Department of Health and Human Services
Plain Writing Act Compliance Report April 2016

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 which contributed to this year's report include:

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)
Indian Health Service (IHS)
National Institutes of Health (NIH)
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH)
Office for Civil Rights (OCR)
Office of Global Affairs (OGA)
Office of Inspector General (OIG)
Office of Medicare Hearings and Appeals (OMHA)
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
The ACF Office of Communications (OC) works with offices within ACF to provide senior staff regular updates about plain writing and coordinate annual office training on plain writing. Its Executive Secretariat (Exec Sec) worked with other offices to develop workshops on plain writing this past year. OC joined with program offices to establish a plain writing version of their key accomplishments since January 2009. OC also worked with program offices to rewrite their landing page website content, and provided ongoing training for program office web liaisons and news team members to aid in ongoing use of plain writing. They continue to provide editing and oversight of content as it is developed.

Since last year's plain writing report, ACF incorporated routine use of readability tools in all OC and Exec Sec editing, as well as training new team members and OC staff in plain writing. ACF identified plain writing training for use in orientation, and worked with its managers to incorporate plain writing requirements in personnel evaluations. Plain writing workshops with ACF staff were conducted, and Exec Sec staff/liaisons were identified in each office for outreach and training purposes. Review processes were developed, as were steps that ensure plain writing is preserved when edits and additions are made to documents.

All Office of Administration and Exec Sec staff who review Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOA) participated in a series of trainings to implement plain writing use. ACF developed guidelines for FOA writers (using outlines, not burying leads, etc.), and a tool for applicants to help them write effective narratives.

ACL
For ACL, all new pieces of writing for general audiences—no matter how they are distributed—follow plain writing standards. This includes all direct e-mails to subscribers of *ACL Updates*, blog posts, most of the information on the ACL website, and all messages posted on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube). ACL sent approximately 350 e-mails to more than 50,000 subscribers in the previous year.

The addition of several major programs to ACL over the past two years, without additional communications staff, made for difficult decisions prioritizing the Office of External Affairs' work. However, they have focused efforts on creating the infrastructure and systems for the future. This included making plain writing a heightened priority with increased training for all staff.

Day-to-day communications products are written for clear understanding, and ACL's External Affairs office collaborates with program staff to translate technical writing to plain writing when necessary. Even with the additional workload, ACL has provided plain writing training and will continue to build a plain writing program for all ACL staff.

AHRQ
AHRQ uses plain writing in all publications targeted to consumers. AHRQ primarily produces information for physicians, policymakers, and others about research findings, and publishes some materials of the lowest levels for consumers. However, AHRQ relies on in-house expertise to assess documents and uses standardized tools to test document reading levels. Every AHRQ staff member has completed the HHS Learning Management System (LMS) online plain writing training, and all new staff is required to complete the training by March of each year. AHRQ maintains an active health literacy and cultural competency program, and offers incentive awards to employees for meeting plain writing requirements.

ASPA
In ongoing efforts to ensure content is easy to find and read ASPA reviewed approximately 1,500 documents, mostly webpages on HHS.gov. This effort to ensure plain writing included

restructuring the content and making consumer information more prominent and easier to read on mobile devices.

ASPA uses Microsoft *Word* to measure the *Flesch Reading Ease* (*Flesch*) score and the *Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level* (*Flesch-Kincaid*) score. These measures are designed to indicate how difficult a particular reading passage is to understand. ASPA encourages new staff members to complete the LMS online plain writing training, and provides guidance on plain writing best practices to ASPA employees who create and review web content.

In addition, senior ASPA officials inserted plain writing into relevant job descriptions and made it a key component of *Project H*, which is their ongoing work to bring HHS Staff Divisions into a centralized HHS.gov website. As part of *Project H*, ASPA works with the Staff Divisions to review content and ensure it is easily understood.

ASPR
All ASPR employees who write, edit, or clear documents must complete the LMS online plain writing training. This includes all Office Directors and their support staff. ASPR's Exec Sec also provides quarterly training on Exec Sec procedures and guidance, during which participants are reminded of the Plain Writing Act's requirements. ASPR's Exec Sec requires all ASPR staff to complete the training, and by the end of 2015, 91 percent of ASPR employees took the training. All new ASPR employees must take the training with 60 days.

CDC
The CDC/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) *Health Literacy Council* includes representatives from across CDC. The *Council* meets regularly to develop guidance to help Centers, Institutes, and Offices (CIO) comply with the Plain Writing Act and the CDC/ATSDR *Health Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy*, which supports the use of plain writing. In 2015, CDC continued to promote the use of the CDC *Clear Communication Index* (*Index*), a set of science-based criteria to enhance clarity, and the *Federal Plain Language Guidelines* as the agency's criteria for plain writing.

