incorporates plain writing into all publications and digital content intended for public distribution, and ranges from creating e-feature articles about NICHD scientific findings to formatting modifications to make information more user-friendly and easy to navigate. NICHD incorporates plain writing into its news releases because of the rise in “citizen journalism” in which venues post the news releases to their websites.

NICHD’s website includes 80 *A to Z Topics* that provide plain writing information for lay audiences about various conditions and health issues within the NICHD’s portfolio. The consumer-focused *Topic* sections rely on a question-and-answer format that is among plain writing best practices. NICHD continues to use new media to reach the public with plain writing health information, such as:

- Infographics on the Zika virus and its effects on brain development, in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.
- Animated infographics, such as one on depression and anxiety during pregnancy and afterbirth.
- Hosting, co-hosting, and participating in Twitter chats about infertility, traumatic brain injury, rare diseases, healthy pregnancy, and Zika virus.
- A Reddit *ask-me-anything* on Zika virus featuring the NICHD’s Deputy Director generated 22,553 user clicks and 12.3 million impressions.
- A Huffington Post *Facebook Live* event on Zika and other maternal health issues that received 17,000 views in 30 days.
- The NICHD-led National Child and Maternal Health Education Program’s *Moms’ Mental Health Matters* initiative, which features important plain writing messages in English and Spanish, about depression and anxiety during pregnancy and afterbirth, and includes web content, posters, cards, an action plan, and digital assets such as web badges and infocards.

The *National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD)* has staff trained in plain writing principles to conduct multiple editorial reviews before clearing health information fact sheets and digital information on NIDCD-supported research, in its efforts to write all materials for public and non-scientific staff in plain language. Specifically, NIDCD:

- Reviewed and updated nine health information fact sheets into plain language for consumers (9 in English, 6 in Spanish).
- Developed, posted, and disseminated 14 news briefs or news releases on NIDCD-supported research and other NIDCD programs.
- Developed two new infographics and two charts to highlight scientific research findings on hearing loss and the use of hearing aids by health consumers with hearing loss.
- Developed, posted, and disseminated one e-newsletter (*Inside*) which included two feature articles and news summaries of NIDCD-supported research.
- Revised the online format of the NIDCD Directory of Organizations, which included approximately 150 advocacy, patient support, and professional organizations in hearing loss and deafness; balance disorders; conditions affecting voice, speech, language, and taste and smell disorders.

NIDCD uses plain writing in all aspects of its public education campaign *It's a Noisy Planet. Protect Their Hearing* (Noisy Planet), to increase awareness about preventing noise-induced hearing loss. During the past year this included reviewing and revising all content on the Noisy Planet website, redesigning the Noisy Planet website, and continued use of shareable graphics with health messages to expand reach through social media channels. The project developed the following using plain writing standards:

- Substantial revisions to more than 200 pages as part of the Noisy Planet website redesign and launch, including new and revised content for preteens and parents, and new content for educators and health professionals.
- Production and dissemination of approximately 40 shareable images with key health and prevention messages in English and Spanish.
- Development of at least six new pop quiz questions for Noisy Planet website.
- Writing and publishing of five Noisy Planet e-bulletins to share program and research updates.
- Writing and posting of at least five noise-related, *Have You Heard?* news stories on the Noisy Planet website (Formerly called *Noise in the News*).
- Development of a new page, *Science of Noise-Induced Hearing Loss*, which describes the campaign and the evidence behind the campaign's health messages, as well as include quick facts with references.

The *National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR)* focuses on the use of plain language principles to communicate science to a wider audience than researchers—including health professionals, patient advocates, and the public. Recently, NIDCR used plain writing on its new/prototype website and conducted usability testing with researchers, health care providers, and consumers. The results show that when jargon and bureaucratic language are removed from the website, users more easily find what they are looking for. NIDCR staff wrote numerous items including news releases, reports, e-newsletters, and social media messages, ensuring adherence to plain writing best practices.

