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Health Literacy Innovations
September 10, 2026

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About Health Literacy Innovations (HLI)

Mission –
Knowing that "literacy" is the single most important indicator of health outcomes, HLI was founded to create tools to help eliminate medical mistakes and confusion due to low health literacy.

Flagship Product –
The Health Literacy Advisor (HLA), the nation's first interactive health literacy software program.

Goals –

- Streamline the health literacy review process
- Replace inefficiency with technology and knowledge
- Empower communicators with the tools to create, produce, print, display, share, and advertise clear health information

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Today's Webinar Goals

Define	health equity and identify factors and conditions that contribute to health inequities
Explain	the relationship between health literacy and health equity and their impact on health outcomes
Apply	health literacy, communication guidelines to promote equitable care

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Presentation Topics

- Health Literacy
- Health Equity
- Health Literacy & Health Equity
- Action Steps



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Health Literacy



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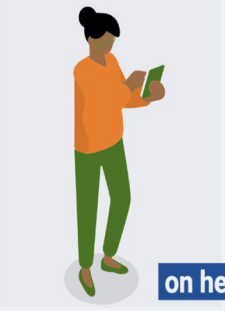
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What is Health Literacy

Personal ⟷ **Organizational**

Health literacy is the consumer's ability to:



obtain
read
understand
and act
on health information and services

Health literacy is an institution's ability to equitably enable consumers to:



obtain
read
understand
and act
on health information and services

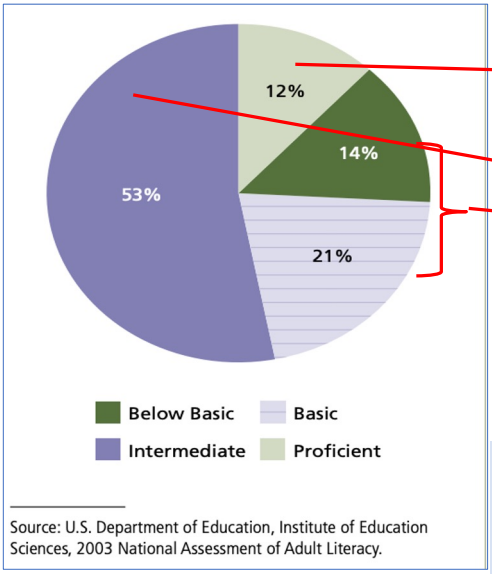
Healthy People 2030

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The Health Literacy Problem



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

12% Proficient

53% Intermediate

35% Low

88% Under the proficient health literacy level

A lack of understanding of health information makes it more difficult to access and manage health care

This is also called LOW HEALTH LITERACY

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Low health literacy dramatically impacts the health care industry



HEALTH CARE COST GOES UP!



QUALITY OF CARE GOES DOWN!



AFFECTS HEALTH OUTCOMES!

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People with Low Health Literacy:



Misunderstand treatment

Misunderstand discharge instructions

Have more problems navigating the health care system

Died early

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Low Health Literacy Impacts All

Vulnerable consumers:

- With lower education levels
- Racial/ethnic minorities
- Uninsured
- Publicly insured
- Elders and people with special needs
- Immigrants and people with limited English proficiency
- People with chronic illness or disabilities



Anyone can be affected by low health literacy:

Consumers may understand familiar content but struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts

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Health Equity



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What is Health Equity?

The absence of unfair and avoidable or remediable differences in health among population groups defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically.

World Health Organization, 2004



In Plain Language:

Health equity means every person deserves the opportunity to achieve their best possible health and well-being!

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Health Equality vs. Health Equity

Health equality means that all consumers are treated the same and have equal access to health care.

Example: A community clinic offers all checkups for a flat $50.

Health equity aims to allocate resources for disadvantaged groups and to create an equitable health service.

Example: A community clinic charges based on a patient's ability to pay.

The goal is equal access to care—Health equality has long been an industry goal; the focus has recently shifted toward health equity.

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Health Disparities and Health Inequity



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Health Inequity

Unfair and avoidable differences in health or health care caused by social, economic, or environmental disadvantage.

Example of Racial Health Inequity:

- American Indian and Alaska Native adults have diabetes at nearly twice the rate of White adults
- This disparity stems from systemic socioeconomic inequities, such as limited access to nutritious foods, combined with factors like sedentary lifestyles

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK233089/



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Health Disparities and Health Inequity

Health disparities are:

- The measurable differences in health outcomes between groups

Example of Health Disparities:

American Indians are 2.4 times more likely to die from diabetes than White Americans.