CDC created design guides to help staff and programs create fact sheets, data sheets, and press releases in accordance with the *Index*. The *Fact Sheet Design Guide* is to be used by staff when developing or revising a traditional fact sheet with the primary purpose of providing actionable information about a health topic. The *Data Sheet Design Guide* is to be used by staff when developing or revising a fact sheet with the primary purpose of conveying current data on a topic. The *Press Release Design Guide* consists of practical guidelines for anyone wanting to use press releases to support public health outreach.

Plain writing training is available to all employees through online classes. In addition, during 2015, CIOs offered multiple in-person plain writing training sessions. CDC recorded and captioned one of the introduction to plain language classes and posted it on the agency intranet, and it promotes use of the NIH online plain writing training course which is comparable to the LMS online plain writing training. They have four CDC-developed online health literacy courses for health professionals: *Writing for the Public; Using Numbers and Explaining Risk; Creating Easier to Understand Lists, Charts, and Graphs*; and *Speaking with the Public*.

CDC continues to use several mechanisms to track and measure its progress improving how it creates and shares health information. Staff training in plain writing and clear communication is tracked in the HHS *Learning Portal* (*Portal*). Although some classes are hosted without being tracked in the *Portal*, the Office of the Associate Director for Communication (OADC) tries to help CIOs enter training offerings in the *Portal*, as well as confirm and credit attendees. OADC staff members run reports in the *Portal* to provide CIOs specific staff training data.

CDC uses fillable data forms in *Sharepoint* to standardize data collection across CIOs. Items on these data forms are directly aligned with the goals and strategies outlined in the CDC/ATSDR [Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy](#) which is currently being updated. *Health Literacy Council* members are e-mailed twice a year with links to current data forms, provided technical and subject matter support via phone and e-mail, and receive follow up as needed regarding reported data and specific items. These data are compiled into an annual report card to assess progress implementing the CDC/ATSDR *Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy*.

CDC created and published the first edition of *[Everyday Words for Public Health Communication](#)* in 2015. The document offers expert recommendations from CDC's *Health Literacy Council* and other agency communicators on how to reduce jargon and replace problematic terms to improve comprehension.

CDC CIOs used plain writing in public messages for:

- Abstracts (184 new)
- Articles (103 new; 2 revised)
- At-a-Glance (10 new; 1 revised)
- Blog posts (18 new)
- Brochures (11 new)
- Campaign messages (9 new; 12 revised)
- Case studies (21 new)
- Contract documents (5 new)
- Controlled correspondence, decision memos, briefing documents (3 new; 10 revised)
- Director's Messages (4 new)
- Fact sheets (198 new; 74 revised)
- Federal register notices (6 new)
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (54 new; 2 revised)
- Funding Opportunity Announcements (1 new)
- Gov. Delivery Messages (62 new)
- Guidance documents (91 new; 15 revised)
- Infographics (68 new; 9 revised)
- Letters (118 new; 1 revised)
- Mobile apps (4 new; 2 revised)
- Newsletters (59 new)
- Posters (41 new)
- PowerPoint presentations (138 new; 3 revised)

- Press releases (66 new)
- Reports (79 new)
- Scripts for podcast, TV, radio (49 new; 22 revised)
- Signs (1 new)
- Social media messages (2,467 new)
- Success stories (4 new)
- Survey questions (33 new)
- Tip Sheets (1)
- Training materials (37 new)
- Vital Signs (2 new)
- Web buttons (10 new)
- Web materials (35 new; 15 revised)
- Webpages (707 new; 1,137 revised)

The Office of the Director and the 11 CIOs include plain writing principles in the standard review and clearance criteria applied to public documents before they are released. Each of the 11 CIOs has an Associate Director for Communication Science who is responsible for this communication review. The agency Communication Director may also review sensitive, complex, or emergency response public materials and apply plain writing criteria.

In 2015, CDC continued implementing the *Clear Communication Index* that includes four questions and 20 items that research shows affect clear communication. The *Index* references the *Federal Plain Language Guidelines* and expands the items we consider for clear communication. The *Index* scores documents on a scale of zero to 100. CDC tracks document scores and uses them to identify steps to increase clarity, and offers plain writing software (*Stylewriter*) analysis to programs to evaluate documents for plain writing elements such as passive verbs, hidden verbs, complex words, and long sentences.

DAB
Since March 2015, DAB has required all of its administrative staff, attorneys, judges, and interns to complete the LMS online plain writing training. The Medicare Operations Division (MOD) judges and attorneys continue to follow the *Plain Writing Guidelines* that were developed by the Administrative Appeals Judges (AAJ) in 2013 as further guidance on plain writing principles. The Deputy Chair offered a voluntary *Writers' Workshop* for MOD attorneys. The *Writers' Workshop*, among other things, seeks to enhance plain writing skills through discussion and evaluation of Medicare Appeals Council decisions. In 2015, it included a session on editing Medicare Part D decisions to better implement the use of plain writing.

