



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
2025 Plain Writing Act Compliance Report
Request for Information**

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Background

On October 13, 2010, the Plain Writing Act (Act) was signed into law. The Act requires federal agencies to use “clear Government communication that the public can understand and use.” Communications in plain language are especially important in the context of health care and human services. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recognizes that using plain language can help meet the needs of those with limited literacy skills, as well as those with limited health literacy skills. Plain language helps people understand health information because the writing style is clear, concise, organized, and jargon-free. Documents written in plain language are less complex and therefore easier for everyone to understand, including people who have limited literacy skills, limited health literacy skills, or both.

In ongoing application and implementation, the Act requires each agency to “[w]rite annual compliance reports and post these reports on its plain language web page.” You can find links to HHS’s previous compliance reports here: <http://www.hhs.gov/open/plain-writing/>

The Department’s Exec Sec is developing the 2025 compliance report to demonstrate our continued compliance with the requirements of the Act from January 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025. The report includes sections on accomplishments, best practices, innovations, continuous improvements, and HHS contacts overseeing implementation of plain writing requirements. To help us develop the Report, please provide information from your division by responding to the questions on pages 2-5, below. Please submit your information to the Secretary’s Policy System (SPS) by COB **Friday, March 6, 2026**.

If you have questions, please contact Dr. Ekaterini Malliou at Ekaterini.Malliou@hhs.gov.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Accomplishments

HHS seeks to reach all Americans with useful health information they can easily understand. To accomplish this goal, HHS regularly reviews new and existing reports, documents, and web content for plain writing to ensure the largest impact on the public.

From January 2025 through December 2025, please describe:

a. The top three plain writing documents your agency published that had the largest impact on the public.

- Each fall and winter, respiratory illnesses—including flu, COVID-19, RSV, pertussis, and *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*—contribute to significant illness, hospitalizations, and deaths in the United States, with CDC estimates last year exceeding 1 million hospitalizations and 70,000 deaths. In 2025 CDC released a [new digital respiratory illness toolkit](#) for outreach during the high-risk season to support public health communicators. The toolkit features social media content, videos, clinic posters, and handouts, with materials available in multiple languages and in editable or printer-friendly formats. Public health professionals are encouraged to use and share these resources to help protect patients and communities from severe respiratory disease. Since the toolkit was launched in August 2025, the site has received more than 25,000 page views, 15,000 visits, and 12,000 asset downloads. It has an average “Helpful” score of 84.57%.
- The back-to-school season is a great time to engage with youth about mental health and substance use to promote their well-being throughout the academic year. To support these conversations, CDC launched [Free Mind](#) in August 2025, a new national campaign that provides youth ages 12-17 and their parents and caregivers with resources and information on substance use, mental health, and their connections. Using clear communication and plain language principles, the [campaign was created](#) through research and real conversations with youth, parents, and caregivers. CDC identified a need to reduce the connection between substance use and mental health among youth ages 12-17.
- September 10 through December 31, 2025, 463 people registered or completed the new online training, Public Health Risk Communication, which includes a *Public Health Risk Communication Guide*. CDC’s Office of Communications (OC) founded this course on the principles of clear communication and plain language. The course provides tools for public health professionals to build trust with audiences by explaining numbers more clearly and helping make risk more personally relevant. Attendees included staff from CDC, state and local public health departments, and academic institutions in 49 states, Freely Associated States, U.S. territories, and 21 countries. Preliminary data and reviews indicated that participants found the course useful. As of December 31, 2025, 99 people had given the course a 4.8 out of 5-star rating. Almost 83%

(155 out of 187) of respondents to the post-course evaluation said the course content addressed a need in their professional practice.

