



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
2026 Plain Writing Act Compliance Report**

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Background

On October 13, 2010, the Plain Writing Act was signed into law. The Act requires federal agencies to use “clear Government communication that the public can understand and use.” Plain writing is especially important in health care and human services. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recognizes that clear, concise, well-organized, and jargon-free communication better meets the needs of people with limited literacy or health literacy. By reducing unnecessary complexity, plain writing has made health information easier for everyone to understand and use.

As part of its ongoing implementation requirements, the Act directs federal agencies to prepare and publish annual compliance reports on their plain writing web page. Previous HHS compliance reports are located on the Department’s Plain Writing webpage at <http://www.hhs.gov/open/plain-writing/>.

The HHS Immediate Office of the Secretary, Executive Secretariat, developed the 2026 Plain Writing Act Compliance Report below in collaboration with HHS divisions. The report describes the Department's continued compliance with the Act during calendar year 2025. It highlights HHS accomplishments, best practices, innovations, and ongoing efforts to improve the clarity and accessibility of Department communications.

Accomplishments

HHS strives to provide all Americans with health information that is easy to understand. To accomplish this goal, HHS regularly reviews new and existing reports, documents, and web content to ensure we follow plain writing principles and effectively serve the public.

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) asked teams to improve their Flesch Reading Ease scores to better align their content with federal plain writing guidelines. The following examples show how high-impact content was revised to make it clearer, more concise, and easier for the public to understand:

- [Apply to the Nurse Corps Scholarship Program](#) – The Bureau of Health Workforce program provided scholarships to nursing students in exchange for a minimum 2-year, full-time service commitment at an eligible health care facility with a critical shortage of nurses. This page outlined eligibility, how to apply, and program benefits.
- [Apply to the Nurse Corps Loan Repayment Program](#) – The Bureau of Health Workforce program helped registered nurses, advanced practice registered nurses, and nurse faculty repay nursing education debt in exchange for a 2-year service commitment in a critical shortage facility or eligible school. This page provided information on eligibility, how to apply, and program details.

- [NHSC Scholarship Program Overview](#) – The National Health Service Corps program awarded scholarships to students pursuing eligible training or degree programs for primary care health professions in return for serving in health professional shortage areas. The page outlined program benefits, service requirements, and who is eligible to apply.
- [Organ Donation FAQs](#) – The Organ Donor site provided information on how organ donation works, why it's important, and how donation saves lives. The Organ Donation frequently asked questions page answered questions about who can be a donor, how to sign up, how donation works, the organ donation process, and the need for transplants.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (ASPA) redesigned the HHS.gov homepage and core landing pages to improve readability, scannability, and navigation. These updates helped the public more easily understand HHS priorities and locate relevant information. The refreshed design, updated graphics, and more intuitive information architecture reinforce plain writing best practices. Specific improvements included:

- Revised the Laws and Regulations section of the website to improve usability by restructuring and rewriting navigation labels using plain writing and removing outdated information.
- Created a naming convention for titles of testimony content to improve scannability in list views.
- Relabeled approximately 5,000 pages tagged with the topic "General" with more specific topics to improve discoverability based on search terms and keywords.
- Developed a new process for identifying editable, dynamic content that should be regularly updated versus evergreen, static content that cannot be edited to support efficient use of resources.

HHS content with the biggest public impact included the HHS.gov website and social media channels @HHSgov and @SecKennedy. These efforts increased the share of HHS.gov content written at or below an eighth grade reading level from 3.5% to 16.2%, according to Siteimprove Analytics.

The Indian Health Service (IHS) developed 53 public health messages using plain writing principles. The messages addressed monthly, seasonal, and urgent health topics and were distributed through program LISTSERVs, posted on the [National IHS Public Health Council website](#), and aired on GoodHealth TV.

GoodHealth TV is a subscription-based health education network that connects American Indian and Alaska Native communities with important health information and local programs and services. Its culturally relevant, community-focused programming encourages viewer engagement. Message topics included vaccinations, women's health, handwashing, heart health, cancer prevention, sexually transmitted infection and HIV prevention, dental health, and alcohol misuse prevention.

IHS also developed the 2025 Alzheimer's Models of Care Notice of Funding Opportunity in partnership with the IHS Division of Grants Management and the HHS Office of Grants. This work supported the HHS initiative to simplify funding announcements through plain writing. The notice used plain writing and clearer organization to help applicants understand and use the information.

Best Practices

HHS supports plain writing by promoting best practices across the Department. These practices include senior leaders encouraging the use of plain writing and programs that track and measure its effectiveness.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provided staff with access to current HHS plain writing training and resources. SAMHSA also maintained a dedicated plain writing page on its intranet, SAMHSA@work, so employees could easily find this information.