It is part of the DAB mission to "deliver products which are thorough, well-reasoned, and written in *concise, clear English*." Since March 2015, DAB has issued decisions, rulings, or orders in plain writing in approximately 6,200 cases. It also sends interim correspondence to the parties involved in cases. These are new documents, but some template language in decisions and interim letters was developed or revised in the past year. Template language is always developed or revised in accordance with plain writing principles. However, DAB cannot convert existing documents into plain writing because the DAB's decisions, rulings, and orders are final documents that cannot be changed.

FDA

The FDA Commissioner issued a directive to "hold ourselves to the highest standards of transparency and accountability." This statement encourages FDA staff to continue to apply plain writing principles to their daily work and to take advantage of the training opportunities provided by FDA University (FDAU) to learn more about plain writing. Agency employees are informed of the Plain Writing Act's requirements and about plain writing using a three-pronged approach:

1. general agency communication efforts,
2. intra-agency outreach efforts, and
3. external networking efforts with the plain writing community to learn best practices.

FDA pays particular attention to its audiences: what are their needs and how can FDA best communicate with them? Plain writing principles are also used in their text. Specifically, FDA works to:

- Reduce text and use shorter sentences in documents.
- Use more tables and lists rather than lengthy paragraphs.
- Eliminate unnecessary jargon, acronyms, and abbreviations.

This has resulted in better communication with the general public, and a greater sense of accomplishment among FDA employees. FDA's Office of Human Resources continues to train employees and strengthen oversight of plain writing to ensure its use in all documents. Annual plain writing courses are used to strategically train employees to strengthen the oversight process. Since writing its plain writing implementation plan—*A Roadmap to Clarity, Investing in Plain Language at FDA*—FDA's goal has been to focus on the eight strategies outlined in the plan, efforts that essentially mirror the goals outlined in the Plain Writing Act and the Office of Management and Budget plain writing guidance:

1. Ownership
2. Agency
3. Outreach & Awareness
4. Training & Education
5. Plain Language Webpages
6. Reporting & Compliance
7. Incentives & Awards
8. Public & Stakeholder Participation

Implementation plan accomplishments and ongoing activities include:

- Weekly tips written and posted in *FDA/Employee News*.
- Plain Language Introduction at FDA's new employee orientation.
- The Center for Food, Safety, and Applied Nutrition's (CFSAN) quarterly plain writing newsletter.

- The Office of Regulatory Affairs' *ORA Communications Toolbox*, which includes tips and guidance on plain writing.
- Plain Language Workgroup Meetings.
- Health Literacy Workgroup Meetings.
- Continued employee plain writing training.
- FDA.gov Plain Language public webpage.
- Inside FDA Plain Language Resource Center for FDA employees.
- Plain writing-specific questions on the ForeSee public customer satisfaction survey.

FDAU adopted plain writing as a core principle for all documents and materials disseminated publically, and it applies plain writing principles in communications on FDAU's website materials including web content, training announcements, course content, blog posts, and other social media. FDAU follows plain writing guidelines when creating materials that:

- Help FDA employees on training decisions.
- Provide information to employees regarding training opportunities via its Chief Operating Officer's announcements on FDA's intranet site to let employee register for all courses.
- Inform consumers about the Agency activities.

Additionally, plain writing resources on FDA's plain writing website are available to action officers who write policy documents. Plain writing is emphasized in training classes offered to FDA employees and through links to the *Plain Language Guidelines* that are provided in classes as well as FDA's plain writing website. *Plain Writing Workshops* cover the essential concepts of good writing and participants practice both writing and editing during the course. The workshops also cover several foundational principles of plain writing including audience identification, document design and logical organization, sentence structure and length, and the importance of word selection and testing your writing content. FDA employees learn to write sentences that are structurally sound and free of jargon and how to compose effective paragraphs. In 2015, 525 students completed a plain writing workshop.

FDA also promotes the Plain Writing Act by:

- Expanding awareness about the Plain Writing Act through agency representatives.
- Promoting the use of plain writing principles for achieving plain writing through weekly plain writing tips.
- Enhancing webpages with information and resources on plain writing.
- Providing training to all staff in a variety of ways including online modules, webinars, and traditional classroom settings.
- Providing individualized editorial support and knowledge sharing.

FDAU uses the LMS online plain writing training. FDAU also developed an extensive *Plain Language Resource Center* that provides training materials, health literacy information, plain writing tools, tips, thesauruses, websites, writing examples, a plain writing reading list, plain writing principles, guidelines, compliance reports, and FDA's implementation plan. FDA also

provides plain writing training in traditional classroom training, webinar training, and online training.