- b. The types of documents, and how many of each (estimate is acceptable, please specify) that your agency wrote in plain writing. Please also specify how many of each were new and how many were substantially revised.*

CDC's Centers, Institute, and Offices (CIOs) reported **68** documents meeting plain language standards. Of those reported documents, **53** were new, and **15** were substantially revised for plain language. Reported document types included:

- Adobe campaign messages
- Articles for consumer publication/lay audiences
- Blogs
- Briefing/guidance documents
- Fact sheets
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Infographics
- Newsletters/announcements
- Posters
- PowerPoint presentations
- Press releases
- Scripts for podcasts, TV, radio, videos, etc.
- Signs/flyers
- Social media messages
- Training materials
- Website/materials/web pages

- c. Examples of documents your agency improved through plain writing.*

- CDC's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) published two public health professional pages, *Tracking Long COVID* and *The Public Health Approach to Long COVID*. This work was highlighted internally in *CDC Connects* and used externally on NCHS social media and via a partner letter.
- CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases updated the Long COVID website.

- d. How your agency updated its website devoted to plain writing, if applicable.*

- As part of the Clean Slate initiative, OC updated its [Plain Writing at CDC](#) web page in November 2024. The web page describes what the CDC does to use plain writing and provides links to:
 - The [federal plain language website](#), which includes the [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#) and the [federal plain language guidelines](#)
 - The [plain writing plan from the Department of Health and Human Services](#)
 - CDC's Plain Writing Act Compliance Report, once it is cleared for posting

- [Everyday Words for Public Health Communication](#)
- [The CDC Clear Communication Index \(CCI\)](#)
- [CDC's health literacy website](#)

The web page includes instructions to provide feedback on the use of plain language in documents, materials, and examples.

- CIOs, including OC and Division of Communication Science and Services (DCSS), maintained their own intranet sites in 2025, offering key writing resources such as links to plain language tools, training, promotional materials, and material-development resources. An example of this is the National Center for Environmental Health/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (NCEH/ATSDR) [Clear Writing Hub](#), a publicly available web portal to help CDC staff, grantees, and partners create environmental health information the public can understand and trust.

e. Other relevant accomplishments.

In 2025, CDC's OC did the following:

- Delivered self-paced and live versions of the [Communicating Science Clearly](#) course to more than 1,300 CDC staff and members of the public. This course focuses on how scientists, policy staff, and communication specialists can collaborate to develop messages and health communication materials that non-academic, non-scientific audiences can understand and use.
- Published updates to agency guidance regarding AI-generated images, [Interim Guidance for CDC Staff in Using AI for Communications](#).
- Completed final audience research data collections for CDC programs and deliverables before the MRI-Simmons, Porter Novelli, and UserTesting contracts ended. These contracts supported research on audience preferences for clear communication best practices. Topics included non-fatal drug overdoses, neonatal care, and chronic kidney disease.

Best Practices

HHS reinforces the plain writing requirements through best practices, such as senior officials promoting plain writing and programs for tracking and measuring plain writing effectiveness.

From January 2025 through December 2025, please describe:

a. How senior officials in your agency reinforced the plain writing requirements through Plain Writing Act-related directives.

CDC reinforces compliance with the Plain Writing Act through Immediate Office of the Director (IOD)-level coordination of plain language activities and agency operational policy. The OC is an IOD office that coordinates plain-language work for the agency and leads the agency's Health Literacy Council. Members of the council

periodically update CDC's Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy and serve as consultants on applying the Plain Writing 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 Writing Act through CDC's intranet, newsletters, and agency-wide announcements.

b. How you tracked the conversion of existing documents into plain writing.

CIOs use a variety of electronic systems to track and clear documents. These systems include

- Communication Clearance Tracking System
- eClearance
- Sharepoint
- OneDrive
- CDC ATSDR Policy System

In early 2025, CIOs also used the plain-language assessment software, VisibleThread, to analyze text for compliance with several federal plain-language guidelines. The software offers suggestions for making text clearer. After the CIOs revise the text, they conduct a follow-up assessment to determine whether language issues have been corrected. Note that the agency contract for VisibleThread was discontinued in 2025.

c. How you measured whether covered documents used plain writing.