Health inequity is:

- Some **systemic, unjust social and economic causes** behind those differences

Example of Health Inequity:

Lack of transportation and longer travel distances to clinics can delay diagnosis and treatment.

https://www.chesshealthsolutions.com/2023/02/14/what-is-the-difference-between-health-equity-disparities-and-inequities/#:~:text=Health%20inequities%20occur%20when%20health,that%20create%20barriers%20to%20opportunity.

Bottom Line:

Health equity addresses the root causes of health disparities.

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Health Inequity Influences



- Stigma
- Implicit Bias
- Racism and Discrimination
- Social Determinants of Health
- Low Health Literacy
- Miscommunication
- Language Barriers
- Cultural Barriers

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Stigma

Stigma:

- "A set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people has about something"

— Merriam-Webster

- **Stigma creates barriers to health equity by discouraging consumers from seeking health care**



Implicit Bias



Bias Sample

- A 2008 study found that assessment for heart disease is delayed in women because family physicians are more likely to attribute their symptoms to anxiety.
- **Implicit bias contributes to unequal care, delayed diagnoses, poor communication, and worse health outcomes for marginalized consumers**

Racism and Discrimination

- **Racism** is prejudice based on race that can lead to unequal treatment
- **Discrimination** is the unfair treatment of consumers based on race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, etc.

Both racism and discrimination limit equitable access to quality health care.

Example:

- A person who experiences racial discrimination may avoid seeking health care, leading to worse health outcomes



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Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

- Non-medical conditions in people's lives, including where they live, learn, work, and age
- Are shaped by economic, educational, health care access, environmental, and social/community factors



Unequal SDOH create barriers that lead to health inequities for disadvantaged consumers.

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Low Health Literacy

The Health Equity–Health Literacy Loop

Lower health literacy → Worse health outcomes

Example:

- Harder to navigate insurance, meds, diagnoses, and self-advocacy → more ER visits, poorer chronic disease management, lower vaccination rates

Worse health outcomes → Reinforced inequity

Example:

- The consumer already facing systemic disadvantage, such as SDOH, ends up with worse health outcomes due to low health literacy, which can further limit trust in institutions, access to health care, etc., **deepening health inequity**

Bottom Line:
Limited health literacy can contribute to health inequities and vise versa.

https://www.chcs.org/resource/how-improving-health-literacy-can-advance-health-equity/

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Miscommunication

- A consumer who misunderstands a diagnosis and treatment may not seek follow-up and may take a drug incorrectly
- Consumers who do not understand discharge instructions may end up back in the ER



Miscommunication is one of the most direct ways health inequity is produced — the point where systemic disadvantage becomes a bad health outcome.

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Miscommunication

Consequences of miscommunication in health care:

- Consumers who feel confused are more likely to sue when outcomes are unfavorable
- By comparison, clinicians with good communication skills tend to face fewer claims, even when complications occur

In health care, miscommunication can be catastrophic, resulting in:

- Consumer harm
- Emotional distress
- Reputational damage
- Significant financial loss



https://www.mplassociation.org/Web/Publications/Inside_Medical_Liability/Issues/2026/Winter/Financial_Impact_of_Medical_Miscommunication.aspx

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Language Barriers



- Language barriers disrupt consumer-provider communication in health care
- There are about 350 languages spoken in the U.S.

https://www.cdc.gov/health-literacy/php/develop-materials/culture.html

Limited English Proficiency (LEP)'s have poorer health care outcomes, yet interpreter use remains low in consumer care.

Language and culture shape how people understand health, making linguistically appropriate communication vital for achieving health equity.

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Cultural Barriers

- Cultural background shapes views on health, illness, pain, and trust in providers
- Dismissing these beliefs leads consumers to disengage from care or receive treatment plans that don't fit their values



Health inequities and disparities arise when health systems ignore cultural differences, leading to worse health outcomes.

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Action Steps:
How to Address Health Equity and Low Health Literacy



Health equity requires valuing everyone equally and reducing avoidable, unfair differences in health outcomes for disadvantaged populations.