HRSA

In the last year HRSA continued efforts to ensure that all agency documents are plainly written. For example, its website, press releases, consumer-oriented publications, and the speeches of senior leadership are all written in plain writing. In addition, HRSA stepped up review of documents destined for the public-facing website to be sure all new web content is written in easily understandable language.

The *HRSA Learning Institute* offers the *HRSA Writing Curriculum* for all interested employees in order to enhance the ability of HRSA employees to write documents that reflect HRSA writing standards and tailor communication to the level and experience of the targeted audience. As part of the curriculum, learners have an opportunity to work with writing advisors—recruited from across HRSA—who provide guidance on improving work products. HRSA's writing team continues to offer a program called *Office Hours* that allows staff to set up time with these agency writing professionals to get help with their own writing projects. The *HRSA Learning Institute* offers three plain writing courses:

1. *Business Writing Principles*
2. *Writing for Clarity*
3. *Writing Complex Documents*

HRSA's Exec Sec works with all HRSA Bureaus and Offices to ensure adherence to the Plain Writing Act, with a focus on ensuring that readers will be able to comprehend the information included in HRSA documents. HRSA Exec Sec developed several resources that focus writers and reviewers on plain writing, including guidelines related to writing and reviewing all documents. In 2015, Exec Sec released updated templates for common inquiries which helps ensure consistent, clear responses. In addition, one Exec Sec staff member serves as a HRSA writing advisor to focus on improving traditionally complex documents.

HRSA's Office of Federal Assistance Management (OFAM) has continued to consider the Plain Writing Act mandates when preparing documentation, presentations, and grant review reports, as well as other items. Since March 2015, approximately 28 final reports have been issued by OFAM. OFAM is also working on modifying language in its electronic handbook to ensure implementation of the Plain Writing Act.

HRSA measures plain writing with a combination of tools including expert review, *Flesch* scores, and usability testing. HRSA leadership has been clear and firm in reinforcing the plain writing mandate and supporting agency-wide efforts to write more clearly. HRSA updated its plain writing website with a tool to enable website users to report documents and webpages that they think is unclear, jargon-filled, or difficult to understand. Once submitted, HRSA writing professionals respond with necessary edits.

IEA
IEA continues to ensure, through internal review processes, that any documents prepared for distribution outside IEA meet the requirements of the Plain Writing Act. Plain writing continues to be reinforced in all new electronic distribution conducted by IEA. IEA created approximately 60 new electronic newsletters, all of which adhere to plain writing standards.

Some examples of best practices in governor letters include:

- Eliminate statutory and regulatory citations in letters to governors, unless those citations are necessary to illustrate a legal point.
- Include subheadings for issues in lengthier letters to enable the reader to more easily follow the discussion.
- Move lengthy substantive text into an enclosure or permit the Secretary's letter to highlight main points.

IEA also considers the Affordable Care Act newsletter and notifications as best practices to deliver succinct and simple information regarding complex regulatory and statutory provisions.

IHS
The Strategic Communications Planning and Office of Public Affairs at IHS accepted and reviewed 67 documents to be posted on the IHS website in the past year. These documents included patient education handouts; food insecurity assessment tools; best practices for prevention activities and case management; and public service announcements in video, radio, and print media.

A link to the LMS online plain writing training is located on the IHS intranet and is available for all of its employees and contractors. It is recommended that all employees take this training annually, similarly to the *Annual Security Training* required by all IHS employees and contractors.

NIH

As the primary United States government agency responsible for biomedical and health-related research, NIH is comprised of a wide and diverse network of 27 individual Institutes. Institutes maintain various types and levels of autonomy, and often operate independent plain writing programs with varying foci. The following examples illustrate some of the plain writing efforts of individual Institutes:

Clinical Center:
The NIH Clinical Center uses plain writing to help make research and patient education communications accessible to everyone. Examples include:

- Translating scientific abstracts for highlighting on the atrium TV (about 100 converted to plain writing); all of these were new.
- Translating patient education materials generated by the various departments within the Clinical Center. These materials help clinical personnel care for patients and are often

given to the patients directly (in the past year about 100 documents were converted to plain writing; edited for style, grammar, and branding; and made 508 compliant so all users, regardless of disability status, can access technology). About one quarter of these documents are new, and about three quarters are revisions and improvements from old versions.

- As part of an 18-month concerted effort to streamline the Clinical Center website, content on hundreds of pagers were revised for purposes of plain writing and clarity, timeliness, and accessibility.

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH):
NCCIH developed or updated numerous science-based content items for consumers including:

- New content on searching the online medical resource *PubMed* for complementary health info.
- Seven full content reviews of existing fact sheets.
- 11 maintenance reviews of existing fact sheets and portals.
- A new interactive module: *9 Questions to Help You Make Sense of Scientific Research*.
- A microsite: *2012 National Health Interview Survey Statistics* on the use of complementary approaches by U.S. adults and children.
- The Monthly *Clinical Digest* e-newsletter on a range of topics written specifically for health care providers.