The CIO Office of the Director, as well as CIOs, apply plain-language criteria during the review and clearance process, which occurs before CDC releases documents to the public. Each CIO has an associate director for communication science who is responsible for this review. The agency's associate director for communication (or delegate) may also review sensitive, complex, or emergency response materials and apply plain language criteria.

CDC continued using the [Clear Communication Index](#) (CCI). This research-based tool scores documents and other material on their use of characteristics that aid people's understanding of information. CDC developed the tool based on a review of the scientific literature in communication and related disciplines, and field-tested it to ensure its validity. The CCI includes criteria from the federal plain language guidelines. Staff use the CCI to score documents on a scale of zero to 100. CDC tracks document scores and uses them to identify steps to improve clarity. CIOs use the CCI to score, provide descriptive notes about plain writing revisions, and upload supporting documents that reviewers can see as deliverables move through the clearance process.

- d. *How you measured (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.)*

CDC measures the effectiveness of the plain writing program through data and feedback from the associate directors of communication science in the CIOs and from members of the CDC Health Literacy Council. CDC promotes the use of a flowchart that shows how various plain-language and clear-communication resources can help at different stages of developing materials. When time and funds allow, CDC measures the effectiveness of our documents through audience testing, such as:

- focus groups
- interviews
- paraphrase testing
- usability testing

CDC's OC asks that each CIO lead on the CDC Health Literacy Council work with their program to develop at least one and no more than five two-year (February 2024-February 2026) specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) objectives that will help CDC reach its overarching 2024-2026 health literacy goal of **increasing collaboration on plain language among scientists, communicators, and policy staff**. Note that the following reporting timeline spans a two-year period.

- By February 28, 2024, CIO leads on the CDC Health Literacy Council submitted the SMART objectives to the Health Literacy Council leadership. The submission included measurable targets for CIOs to track progress over two years.
- By February 28, 2025, CIO council leads submitted a brief report regarding first-year progress. The report included obstacles to meeting first-year expectations for objectives, as well as information regarding if/how the obstacles were overcome.
- Indicated areas where CIOs need help from the Health Literacy Council leadership to meet the ultimate two-year objectives.
- By March 6, 2026, each CIO council lead will submit a brief report (3-6 paragraphs) on the final progress toward the two-year objectives (i.e., not met, met, exceeded), obstacles to meeting the two-year objectives and if/how they were overcome, and lessons learned.

- e. *The obstacles to measuring these aspects of your plain writing program.*

Given CDC's large number of documents and materials, a dedicated team would be needed to track the extensive review process and measure writing quality for all documents. This is not possible due to staffing and contract/procurement challenges.

Although testing documents with the intended audience and asking for customer feedback on the use of plain language are ideal ways to measure aspects of CDC's

plain writing activities, these evaluation methods stretch limited resources. Individual programs often do not have the resources to thoroughly audience-test the documents they produce.

f. Other relevant best practices.

CDC translates print and online resources into Spanish and American Sign Language (ASL) so people whose primary language is not English or people who use ASL can benefit from our messaging.

DCSS regularly shares notices from other HHS divisions and CDC partners regarding upcoming webinars, conferences, and training on plain language or health literacy.

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 plain writing skills in position descriptions.

From January 2025 through December 2025, please describe:

i. Any innovative activities you implemented to promote plain writing.

