Health Literacy: What Everyone Needs to Know

What is Health Literacy?

Health literacy is a consumer's ability to:



- Obtain
- Read
- Understand
- Act on

health information and services

Is a two-way street:

CONSUMER SKILLS:
- Writing/reading
- Culture/language
- Calculating numbers
- Health care experience

ORGANIZATION CAPACITY:
- Health information access
- Culture/language access
- Navigation of health systems
- Health insurance access

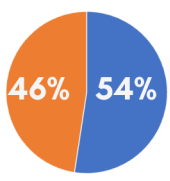
The capacity of health care organizations to facilitate equitable access to health information and services.



What is the Problem?



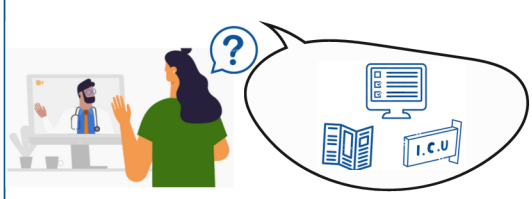
In the US, only one of ten consumers have the skills needed to manage health and prevent disease.



of Americans read below the sixth grade reading level.

Yet, most health materials are written at a 10th grade reading level or higher.

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



This is called LOW HEALTH LITERACY

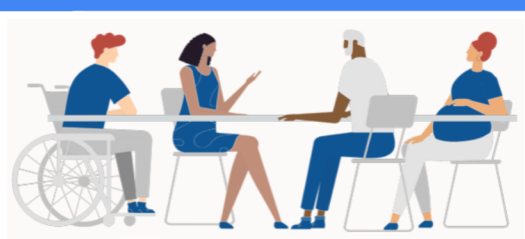
Health Literacy Levels

- 12% Proficient
- 53% Intermediate
- 35% Low

88% Under the proficient health literacy level

Vulnerable Populations Include:

- Older adults
- Consumers with low income and educational levels
- Immigrants and non-English speakers
- Consumers who are overwhelmed — even those with good reading skills
- Consumers with chronic diseases
- Consumers with mental and/or physical developmental conditions



Sixty-percent of all Medicaid recipients have the lowest level of health literacy.

Of the 87 million people with low health literacy skills, the majority are:

- White, English-speaking, American citizens
- Insured (have health care coverage)

Why is this Important?

With low health literacy, mistakes happen!

Health Care Costs Go Up

Consumers with low health literacy incur an average annual health care cost of $13,000

In contrast, consumers with high health literacy spend only $3,000 per year.



Improving health literacy could save Medicare $25.4 billion each year.

Low health literacy is estimated to cost the U. S. $352 billion in 2025

This calculation is based on a 2003 estimate of $238 billion, adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) calculator.

Health Care Quality Goes Down

Consumers with low health literacy:

- **Use more treatment** and emergency services
- **Have more hospital stays** and readmissions
- **Often cannot follow** their treatment
- **Have higher mortality** rates

Low health literacy keeps consumers from:

- **Preventing** health issues
- **Managing** current health problems
- **Understanding** health insurance forms
- **Engaging** actively in their health care

Low health literacy contributes to health disparities.

What can we do?



We have a Solution!

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?
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Improving Health Literacy One Word at a Time™