

Facts About Clear Health Communication

Health Literacy

Readability Scales

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Health literacy is a person's ability to read, understand, and act on health information. Examples of "health information" include instructions on prescription drug bottles, health education booklets, a doctor's written and oral instructions, and a letter about Medicare changes.

Why is health literacy important?

Limited health literacy affects millions of people and costs billions of dollars each year. Limited health literacy also keeps people from getting the most from their health care.

People with limited health literacy skills struggle to understand information they need to make health care decisions. They have more difficulty navigating the health care system.

Compared to people with stronger health literacy skills, people with limited health literacy:

- Have higher rates of hospitalization.
- Use more emergency services.
- Make more medication and treatment errors.
- Take fewer preventive health measures.

What can we do about limited health literacy?

Clear health communication is one of the easiest ways to help those with limited health literacy. Even adults with strong reading skills will appreciate steps toward clearer communication! Organizations can apply the techniques presented in these tip sheets to improve the readability and usability of their health information materials.

Know the Facts

- 90 million people in the U.S. — almost half the population — have limited health literacy skills.
- In California, most health care materials are written above the 10th grade reading level. The average Californian reads at the 7th grade level.
- The average adult reads 3-5 levels below the highest grade completed. This means that someone with a 12th grade education may read at the 7th grade level.
- Limited health literacy affects everyone. Even people with strong literacy skills have trouble understanding complex health information.

Want more information?

To learn more about clear writing, materials assessments, and on-site health communication trainings for your staff, please contact **Beccah Rothschild** at beccah_rothschild@berkeley.edu or (510) 642-0415.