- CDC has been working on ways to use artificial intelligence (AI), specifically focused on plain writing responsibly in our communication work. AI technologies can rapidly process and analyze large amounts of complex data, helping public health professionals make timely data-driven decisions and interventions. An essential aspect of CDC's AI strategy is applying effective governance to safeguard against risks, ensure AI meets the highest standards for scientific integrity, and encourage innovation, research, and development. CDC AI leadership will provide guidance and oversight on critical issues related to privacy data security and protection, mitigating model bias and model monitoring to reduce model drift.
- CDC is committed to ensuring efficient and responsible use of AI at all levels of public health. CDC developed guidance and resources for teams considering using AI in their projects. Starting in 2023, OC led and executed the agency-wide Clean Slate website initiative to relaunch optimized web content, remove excess content, and affirm the value of content to improve communication with our audiences. A part of the Clean Slate initiative is the Digital First Editor (DFE), a simplified editing and publishing tool with built-in digital-first and data-driven design and content principles meant to transform how CDC staff develop and deliver web content. Content Insights is a custom DFE tool that provides real-time writing guidance and actionable feedback based on best practices for clear communication, user interface design, and search engine optimization. In 2025, this work continued with the following improvements:

- **Jargon Checker in the DFE**
 In 2025, CDC’s web team removed the Everyday Words list from the writing goals and scoring formulas of the DFE’s Content Insights feature before the May 2025 software release. When applied to the DFE, the Everyday Words rules were flagging too many commonly used terms, e.g., ‘Diseases’ and ‘Infection.’ This was one of five rules that make up the Clear Writing Scores for the DFE (the others are passive voice, link counts, link labeling, and spelling). Everyday Words is still going strong, but it was not intended for this use. The web team developed a jargon checker in 2025 as part of the DFE, which will be piloted and rolled out in 2026.
- **Content Insights Scoring Impact on Plain Language Compliance**
 In 2025, the web team changed how web content is scored in the DFE, leading to a huge increase in plain language. CDC’s original six-category scoring system masked underlying plain-language issues. October 2025 scores showed 18.5% of pages scoring 90-100, suggesting strong performance. However, the CDC web team suspected the scoring methodology wasn't properly weighted to reflect actual plain language compliance, potentially giving inflated scores to pages that still needed improvement. CDC restructured the scoring system from six categories to four, adjusting the weights to reflect plain language principles better. This change was carried out in November 2025. The revised scoring system provided content owners with accurate, actionable data about their pages' plain language compliance. Armed with this clarity, teams prioritized remediation efforts throughout late 2025. While the initial November scores revealed significant gaps in plain language across our website, this honest assessment motivated targeted remediation. The progress from November 2025 to January 2026 proves that CDC now has a scoring system that accurately measures plain language compliance and drives continuous improvement. The revised scoring framework gives CDC confidence that metrics reflect reality, enabling data-driven decisions about content quality and plain language compliance going forward.
- In 2025, CDC’s web team built an **AI Writing Tool** in the DFE, which provides written prompts that focus on plain language. This tool will be piloted in February 2026. Part of this work included writing and publishing best practices for writing content for the CDC website:
 - [Page Descriptions: Writing, Refining, and Pulling AI-Based Reports | DFE Content Design Guide | CDC](#)
 - [Using AI to Check Page Clarity, Search Intent, and Summaries | DFE Content Design Guide | CDC](#)
- CDC has more than 5,000 staff who leverage generative AI (Gen AI) tools in their work. CDC created a **CDC Health Communicators AI Working Group**, a larger **AI Community of Practice** with more than 2,600 members, and several subcommunities of practice by domain and CIO. CDC has reported a return on investment of over 520% from the use of GenAI tools internally, and

CDC's GenAI guidance has served as the basis for AI policy across HHS and the federal government.