The *National Institutes of Nursing Research* (NINR) used plain writing principles to update its News Highlights, Outreach, Boot Camp, Graduate Partnerships Program and Summer Genetics Institute flyers. NINR maintains a Spanish-language version of its *Palliative Care:*

*Conversations Matter* website on palliative care for children, which includes easy-to-read materials for the public, translated from English, and developed with plain-language principles. NINR staff use the LMS online plain writing training (which is incorporated into the NINR Employee Orientation/Onboarding process on its employee SharePoint site), and all new NINR employees are required to complete the training within 30 days of being hired.

The *Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research, Office of the Director* (OBSSR) has target audiences that are primarily scientific and technical but, makes sure many of its new documents adhere to plain writing guidelines, to help ensure the science is accessible as possible. These documents include:

- Social media posts on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.
- A monthly blog series, The OBSSR Connector, which covers a wide range of behavioral and social sciences research topics, and explains and showcases OBSSR's mission and scientific priorities to the public.
- Promotional materials for webinars, in-person meetings, and other events.

### **OASH:**

The *Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion* (ODPHP) ensures that all materials developed within ODPHP use plain writing, including all content on the [health.gov](http://health.gov), [HealthFinder.gov](http://HealthFinder.gov) (which updates over 100 health topics a year and reviews each topic for plain writing) and [HealthyPeople.gov](http://HealthyPeople.gov) websites, as well as all site outreach, including e-mail, blogging, Twitter, and Facebook. All ODPHP staff is required to take the LMS Plain Writing training, and in 2016, all employees in ODPHP completed the training.

The *National Vaccine Program Office's* (NVPO) management provided plain writing resources and added information and plain writing links to its new employee manual. NVPO shares the LMS online plain writing training with all new staff based on their previous plain writing training, and whether their job includes writing for public use. NVPO posts original and revised examples in its new employee manual when onboarding new employees. NVPO also directs employees to:

- <http://www.plainlanguage.gov>
- <https://www.usability.gov>
- <http://www.redish.net>

NVPO recently reviewed all documents and webpages on the NVPO website for plain writing, and revised a number of them to make them more user-friendly. NVPO used metrics reports and usability findings to improve the readability and writing of the [Vaccines.gov](http://Vaccines.gov) website. All new reports and documents go through a clearance process review for plain writing best practices and a readability check. This year, NVPO also developed a style guide to standardize language across communication materials and further encourage plain writing, and routinely seeks

feedback from stakeholders and information users through public comments; through conducting user testing; and analyzing metrics reports to ensure understanding.

The *Office of Adolescent Health* (OAH) uses free on-line readability tools to measure whether its covered documents conform to plain writing standards. OAH uses user feedback to determine the effectiveness of its plain writing documents. Feedback indicates that the training provides useful information and helps OAH plan and develop content that is easy for the general public to understand.

The *Office of Communications* (OC) issued approximately 27 press releases, statements, videos, and blogs using plain writing since March 2016. OC shares the LMS online plain writing training with new staff members and measures plain writing using MS-Word to check readability.

The *Office of Population Affairs'* (OPA) Title X family planning services revised and released its FY 2017 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) to reflect plain writing. OPA uses plain writing on its website as pages are revised and updated. Staff incorporates plain writing into public documents to provide the best level of information. OPA staff must take the NIH online training course, annually. OPA conducts internal document reviews and discussions of documents with staff to improve clear messaging and language to compliment the target audience's reading and health literacy levels. OPA's periodic review of the website allows staff to identify unclear items and make plain writing suggestions.

The *Office of the President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition* developed web content, blogs, press releases, and fact sheets in plain writing. This included 18 blogs, six news articles and/or press releases, and several pages that appear on its website.

The *Office on Women's Health* (OWH) updates the plain-writing consumer health information on both [WomensHealth.gov](http://WomensHealth.gov) and [GirlsHealth.gov](http://GirlsHealth.gov) at regular 18-month update cycles. OWH writes [WomensHealth.gov](http://WomensHealth.gov) using plain writing at the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, according to the Frye readability test. All of OWH's original and updated web content follows plain writing guidelines and best practices for writing.