National Eye Institute (NEI):
With renewed focus on plain writing, NEI created 179 new documents since March 2014. Most of them (148) were prepared as part of its National Eye Health Education Program. New documents included drop-in articles, tip sheets, infocards and infographics, fact sheets, e-blasts, partner outreach materials, and multimedia resources.

National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI):
NHGRI's efforts to more fully implement the Plain Writing Act include:
- In conjunction with their *Language Access Plan*, NHGRI is in the process of updating its fact sheets in accordance with plain writing guidelines.
- NHGRI's intranet has tips for plain writing and links to additional resources on NIH.gov.
- At their annual NHGRI Symposium, investigators encouraged their post-docs and trainees to create scientific posters using plain writing. These posters were judged as a separate category to help raise awareness of this approach. Staff from the Communications branch helped evaluate the posters and award a winner.
- NHGRI continues work on infographics using plain writing principles.
- NHGRI publishes a monthly director's report, *The Genomics Landscape*, written using plain writing principles.
- NHGRI finalized work on an official institute brochure using plain writing principles.
- NHGRI developed simple, easy-to-understand strategic messages for 12 extramural programs and for the entire institute, and is expanding the effort to include issues and phraseology.
- *Genome: Unlocking Life's Code*, a partnership and exhibition between NHGRI and the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, developed exhibition interactives using plain

writing principles. The accompanying website is developing a series of interactive educational games using plain writing.

- NHGRI is developing plain writing guides to train health care providers to speak with patients and genomics.

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA):
Across NIAAA, staff members in all areas use plain writing when developing a wide range of products. In particular, communications staff creates health education materials using a range of plain writing principles set forth in the Plain Writing Act, including the use of common, everyday words, personal pronouns, and the active voice when possible. Significant time is devoted to creating preliminary outlines to ensure that materials are organized logically and use easy-to-read formats along with bullets, images, tables, and extensive whitespace.

Since March 2015, NIAAA communications staff have produced more than 60 new and revised documents for diverse public and professional audiences with appropriate language. These include fact sheets, brochures, news releases, articles for NIAAA's webzine, *Spectrum*, and materials for *CollegeAIM* (College Alcohol Intervention Matrix), a new guide and website to help universities and colleges address harmful and underage student drinking.

National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB):
In the past year NIBIB wrote 10 press releases highlighting significant findings of NIBIB-supported research. NIBIB also wrote 40 brief articles for its website that explain NIBIB-supported research on a broad range of medical imaging and bioengineering topics from tissue engineering to building cameras that can operate at the speed of light. In these documents NIBIB explains new complex scientific concepts written in plain writing using simple terms. The press releases and science highlight articles can be found on NIBIB's website.

NIBIB is also revising fact sheets on the scientific topics of mammography, ultrasound, and other types of medical imaging procedures. Three of 14 fact sheets were revised in 2015 to include plain writing and the remainder will be revised in 2016. These fact sheets can be found on NIBIB's website.

NIBIB also produces short videos for its *60 Seconds of Science* series that explain, in plain writing, various science topics and medical procedures. In the past year four videos were produced about x-ray imaging, tissue engineering, ultrasound, and quantum dots. These videos can be found on NIBIB's YouTube channel.

NIBIB also developed a game app that uses a quiz to teach and explain concepts about tissue engineering, research to help paralyzed people, and imaging scans in plain writing. The game can be played or downloaded to a mobile device from the NIBIB website.

National Institute on Child and Human Development (NICHD):
This Institute's website is a focal point for plain writing information. Within the *Health & Research* section, the site includes 80 *A to Z Topics* that provide plain writing information for lay audiences about various conditions and health issues. The consumer-focused section relies on a Question and Answer (Q&A) format that is among plain writing best practices. In addition, the

Institute is in the process of changing the format of the topics to make them more user-friendly and responsive to enable audiences to access the site more easily from any platform. The new format of the topics includes more visuals and ensures that information is easily printable.

The Institute also launched a Spanish website that includes a subset of the consumer-focused information available on the NICHD's English website. The plain writing nature of the English versions makes translating into Spanish somewhat easier because the language and concepts are described simply.

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA):
Since March 2015, NIDA has continued producing consumer fact sheets and publications in English and Spanish, using plain writing principles. Each new resource is carefully reviewed with plain writing principals in mind. *Flesch-Kincaid* readability scores are used to assess plain writing and to ensure all documents stay within audience-appropriate reading levels.

Approximately 25 fact sheets in English and Spanish were updated to include plain writing, as well as 10 revised English booklets and 5 revised Spanish booklets. A twice-weekly blog for teens and the *Easy-to-Read* website is maintained with consideration of plain writing. This site provides low literacy information (eighth-grade or below reading level) on neuroscience, drug abuse prevention and treatment, and is also a resource for adult literacy educators. It has a simple design with a large default text size, motion graphic videos, and other features that make it easy to read and use. The NIDA *Plain Language Guide* was developed for use by all staff.