- OC convened the Health Communicators AI working group and sponsored a survey on GenAI to probe communicators' AI knowledge and enrichment needs in late 2025. Of the 118 respondents, 101 were health communication specialists. Almost all respondents reported knowing some, a little, or a lot about GenAI technology and identified better prompts, tailoring for priority audiences, and plain language rewrites as the top three enrichment interests among respondents. The findings from this survey were applied to CDC's **AI Health Communication workplan** which was drafted earlier in 2025 and supported the development of the **AI Prompt Library**.
 - In 2025, CDC developed an **AI Prompt Library** for staff to help with performance measurement, meeting notes, data extraction, coding, and story development. This will launch in the first quarter of 2026. Half of the prompts are related to plain language.
 - OC's DCSS hosted several Communicators' Network sessions throughout 2025, with an average of 416 participants/session. These included:
 - Crafting Connections: Mastering the Science (and Art!) of Communication Campaign Planning with 532 attendees
 - Overviewing Prompt Engineering for CDC Staff with 628 attendees
 - Artificial Intelligence at CDC: AI Foundations with 602 attendees
- *Incentives or rewards you provided to employees to encourage the use of plain writing.*

Senior leadership and several CIO supervisors recognized staff who demonstrated and promoted effective, clear communication and health literacy through Performance Management Appraisal System ratings, public recognition at senior leadership meetings and all-staff meetings, time-off awards, and special CIO awards.

- *Whether you included plain writing skills in relevant job descriptions (i.e., employees who draft, edit, or clear any document). Please provide specific examples.*

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 CDC audiences. Some CIOs ask job candidates to provide samples of plain-language materials they have produced.

- *The documents your agency nominated for recognition as recipients of ClearMark Awards by the Center for Plain Language.*

CDC did not nominate work for the 2025 ClearMark Awards.

Continuous Improvement

HHS carries out a wide array of training activities to ensure our employees understand the importance of plain writing and how to do it effectively. Many agencies encourage the use of plain language for both internal and external communication. Such agencies also developed training and materials to educate stakeholders and the public on plain writing.

From January 2025 through December 2025, please describe:

- The specific number of your employees completing plain writing training:
 - **312** staff successfully completed the Principles of Plain Language for Powerful Communication course.
 - **42** successfully completed the CDC CCI course.
 - **More than 3,000** successfully completed the Health Literacy for Public Health Professionals course.
 - **Approximately 1,300** successfully completed the self-paced or in-person Communicating Science Clearly course.
 - **More than 400** successfully completed the self-paced Public Health Risk Communication course.

NOTE: Health Literacy for Public Health Professionals, Communicating Science Clearly, and Public Health Risk Communication courses were added to the course catalog for a pilot of the CDC CourseSync training for external organizations at the end of 2025.

- The feedback received from those who completed the training:
 - Post-course evaluations for the Principles of Plain Language for Powerful Communication course revealed that **94%** of respondents felt confident in their ability to use plain language skills successfully in their work.
 - Post-course evaluations for the CCI course revealed **88%** of respondents felt confident in their ability to use the Index successfully in their work.
 - Post-course evaluations of the in-person Communicating Science Clearly Course were overwhelmingly positive:
 - Nearly **92%** of participants strongly agreed or agreed the course will help them communicate their science more clearly to the public.
 - Almost **98%** intended to collaborate with communication and policy staff when starting any public-facing work.
 - Nearly **98%** planned to put the principles of good public health communication into practice immediately.
 - **100%** would recommend the course to their colleagues.

a. The plain writing training programs you used.

Principles of Plain Language for Powerful Communication (2 hours) – trains staff to use the federal plain language guidelines. It is a prerequisite for CDC CCI training and provides exercises with practice opportunities.

- **CDC CCI (2.5 hours)** – trains staff to create or revise communication

materials that enhance people’s understanding of your information. The course scores materials using CCI.

- **Communicating Science Clearly (2.5 hours, offered in person or as a [self-paced, online course](#))** – emphasizes that collaboration among scientists, communicators, and policy staff leads to health information that nonscientific, nonacademic audiences can understand, leading to greater public health impact. Interactive exercises help participants learn how to use clear communication principles, tell stories, and express empathy. This course became part of the qualification requirements in 2025 for all Joint Information Center leads and Senior Communication Specialists in the agency serving as Response Communication Cadre Champions in the CDCReady Responder program.

b. Examples of trainings and materials you developed to educate stakeholders and the general public on plain writing.