SAMHSA used short surveys to measure how well its written products met readers' needs. Many publications include a link that allowed readers to provide feedback, helping SAMHSA identify opportunities for improvement. For example, the Disaster Technical Assistance Center (DTAC) Bulletin and DTAC Dialogue included links to online surveys about DTAC products. Several SAMHSA Treatment Improvement Protocols also included short online surveys for readers to share feedback on the publications.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) provided training, tools, and resources to help employees improve their plain writing skills and communication. Some teams used generative artificial intelligence and virtual assistant chatbots to make health information easier to understand and help the public find reliable health information. NIH staff also shared public health and scientific information with the public in plain writing through social media posts, videos, websites, and other digital platforms.

NIH recognized teams and individuals who demonstrated excellence in plain writing communication. The Performance Management Appraisal Program, which connected organizational goals and objectives with employee performance, also included plain writing requirements.

NIH included plain writing skills in relevant job descriptions and contract support documents. Plain writing was a key performance expectation for staff who produced communication materials, including web content, press releases, and health information. NIH also evaluated employees' use of plain writing.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) supported compliance with the Plain Writing Act through agency-level coordination of plain writing activities and operational policy. The Office of Communication coordinated plain writing activities across CDC and led the agency's Health Literacy Council. Council members periodically updated CDC's Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy and advised staff on how to apply the Plain Writing Act.

Senior C officials promoted plain writing by supporting staff participation in training, requesting briefings, inviting presentations at staff meetings, and reminding employees of the importance of clear communication and compliance with the law. CDC leadership also reinforced the Plain Writing Act through intranet content, newsletters, and agency-wide announcements.

Innovations

In the past year, agencies across HHS implemented innovative strategies to promote plain writing, including web banners, webinars, external social media messages, awards, and incorporating plain writing skills into position descriptions.

HHS developed a new plain writing training video, *Win@Writing: Using Plain Writing at HHS*, through a collaborative effort involving ASPA, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration (ASA), and the Immediate Office of the Secretary, Executive Secretariat. The training covered core plain writing principles, including understanding audience needs, organizing information clearly, using concise wording and active voice, and providing practical examples. It translated statutory requirements, Department policy, and communication best practices into accessible instruction presented in an engaging format for employees across the Department. The HHS Chief Human Capital Officer made the video mandatory, Department-wide training. This requirement supported consistent implementation of the Plain Writing Act and established a common baseline for effective communication among HHS employees. The video also replaced outdated training materials with a modern, HHS-specific resource that fulfills statutory training requirements. The video serves as a reusable Department-wide resource that promotes consistent plain writing practices across HHS. It serves employees in a broad range of roles, including executives, budget analysts, physicians, scientists, facilities staff, attorneys, leaders across HHS Divisions, current employees, and new hires. HHS established the training as a recurring requirement to be completed every two years. ASPA will conduct a biennial review and update cycle to ensure that the content remains accurate, relevant, and current.

ASA conducted a comprehensive communications analysis to identify opportunities to improve the clarity and accessibility of its messaging. ASA incorporated plain writing expectations into relevant job descriptions, especially for communications and editorial staff.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) promoted plain writing through targeted activities integrated into agency operations. The agency developed and implemented standardized question-and-answer documents that followed plain writing principles and were used across internal platforms. FDA shared these resources through SharePoint with hiring managers and the Classification team to support clear and consistent communication in human resources and classification processes. This approach integrated plain writing into day-to-day internal operations.

The Office of Medicare Hearings and Appeals (OMHA) continued to emphasize the use of plain writing in internal communications and substantive training materials developed by OMHA headquarters for staff in field offices. Staff at all levels drafted these communications and provided feedback. OMHA did not offer a specific reward or incentive for plain writing, but its

Chief Administrative Law Judge Honor Awards program recognized exceptional service to the public. One key award criterion was the quality of the written work supporting administrative law judge decisions.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Financial Resources (ASFR) participated in programs and workgroups that promoted plain writing. For example, the Office of Grants' Simpler Grants initiative provided a strong foundation for promoting plain writing across HHS awarding agencies. The initiative made plain writing training, resources, and design-focused technical assistance available to all awarding agencies.

Continuous Improvement

HHS carried out a wide range of training activities to help employees understand why plain writing matters and how to use it effectively. Many agencies encouraged employees to use plain writing in both internal and external communications. They also developed training materials to educate stakeholders and the public about plain writing.

The Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) emphasized clear and accessible communication in all public-facing materials. Its onboarding process provided new Program Managers and other staff with communication resources, support, and guidance in plain writing. These resources included the ARPA-H writing style guide. Each mission office had a dedicated press officer who met individually with new Program Managers during onboarding and introduced them to these resources. This support helped ensure that new Program Managers were prepared from the start to create clear materials that met plain writing requirements.

Conclusion

HHS's implementation of the Plain Writing Act continues to expand each year. Through consistent leadership, HHS strengthened its plain writing culture and helped ensure that new and existing documents and web content for the public, other government agencies, and HHS employees used plain writing.

For questions or feedback about this report, please contact Dr. Ekaterini Malliou in the HHS Immediate Office of the Secretary, Executive Secretariat, at Ekaterini.Malliou@hhs.gov.