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Acknowledge Impacts

Both low health literacy and health inequity:

- Affect understanding of health information
- Delay care
- Lead to medication errors and severe consumer harm
- Lower consumer engagement
- **Lead to poorer health outcomes**
- **Contribute to higher health care costs**

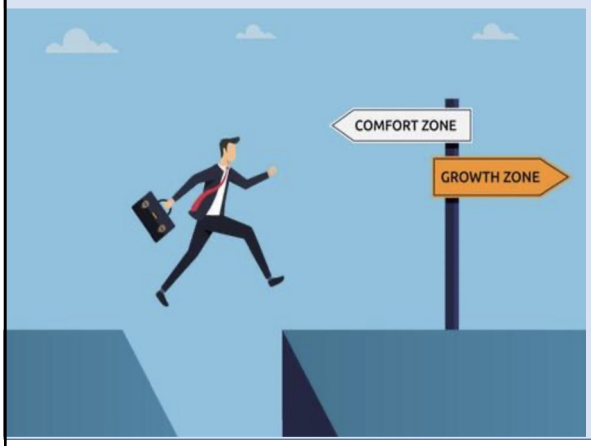


Low health literacy and health inequity affect the same vulnerable groups.

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Strategies to Improve Health Equity



- **Combat Stigma**
- **Combat Implicit Bias and Discrimination**
- **Promote Equitable Care**
- **Improve Access to Care**
- **Leverage Community Strengths**
- **Improve Communication**
- **Improve Language Access**
- **Provide Culturally Competent Care**

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Reduce Stigma

- Avoid defining consumers by a condition (e.g., "person with diabetes" rather than "a diabetic person")
- Create safe spaces where consumers feel heard and are more likely to seek treatment
- Share consumer stories to humanize stigmatized conditions



Treat stigmatized conditions like any other disease

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Combat Implicit Bias and Discrimination

- Acknowledge that bias exists — recognize that implicit bias affects everyone, including well-intentioned providers
- Slow down decision-making in high-stress moments
- Standardize care using evidence-based protocols to reduce variations in treatment
- Seek to understand your consumers to avoid misinterpretation
- Encourage consumers to speak up and ask questions



Support decision-making

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Promote Equitable Care

- Create policies to improve health services
- Increase workforce diversity
- Collect health equity data
- Monitor health outcomes by race and ethnicity to identify gaps and improve services

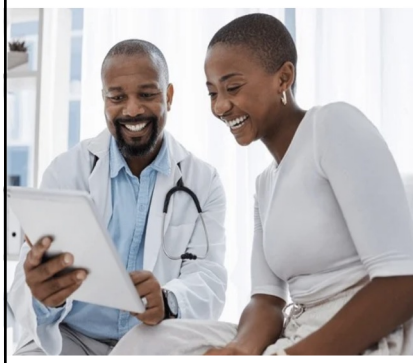


Promote anti-racism training

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Address Health Equity



Help remove barriers to care:

- For low income: Offer services at no cost or at a lower cost
- For lack of access to health services: Bring care directly into the community
- For poor housing conditions:
  - Assess consumer needs
  - Provide access to needed services and resources
- For social isolation and lack of support:
  - Provide navigators/community health workers

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Improve Access to Care



Reduce administrative hurdles:

- Minimize and simplify paperwork requirements
- Provide only the core action items consumers need at that moment
- Improve system navigation and create clear signage
- Provide screening and appointment reminders
- Assess staff performance in delivering services

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Leverage Community Strengths

- Elevate consumers into leadership roles
- Partner with community organizations to:
  - Offer local health services
  - Build relationships
  - Learn skills
  - Familiarize with the community
  - Share resources



Empower marginalized consumers and their community leaders

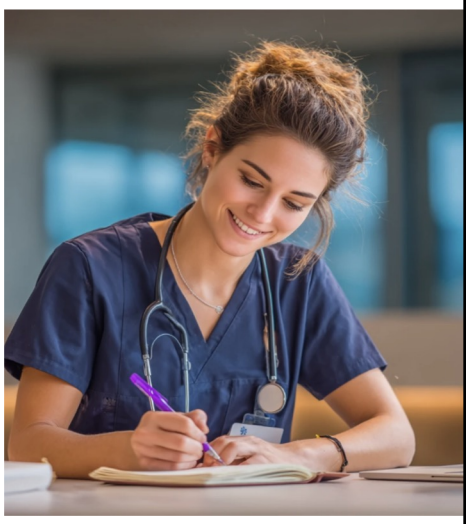
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Improve Written Communication

Write in Plain Language:

- **Use tools such as the Health Literacy Advisor to check readability levels**
- Avoid complex medical jargon
- Set a readability level standard: 4th to 6th grade
- Evaluate materials for understanding by conducting user testing

