

Health Literacy and Plain Language Standards
Webinar Presentation: September 18, 2025

Aracely Rosales
Chief Content Expert
Health Literacy Innovations
aracely@healthliteracyinnovations.com
301-230-4966

About Health Literacy Innovations & the Health Literacy Advisor

Health Literacy Innovations (HLI) creates tools to reduce medical mistakes, unnecessary health care costs, and poor health outcomes from low health literacy.

HLI's flagship product is the Health Literacy Advisor (HLA), a state-of-the-art interactive health literacy software tool, is available in two languages (English and Spanish) and in two platforms (Word-based add-in and web-based). Year after year, the HLA continues to revolutionize the labor-intensive health literacy review process by leveraging powerful software to help the health care industry evaluate, standardize, and produce clear health information.

The Health Literacy Advisor (HLA):



- Scores readability
- Highlights difficult words and health terms
- Suggests plain language replacements
- Evaluates principles of plain language
- Provides readability reports
- Stamps "ReadsEasy" when you achieve the readability goal

Ready to simplify health information?
Sales@HealthLiteracyInnovations.com
(301) 230-4966
HealthLiteracyInnovations.com

Our 2025 Big Sale Continues
20% off all new HLA Licenses
contact: sales@healthliteracyinnovation.com

For a free HLA Online trial
www.healthliteracyadvisor.com

HLI conducted a comprehensive survey of Medicaid state agencies' standards, requirements, and laws.

To receive the full report, contact us at:

HLI2025Medicaidsurvey@HealthLiteracyInnovations.com

While numerous studies document the benefits of standards in industries such as manufacturing, engineering, and health care in general, there is no specific evidence that health literacy standards are directly linked to improving patient health outcomes. Research, however, shows that implementing health literacy–related programs improve health literacy levels, which in turn increases health outcomes.

The Process and Application of Health Literacy Standards

Applying health literacy standards helps organizations plan and create effective health literacy programs and initiatives. Organizations that prioritize health literacy make it a core part of their mission, operations, and leadership. They integrate it into planning, safety, and quality improvement; train and monitor health staff; and involve communities in shaping services. They also ensure accessible services and support for system navigation.

Health literacy standards encourage organizations to meet consumers' diverse literacy levels, avoid stigma, and focus on high-risk situations such as medication use, discharge instructions, and explaining coverage and costs. They also emphasize clear communication and the creation of materials that are easy to understand and use. Often, these materials aim for a sixth grade reading level or lower, incorporate plain language, avoid medical jargon, and simplify sentences. Collectively, these efforts help health care consumers move from low health literacy to more functional health literacy.