- As mentioned above, OC continued to teach and update the course Communicating Science Clearly. This course is taught in person and as a [self-paced, online course](#) on CDC TRAIN (now open to the public). As mentioned earlier in this report, close to **1,300** CDC staff and members of the public successfully completed either the self-paced or in-person Communicating Science Clearly course.

c. Ways in which you improved or focused your plain writing efforts.

- OC was unable to fund a contract to continue agencywide access to the VisibleThread plain language assessment software server license. The license expired in May 2025, and OC communicated to the programs that they would need to obtain new licenses directly from the VisibleThread vendor going forward. As mentioned above, CDC’s web team developed a jargon checker in 2025 as part of the DFE to help fill this gap.
- In 2025, CDC’s Health Literacy Council issued guidance for each CIO to develop their own objectives to support the overarching CDC goal of promoting the use of plain language in public-facing communication. This objective-development effort continues in 2026, with the overarching goal of increasing collaboration on plain language among scientists, communicators, and policy staff.
- The **CDC Health Literacy Council**, comprising representatives from across CDC and under the leadership of OC, met three times in 2025 to develop guidance to help CIOs comply with the Plain Writing Act and the CDC/ATSDR Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy. The action plan supports the use of plain language. Health Literacy Council members worked with their CIOs to create unique events for CDC colleagues and partners. These include the following:

- OC
 - More than 400 staff or public health professionals registered or completed the new online CDC training course, **Public Health Risk Communication**, which includes a *Public Health Risk Communication Guide*. Attendees included CDC staff, staff from state and local public health departments, and individuals from academic institutions in 49 states, Freely Associated States, U.S. territories, and 21 other countries. Preliminary data and reviews indicated that participants found the course useful. As of December 31, 2025, 99 people had given the course a 4.8 out of 5-star rating. Approximately 83% (155 out of 187) of people who completed the post-course evaluation said the course’s content addressed a need in their professional practice.
 - A member of the CDC Health Literacy Council presented at the Writing-Related Webinar Series on *A Look at Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Communication* in August 2025.
- NCEH/ATSDR sponsored the September 2025 NCEH/ATSDR Clear Writing Webinar, featuring CDC librarians presenting on *Research for Clear Communication*.
- The Office of Laboratory Systems and Response (OLSR) promoted plain language resources and training sessions to laboratory partners across CDC through their Lab Links newsletter. OLSR also encouraged all laboratory subject-matter experts (SMEs) and leadership to practice clear communication principles in all communications. OLSR’s associate director for communication promotes and uses plain language principles even in materials written for the laboratory community, such as laboratory quality and safety policies, training, and engagements. In 2025, OLSR updated and reviewed plain language on all of its web pages.
- CDC’s OC presented “Communicating Clearly: Free Tools for Effective Science Communication” on Pulse Check, MRI-Simmons, and the Communicating Science Clearly Course at NECH/ATSDR Clear Writing Summit presentation on May 22, 2025. There were 426 participants, both online and in person. Organizers said the survey results showed the presentation was well received.
- CIOs implemented the following to improve agency plain writing efforts:
 - Edited high-profile web pages for plain language.
 - Review documents for plain language and provide feedback to authors inside and outside of eClearance.
 - Provide technical assistance for grantees, including plain language training.
 - Encouraged project leads and SMEs to work with communication staff to develop and review public-facing content for plain language.
 - CDC continues to standardize the application of plain language guidelines and the CCI via OC training courses.
 - CDC emphasizes the need for ongoing and refresher training in plain language. DCSS asks CIOs to identify employees in specific roles who

would benefit from advanced or refresher training.

Contacts

The Act requires each department to designate one or more senior officials to oversee application of plain writing requirements. A list of HHS agency officials can be found on the HHS website here:

Please confirm the senior official in your Operating or Staff Division responsible for plain writing.

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NOTE: We will include this information on HHS's plain writing web page.