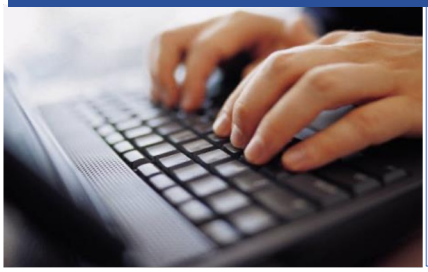


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Health Literacy Advisor

At the baseline of all change is a good interactive health literacy software tool that streamlines all health literacy efforts:

Readability + Usability + Health Literacy + More



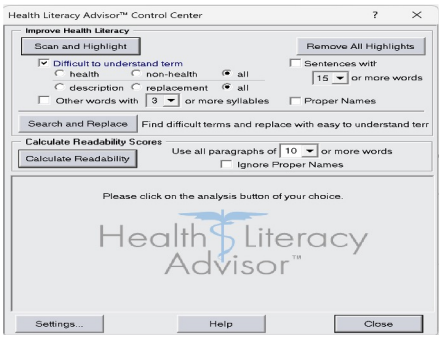
One comprehensive solution!

https://www.healthliteracyinnovations.com/products/pricing

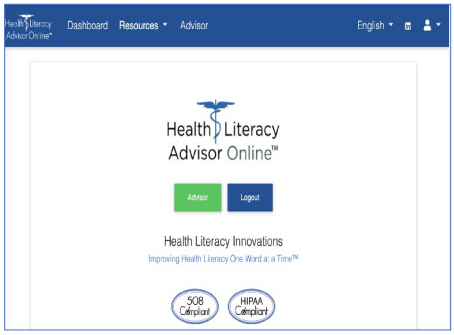
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The Health Literacy Advisor
Two Platforms

HLA Desktop (Add-in to Word)



HLA Online (Web-based version)



Coming Soon HLA Online/AI

English and English/Spanish

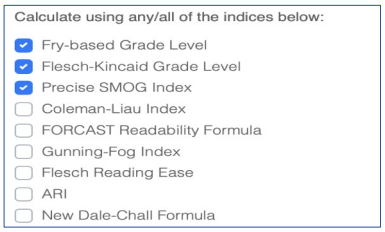
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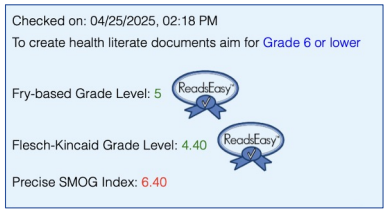
Health Literacy Advisor Features

Calculates Readability:

- Uses nine readability indices in English and six in Spanish.
- Creates detailed reports
- Stamps results and the "ReadsEasy" stamp on the document

Assesses principles of plain language using the REDA – Reads Easy Document Assessment, a suitability tool.





The HLA cleans documents before scoring readability, assuring accurate readability scores

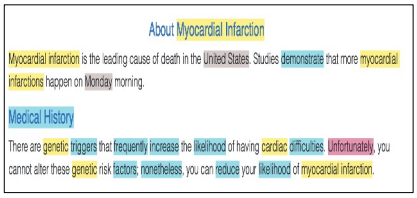
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Health Literacy Advisor Features

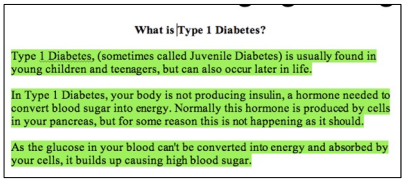
Highlights Words

- Long words by database
- Long words by syllable count
- Medical terms and jargon



Highlights Long Sentences

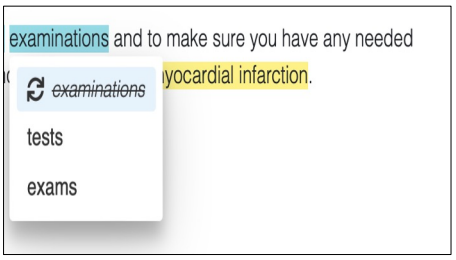
Long sentences with 10 words or more

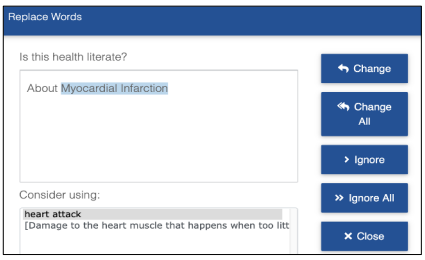


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Health Literacy Advisor Feature