National Institute on Deafness and other Communication Disorders (NIDCD):
NIDCD strives to write all materials intended for the public and non-scientific staff in plain writing. Standard procedures for clearances include multiple editorial reviews by staff trained in plain writing principles. Materials include health information fact sheets and digital information. With special consideration to the use of plain writing, NIDCD has:

- Substantially revised more than 500 pages on the NIDCD website.
- Developed and launched a new Spanish web portal on the NIDCD website.
- Developed and launched a new training section on the NIDCD website.
- Reviewed and began updating seven health information fact sheets in English.
- Reviewed and updated six health information fact sheets in Spanish.
- Developed, posted, and disseminated 17 news briefs or news releases on research findings conducted by NIDCD scientists or NIDCD grantees.
- Developed, posted, and disseminated one e-newsletter (*Inside*) which included three feature articles and news summaries.
- Developed two new infographics to highlight scientific research findings on voice, speech, and language disorders.

NIDCD considers plain writing in all aspects of its public education campaign to increase awareness about noise-induced hearing loss: *It's a Noisy Planet. Protect Their Hearing* (*Noisy Planet*). During the past year, this included increased use of shareable graphics with health messages to expand reach. The project developed the following using plain writing standards:

- Created four *Noisy Planet* shareable images with key prevention messages in English, and 10 in Spanish.
- Developed 12 new pop quiz questions for *Noisy Planet* website.
- Wrote and published six *Noisy Planet* e-bulletins to share program and research updates.
- Wrote and posted five noise-related news stories on the *Noisy Planet* website.

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR):
The NIDCR Office of Communications and Health Education develops and distributes easy-to-understand, actionable oral health information that reflects the most current science. Materials are available for English and Spanish speakers, those with limited literacy skills, and the American Indian/Alaska Native population. During the past year, NIDCR produced or updated more than 40 health information pieces in plain writing.

NIDCR focuses on the use of plain writing principles when communicating about science so it can be understood by a wide variety of audiences including health professionals, patient advocates, and the public. Examples include:

- NIDCR staff created the [Diversity & NIDCR](#) portal for its website using accessible language rather than bureaucratic jargon.
- NIDCR research trainees participated in a [*Three Minute Talk*](#) (*TmT*) competition. *TmT* aims to help early-career scientists communicate the substance of their research and its significance to improving human health in three minutes or less—and in such a way that can be understood by a broad scientific audience. Fellows and grad students from NIDCR and other NIH Institutes competed. As part of their preparation, trainees attended an improv workshop from the *Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science* at Stony Brook University.
- Staff wrote numerous items including news releases, reports, e-newsletters, and social media messages, ensuring that each adhered to plain writing best practices.

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS):
NIEHS uses plain writing in all of its 80 fact sheets on various environmental health topics, research initiatives and the NIEHS/National Toxicology Program. It produced more than 300 newsletter stories and 12 press releases, and summarized environmental health science and research findings in plain writing in 2015. NIEHS also maintains a section on its website for the general public, which uses plain writing to communication research activities and information.

National Institute of General Medical Science (NIGMS):
NIGMS continues to provide information to the general public about the results, impact, and value of basic research via its [*Biomedical Beat*](#) blog as well as in its fact sheets, science education publications, and other products and activities. The Institute also continues to provide information to the scientific community about its funding opportunities, trends, and plans via its [*Feedback Loop*](#) blog. NIGMS follows the guidelines of the Plain Writing Act in all materials produced. Examples in 2015 include:

- The development of a clearly-written illustration of the CRISPR gene-editing tool, which was recognized as the [Breakthrough of the Year](#) by *Science* magazine.

- The continued use of checklists for blog writers and the development of a new list of tips for blog editors who review posts for clarity and ease of understanding.
- A training session for scientific staff participating in NIGMS's annual web chat with middle and high school students about cell biology and research careers, stressing key elements of plain writing: being clear, concise, and age appropriate.

National Institute on Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS):
NINDS incorporated plain writing in all of its web content and documents intended for public distribution before the Plain Writing Act. Efforts continue to revise the existing 350-plus online and printed health information documents using plain writing during each periodic review. All NINDS Office of Communication and Public Liaison (OCPL) news releases and health information documents are prepared using plain writing guidelines. The requirement to write "clearly and logically" for a variety of audiences is a critical element in each OCPL writer's *Employee Performance Plan*. In the previous year NINDS produced the following health education materials in plain writing:

- More than 40 online one-page information sheets (revised).
- Three *Hope Through Research* brochures (revised), with an additional three currently in review.
- Six Spanish brochures.
- Six fact sheets on neurological disorders (one new), with an additional 18 currently in review.