The *Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion* (ODPHP) send all ODPHP website document webpages through plain writing edits by plain writing experts. Surveys on ODPHP websites ask users questions related to the readability of the pages. ODPHP websites regularly go through usability testing to ensure that the public can easily understand the content on the websites. As a best practice, ODPHP requires new tools to go through usability testing before they are added to the websites.

The *Office of Research Integrity* (ORI) employs a full-time science writer who reviews all new documents for plain writing. ORI periodically surveys the public for effectiveness of the resources they offer.

The *Office of Population Affairs* (OPA) subjects documents to a vigorous review to make sure the writing is clear, straightforward, and appropriate to the target audience's reading skill and

level of health literacy. Its final review focuses on adherence to plain writing. The OPA communications lead and Acting Director write and assess internal documents for plain writing. Documents submitted for inter/intra-agency review are further assessed for plain writing by reviewing agencies before a final review by OPA and the Office of General Counsel (when applicable). In addition, OPA requests that public documents posted to the website undergo plain writing assessment by the OPA website contractor.

### **OCR:**

OCR's Civil Rights Division issued four major consumer-facing plain language fact sheets on the Affordable Care Act Section 1557 (<https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/section-1557>). OCR uses *ForeSee* analytics via a monthly consumer satisfaction survey to monitor/measure plain writing for covered documents. Both, OCR's Privacy and Civil Rights divisions have public affairs employees who review documents before publication and distribution to ensure a clear emphasis on plain writing. OCR recently completed a comprehensive website redesign that strengthens compliance with the Plain Writing Act. All OCR staff has been provided the HHS style guide for ongoing guidance. In November 2016, OCR provided a link to the LMS online plain writing training to all employees (65% had completed the training).

### **OIG:**

In 2016, OIG continued to ensure that all documents for the public explained technical terms in accessible language, and short sentences when possible. This included nearly all of the approximately 1,000 new documents OIG put on its website, including *Web Spotlights*, which describes OIG's work in plain writing.

OIG's senior advisors reinforce its Executive Secretary's (Exec Sec) mandate to edit documents to ensure they are written using plain writing. As strong proponents of plain writing, OIG Exec Sec editors ensure all covered documents are in plain writing. All OIG writers attend courses such as *Write to the Point* that emphasize clear and concise writing. OIG produced a plain writing training video for staff, which explains how to comply with the law and why complying is important to OIG's mission. OIG posted the video on the *Writing & Research* tab of its intranet website.

### **ONC:**

Since March 2016, ONC produced hundreds of documents using plain writing, including approximately 50 letters, 100 web and blog documents, 100 replies to web inquiries, and 75 forms. Since the 2016 plain writing report, ONC developed a dedicated intranet web link that supports plain writing, and includes:

- The Plain Writing Act
- A Plain Writing Checklist
- A PowerPoint overview of the *Principles of Plain Writing Language*

ONC established standard operating procedures that ensure all web content and documents comply with the Plain Writing Act. ONC reviews documents prior to web posting for plain writing compliance, and a random sample of web based content and documents are tested by consumers for readability. ONC goes through a rigorous internal review process to evaluate all correspondence, and non-web based documents are checked for spelling, grammar, tone, and clarity for plain writing compliance. ONC also includes plain writing requirements in the quality assurance and surveillance plan under one of its contracts. This ensures that external documents for ONC grantees are published in plain writing.

In addition to the LMS online training, ONC recommends staff use the plain writing guideline tools available on the ONC intranet. ONC recommends all employees who edit, clear, and write documents take Plain Writing training. Since the 2016 plain writing report, all ONC employees have completed the training. ONC offers two writing sessions that include guidance on plain writing:

- *Writing for Results*: This course focuses on writing to convince readers and achieve real-world results using plain language as mandated by the Federal Plain Writing Act of 2010.
- *Clear Writing Through Critical Thinking Course*: This course improves thought process at each stage of the writing process by writing plainly as mandated by the Federal Plain Writing Act of 2010.