- **Search difficult terms and replace** them with easy-to-understand choices right on your document
- Includes definitions for health terms and non-health terms





On average, it lowers the reading level with replacements by at least 4 grades

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Improve Oral Communication

- Explain information in simple language:
  - "Take this medicine twice a day" instead of "administer bi-daily"
- Apply the teach-back technique:
  - Ask consumers to repeat information in their own words
- Use visuals if needed
- Tailor your communication to suit the consumer
- Ask open-ended questions when interviewing consumers



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Apply Health Literacy Best Practices

Establish health literacy universal precautions:

- Assume that anyone may struggle to understand health information:
  - Become a health-literate organization
  - Create a **shame-free** and **consumer-centered** environment



Design health information and services so everyone can understand and use them.

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Improve Non-verbal Communication

- Maintain an open, relaxed posture
- Keep eye contact
- Convey compassion and empathy
- Pay close attention to the consumer's non-verbal cues that may indicate:
  - **Confusion**
  - Anxiety
  - Fear
  - Discomfort



Effective non-verbal communication builds consumers' trust, establishes rapport, and often conveys more than spoken words.

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Improve Digital Communication

Digital health equity ensures fair access to and benefits from digital health technologies:

- Provide **user-friendly and easy-to-read** digital tools and resources
- Provide education on digital literacy
- Design accessible websites and media
- **Co-design technology with consumers' input**



When possible, provide internet connectivity.
A lack of internet connection makes it difficult to access online resources or to participate in virtual communication.

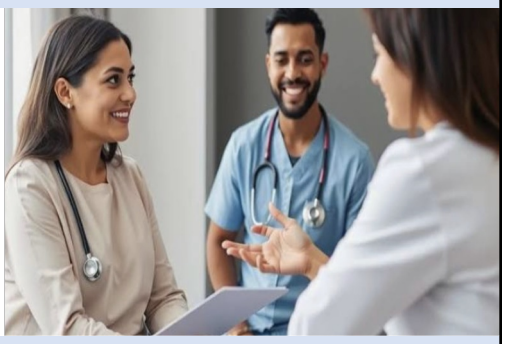
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Improve Language Access

Language access enables Limited English Proficiency (LEP) consumers to communicate with providers in their preferred language.

Language access helps to:

- Ensure that LEPs receive equitable care
- Increase engagement
- Improve uptake of recommended screenings



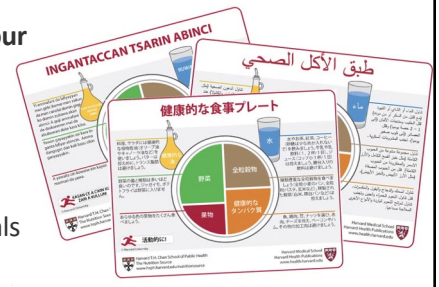
Providing translation and interpreting services reduces 30-day readmissions and costs.

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Translate Health Materials

Translate vital documents into languages that match your consumers' demographics:

- Informed consent forms
- Discharge instructions
- Financial and billing documents
- Wellness, disease prevention, and management materials



Steps for good translations:

- Assess consumers' knowledge and needs before you start writing content
- Write and design for the target audience in English OR adapt the English version
- Simplify or write in verified plain language in English
- Then translate
- Test the translation with the target audience

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Translate Health Materials

Make sure translations:

- Are linguistically and grammatically accurate
- Use consistent wording or terms
- Preserve accurate medical terminology
- Maintain clinical/health intent
- Follow guidelines and standards (ISO-Certified Translation, HIPAA-compliant, etc.)
- Are adapted for the target audience
- Consider testing translations with the target consumers



Use resources available:

- **The CDC's Culture and Language website:**
  https://www.cdc.gov/health-literacy/php/develop-materials/culture.html
- **The American Translators Association website:** https://www.atanet.org/certification/

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Use Interpretation Services

Ensure that LEP consumers receive information that is:

- Accurate
- Transparent
- Confidential
- Impartial
- Culturally respectful



Interpreters in health care are critical for bridging language barriers, ensuring safety and promoting health equity.

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Use Interpretation Services

Consider using interpreting services that:

- Use certified, trained, and/or proven, experienced professional medical interpreters
- Follow standards, strict ethical codes, and protocols to ensure accurate and effective communication
- Check language access standards and guidelines, such as The Joint Commission, CMS, Medicaid, and Medicare



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Culturally Competent Care

- Reduces inequalities in treatment for different racial and ethnic groups
- Increases consumers who show up for regular checkups and early screenings
- Reduces the number of missed medical visits
- Lowers risk of lawsuits
- Helps meet state, federal, legal, and regulatory guidelines more easily
- Attracts more local consumers who feel welcome and respected



Source: American Hospital Association, 2013.