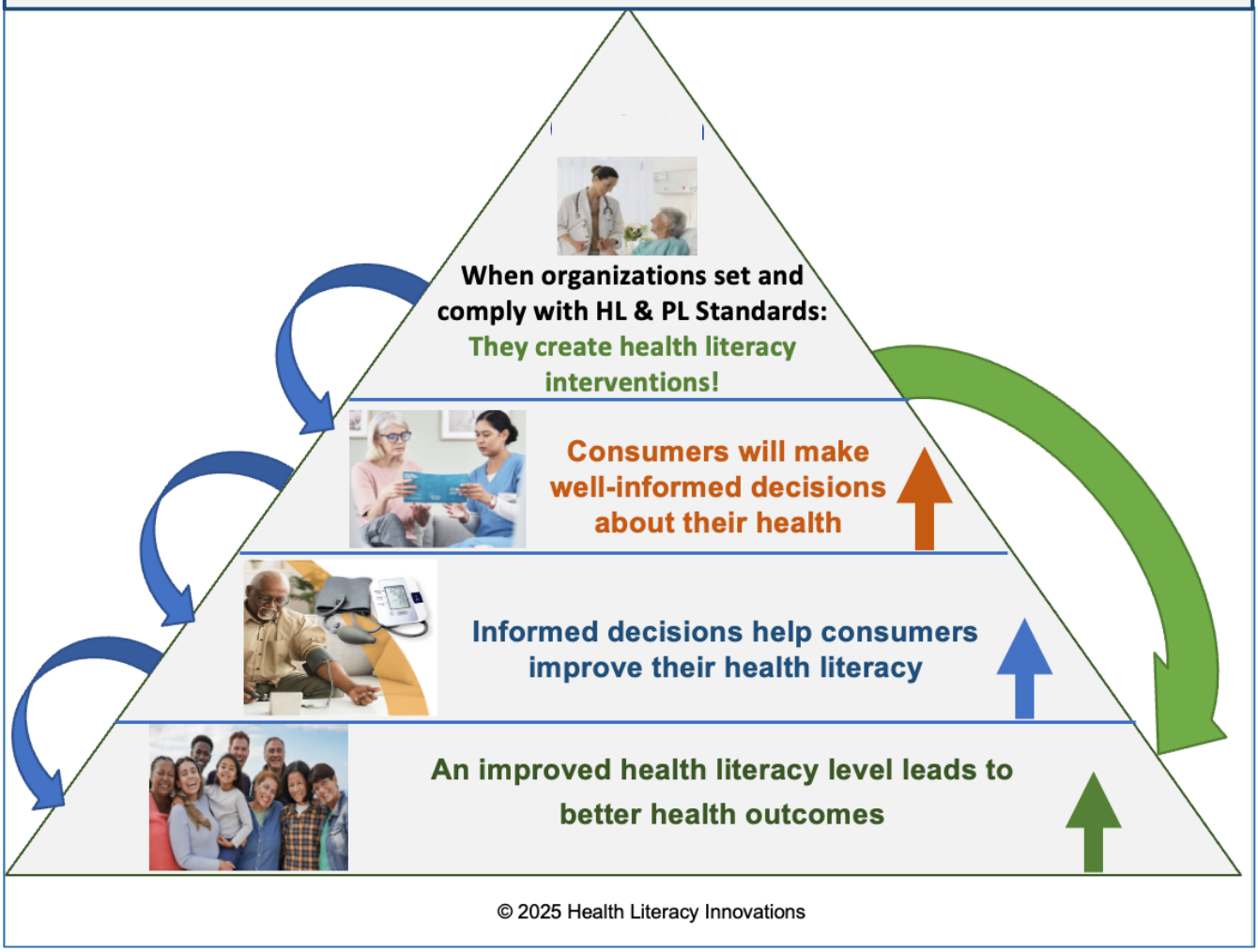
The Effect of Raising Health Literacy Levels in Consumers

Functional health literacy leads to better health outcomes and wellness because it helps consumers understand, evaluate, and act on health information effectively. When individuals have strong health literacy skills, they can:

- **Make informed decisions** – Understand medical instructions, treatment options, and risks, allowing them to choose the best care
- **Manage chronic conditions** – Follow medication schedules, monitor symptoms, and adopt healthier habits, reducing complications
- **Navigate the health system** – Know how to access services, ask the right questions, and advocate for themselves
- **Practice prevention** – Recognize the importance of screenings, vaccinations, nutrition, and exercise, lowering the risk of disease
- **Improve communication** – Engage in clearer conversations with providers, reducing misunderstandings and medical errors

Altogether, high health literacy increases self-confidence in managing health, lowers hospitalizations, supports healthier behaviors, and ultimately leads to longer, higher-quality lives. It also improves health outcomes, reduces disparities, and advances health equity.

Health literacy standards give organizations a roadmap to deliver care that is understandable, inclusive, and actionable, leading directly to better health outcomes and wellness.



© 2025 Health Literacy Innovations

Key Elements of Health Literacy Standards

1. **Clear Communication**
   - Use plain language, avoid jargon, and explain medical terms
   - Keep and check written materials at about a **6th-grade reading level or lower**
   - Use visuals, infographics, and teach-back methods to confirm understanding
2. **Accessible Information**
   - Provide information in multiple formats (print, digital, audio, video)
   - Translate into multiple languages and ensure cultural relevance
   - Design for people with disabilities (large print, screen reader compatibility, captions)
3. **Patient-Centered Services**
   - Involve patients and communities in co-designing programs
   - Support navigation of the health system (guides, navigation signs, patient advocates, helplines)
   - Address high-risk situations (medication instructions, discharge planning, insurance/coverage explanations)
4. **Organizational Integration**
   - Make health literacy part of the organization's **mission, policies, and quality improvement processes**
   - Train staff regularly on health literacy and plain language practices
   - Monitor and evaluate progress with measurable goals
5. **Equity and Inclusion**
   - Ensure services meet the needs of people with **diverse literacy skills, languages, and cultures**
6. **Safety and Quality**
   - Apply standards to improve patient safety by preventing errors linked to misunderstanding (e.g., medication use)
   - Use plain-language consent forms, safety instructions, and health education