National Library of Medicine (NLM):
NLM's OCPL regularly reviews plain writing materials and tools from HHS as well as outside resources. The written materials for general public audiences are routinely assessed via the readability tools provided within *Word*, or external readability tools such as the *Fry* formula/method which focuses on sentence length and syllable count. The routine use of readability tools within the preparation of written materials was a part of the routine editing process for three NLM-OCPL publications during the past year. For example, *Word's* readability tool was built into the process to edit all documents for NLM's *To Your Health-NLM Update* weekly podcast, NLM's *Native Voices* blog, as well as some articles within NLM *In Focus* online magazine.

NLM staff produced MedlinePlus.gov (a comprehensive consumer health informatics website). The staff at MedlinePlus.gov assesses the suitability of linked external websites by their readability to consumers who read at a 10th grade or below educational level. MedlinePlus.gov staff also assesses the original materials provided on MedlinePlus.gov's health topic pages via readability and plain writing guidelines.

OASH
In the last year, the OASH Office of Women's Health (OWH) estimates that at least 20 of its fact sheets were updated using plain writing principles. This included keeping the readability level between 6-8 grades and drafting the content in the Q&A format. The Office of Population Affairs (OPA) released policy guidance in partnership with CMS regarding contraceptive coverage and the Affordable Care Act. OWH has implemented low literacy and plain writing

principles for its consumer writing projects (womenshealth.gov, girlshealth.gov, and all publications) since 2000. Staff uses the *Fry* readability formula to ensure that materials are in the 6-8 grade reading level. As materials are updated to ensure accuracy. OWH strives to keep the reading levels as low as possible and follow plain writing best practices. OWH developed a style guide that incorporates rules for plain writing to help standardize writing across their websites. Both before and since the signing of the Plain Writing Act of 2010, OWH writers have kept up-to-date with regulations and adherence to plain writing techniques.

In 2016, OWH intends to make the LMS online plain writing training a requirement for every member of its communications staff to take as a refresher, and also use it as an orientation activity for Division of Strategic Communications staff. In OPA, existing documents are reviewed and assessed for plain writing. The Acting Director expects all publically directed documents to be created and revised in plain writing. Documents are subject to a vigorous review to make sure the writing is clear and straightforward, and appropriate to the target audience's reading skill and level of health literacy. The final document review focuses on plain writing adherence.

OPA measures the effectiveness of its plain writing program at several levels. Internal documents are written and assessed for plain writing. Documents submitted for inter/intra-agency review are further assessed for plain writing by those agencies, and then under final OPA and the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) review (when applicable). In addition, OPA asked that public documents posted to the website undergo plain writing assessment by the website contractor.

All OPA staff completed the LMS online plain writing training. Internal document reviews include discussions of the document with staff to improve clear messaging and writing which complements the target audience's health literacy understanding. Periodic review of the website allows staff to identify unclear items and suggest changes using plain writing. OPA staff is asked to take the plain writing training on an annual basis as a refresher.

Staff in the OASH Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) responded to more than 1,100 e-mails. Approximately 30 percent of those responses were substantially revised to reduce complexity. Outgoing correspondence are checked for spelling, grammar, clarity, style, and tone and are often reviewed by the OGC and other senior staff in OHRP. Some examples from the past year include:

- Three Federal Register (FR) notices issued for Secretary's Advisory Committee on Human Research Protections meetings (July, October, and December).
- Two Information Collection Requirements FR notices issued in July and September, 2015.
- A notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) on the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects Rules.
- An FR notice issued in November 2015, extending the comment period on that NPRM.
- An additional FR notice published in October announcing a Town Hall Meeting on September 8, 2015.

- An FR issued in November, 2015, announcing the availability of a joint draft OHRP-FDA guidance document.
- An FR issued in December extending the public comment period on this joint guidance document.

The OASH Office of Communications (OC) issued approximately 30 press releases, statements, videos, and blogs using plain writing. OC staff measure covered documents for plain writing use by checking readability via *Word*. OC staff measure the effectiveness of the plain writing program based on whether or not it is picked up by the news media, partners, or other stakeholders.

The Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) principally develops web text and technical assistance information for grantees (grantee guidance, FOAs). OAH summarizes FOAs on the OAH website as clearly as possible, and uses free online readability tools to measure levels of plain writing in covered documents.

OAH uses user feedback to measure the effectiveness of its plain writing documents. Following are documents produced by OASH in 2015:

- 10 new or updated grantee program guidance documents.
- Four new *OAH Picks* (overviews of some of the major themes seen in adolescent health).
- Five new *Adolescent Health Insider* e-updates.
- Two *TAG in Action* eNews updates (**T**hink, **A**ct, **G**row—*TAG* is a call to action to improve adolescent health.
- Two new grantee e-learning resources added to the website.
- One evaluation brief.
- 11 webinars' resources, including transcript, slides, etc.
- Updated resources for the *Adolescent Health Library* section on the OAH website.