Culturally competent care can improve consumers' experiences and lead to improved health outcomes among diverse populations.

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Culturally Competent Care

- Identify consumers' health priorities and needs
- Promote open discussions and equity-centered communication
- Apply National Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) standards
  https://thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/clas/standards
- Train providers and front-line staff in:
  - Cross-cultural communication
  - Trust-building



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Culturally Competent Care



- Learn about your diverse audience
- Use inclusive, respectful language
- Apply the LEARN Model, a culturally sensitive communication framework: Listen, Explain, Acknowledge, Recommend, and Negotiate

https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2023/23_0061.htm

Finally, practice cultural humility

A process of self-reflection, continuous learning, and self-critique

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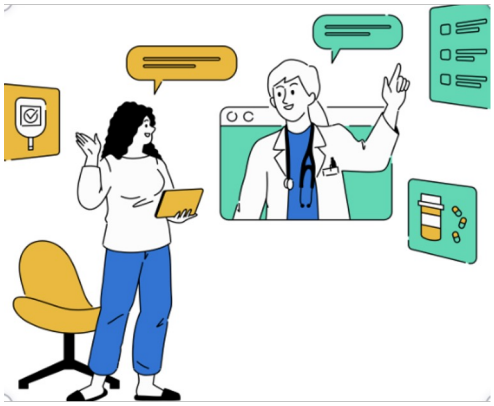
Summary



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Tips to Improve Health Equity and Health Literacy

- Improve health communication
- Set readability standards to comply with regulatory and government agencies
- Simplify all consumer health materials
- Train staff on health literacy and plain language principles



Use the HLA software to apply health literacy principles

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Tips to Improve Health Equity and Health Literacy



- Simplify health services navigation
- Support self-care and consumer engagement
- Empower marginalized consumers and their community leaders
- Improve the digital divide
- Build a diverse health workforce

Involve consumers in the design and review of health materials and health services

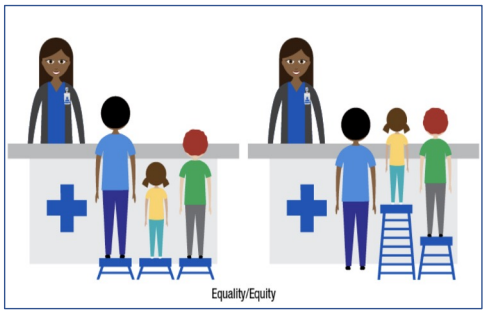
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Tips to Improve Health Equity and Health Literacy

Provide professional language translation and interpreting services

Comply with requirements from regulatory and accrediting agencies such as:

- HHS
- CMS (Medicare/Medicaid)
- The Joint Commission
- Plain Writing Act (2010)



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Tips to Improve Health Equity

- Design health information and services so everyone can understand and use them
- Simplify communication
- Confirm understanding,
- Improve navigation
- Support disadvantaged consumers
- Train bilingual community health advocates/worker to break down language and cultural barriers



Use resources such as the *CDC's Guiding Principles to Promote an Equity-Centered Approach to Public Health Communication*
https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2023/23_0061.htm

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Remember

Consumers may only consent to or participate in care decisions if they truly understand their health information

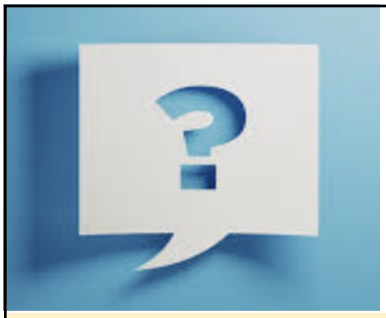
Apply plain language to help consumers:

- **Find what they need**
- **Understand what they find**
- **Act appropriately on that understanding**

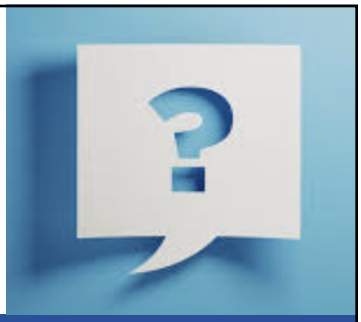


Use the Health Literacy Advisor to simplify and improve health communication

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all new
HLA licenses

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