### **SAMHSA:**

Since the 2016 plain writing implementation report, SAMHSA has cleared approximately 40 publications for distribution and posted over 100 blog posts in plain language. SAMHSA requires all materials be compliant with plain writing guidelines before publishing either in print or online.

SAMHSA converted over 4,200 webpages into plain writing as part of *Project Evolve*, a website modernization project. This multi-year project requires the consolidation of content from 100 websites to unify all Agency information into one main website, [SAMHSA.gov](http://SAMHSA.gov). As content is migrated from its current site to a staging site, SAMHSA checks for plain writing, and rewrites content that does not comply with federal plain writing guidelines, before posting to the new [SAMHSA.gov](http://SAMHSA.gov) site. SAMHSA reviews new publications for plain writing, and existing publications when undergoing revisions.

As a standard practice, SAMHSA determines the effectiveness of plain writing documents by monitoring the frequency of downloads from the *SAMHSA Store* and changes in telephone, e-mail, postal mail, and fax inquiries from the public for and about information resources. SAMHSA tracks various populations that request information which shows that the materials are being used across a wide variety of groups. Examples of SAMHSA documents substantially improved through plain writing include:

- How to Cope with Sheltering in Place: <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4893/SMA14-4893.pdf>

- Tips for Talking With and Helping Children and Youth Cope After a Disaster or Traumatic Event: A Guide For Parents, Caregivers, And Teachers: <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA12-4732/SMA12-4732.pdf>
- Tips for Survivors: Coping with Grief after Community Violence: <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4888/SMA14-4888.pdf>

SAMHSA trains writers and reviewers in plain writing, and has created a new plain writing video curriculum for all content owners and writers. A SAMHSA writing team checks for plain writing compliance before any content is posted onto the web. SAMHSA requires all employees who write or review content to be used or seen by the general public to take plain writing training. SAMHSA requires all Project Evolve team editors, including all web contractor writers, to complete the training. Members of the Office of Communications have also taken the training.

SAMHSA’s primary plain writing training includes a new, two-module plain writing video curriculum using the NIH/CDC plain writing standards as a foundation, which infuses the curriculum with SAMHSA-specific examples. The videos are posted on SAMHSA’s internal intranet. After each module is a certificate that can be printed out with the individual’s name to show completion. In addition, SAMHSA requires all federal employees and contractors whose main responsibility includes writing for public information products to attend the plain writing workshop, and identify regularly-used behavioral health terms that can be explained in plain writing, for general readership. SAMHSA employees use the LMS online plain writing training in addition to SAMHSA-specific curriculum. SAMSHA refers employees to these government resources:

- Document checklist for plain language on the Web by [PlainLanguage.gov](http://PlainLanguage.gov)
- Plain Language Web Writing Tips (DOCX) by [DigitalGov.gov](http://DigitalGov.gov)
- Plain language toolkit (PDF) from the Federal Aviation Administration
- Plain language course from the National Institutes of Health
- Video plain language course from the Federal Aviation Administration

SAMHSA’s Press Officer became a trainer with the Plain Language Action and Information Network, a group of federal employees from many different agencies who train others on the use of clear communication in government writing. With this designation, SAMHSA’s Press Officer presents the federally recognized half-day plain writing course to SAMHSA employees.

SAMHSA checks its web content for plain writing as part of SAMHSA’s major initiative (Project Evolve) to design, enhance, and modernize [SAMHSA.gov](http://SAMHSA.gov). SAMHSA rewrites content that does not meet plain writing standards prior to being migrated to the new website. SAMHSA also has a page on plain writing (<https://www.samhsa.gov/plain-language>) that provides site users with contact information for issues regarding publications or web content.