Managers and staff continue to be encouraged to take the LMS online plain writing training; about 20 percent of staff completed the course so far. Those who have taken it indicate that it provides useful information that can be put to good use to develop content that is easy for the general public to understand. OAH is currently focusing on 508 training for its staff and formatting documents to be 508 compliant which also helps to ensure plain writing.

The President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition (PCFSN) developed web content, blogs, press releases, and fact sheets in plain writing. This includes 34 blogs, 10 news articles and/or press releases, and several pages that appear on the website. PCFSN provided the guidance from HHS on plain writing to its communications contractor during its website redesign in 2012 so they could follow them for the office's redesigned site. PCFSN reviews new content being posted using plain writing.

The Office of the Surgeon General uses the Secretary's *Guide to Document Preparation* as well as daily use of the "QUICK TIPS" guide set forth by OASH. Its website, surgeongeneral.gov, was revised to reflect updates/plain writing messaging in coordination with OASH Communications and ASPA guidance/recommendation, and the surgeongeneral.gov invite form

was revised from a *Word* document to a fully electronic HTML document. Surgeon General staff is required to take a plain writing course.

The Office of Research Integrity (ORI) reviewed its web content, FAQs, and ORI Newsletters for plain writing and readability. ORI tracks the conversion of existing documents into plain writing using the *Flesch* and *Flesch-Kincaid* methods to ensure covered documents use plain writing. ORI staff is encouraged to take the NIH online plain writing training, and those who review for plain writing are required.

OCR
Over the last year, about 110 memorandums, fact sheets, and webpages were written using plain writing principles. All covered documents are reviewed and cleared by OCR Exec Sec personnel for adherence to plain writing. All staff correspondence reviewers have attended plain writing training and are also versed in the use of the Secretary's *Guide to Document Preparation*. Because senior leaders are aware of plain writing standards, all documents begin with plain writing.

OCR also measures the effectiveness of its plain writing program through questions specific to plain writing via the agency's online survey hosted by *ForeSee*. A link to the LMS online plain writing training was provided in response to a suggestion in the OCR *Director's Suggestion Box*. OCR completed a comprehensive website redesign that strengthened its Plain Writing Act compliance. Content was developed and written plainly, and tested for readability. Key correspondence staff members at OCR use the Secretary's *Guide to Document Preparation*, and are aware of Plain Writing Act requirements. OCR Exec Sec personnel review, approve, and clear all outgoing documents for adherence to plain writing standards. OCR also promotes yearly refresher training on plain writing.

OGA
OGA hosted a number of writing courses with all staff, and developed documentation to share tips for writing clear, concise briefing documents. All documents that go to the Front Office are reviewed by a minimum of three people to ensure plain writing is used. OGA hosts internal trainings focused on plain, concise writing, and senior leadership regularly gives feedback to all staff on plain writing. Plain writing is also a factor in the vast majority of annual performance reviews at OGA.

OIG
OIG fully implemented the Plain Writing Act in 2012. In 2015, OIG continued to ensure all documents for the public are written with technical terms explained in accessible language, and short sentences when possible. Almost all of the approximately 1,000 documents put on the OIG website each year are new, including web *Spotlights* that describe OIG work in plain writing, and podcasts by senior management that explain OIG's work in a conversational way. OIG ensures that all covered documents are written plainly before the public sees them. All OIG writers attend courses, such as *Write to the Point*, that emphasize clear and concise writing. An OIG-produced plain writing training video, which explains how to comply with the law and why it is important, is posted on the OIG intranet. Bullets on the OIG *Statement of Work* for new contract editors include:

- Expert knowledge of the principles of plain writing.
- Experience in plain writing editing of technical documents.

All documents signed by the Inspector General and posted for public consumption are reviewed by editors to ensure Plain Writing compliance.

OMHA

Each Supervisory Law Judge team issues approximately 1,000 decisions each year. OMHA continues to standardize the decisional macros to approved templates; the writer then inserts analysis into that template. Clear, targeted, and audience appropriate language is used on the OMHA website. Existing documents are reviewed in consideration of current policy. When necessary, documents are revised using plain writing techniques. To the extent possible, OMHA documents are thoroughly reviewed to assess if they were written clearly and plainly for the general public and intended audience.

OMHA has noticed that each year fewer and fewer documents are being rewritten because clear and concise writing is more frequently being used initially. All new OMHA employees must complete the LMS online plain writing training within 90 days of their start date. Senior officials continue to require that before a document is released it is reviewed from the perspective of its intended audience to ensure clarity. All documents posted to the OMHA website must be clearly and plainly written for the public.