

# **Starting Up and Advancing Your Company's Health Literacy Program**

## **Part I Background on Health Literacy**

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# Observations

- **Not just “those people”**
- **Shame is a major issue**
- **Affects people from entry to exit**
- **An issue that is often overlooked**

# An Overview

# **The Issue of Inadequate Health Literacy**

## **An Overview**

- 1. What it is**
- 2. What contributes to it**
- 3. How it makes people feel**
- 4. Who is most likely to have it**
- 5. Why to be concerned about it**

**1.**  
**Health Literacy:**  
**What it Is**

# Health Literacy

## What It Is

**Health literacy is the degree to which individuals can obtain, process, and understand the basic health information and services they need to make appropriate health decisions.**

# Inadequate Health Literacy

Having *problems* obtaining, processing, and understanding the basic health information and services one needs to make appropriate health decisions

**2a.**

**Inadequate Health Literacy:  
What Contributes to It**

**PATIENT  
Factors**

# Summary

## What Contributes To It – Patient Factors

- Having marginal literacy skills, and / OR...
- Being unfamiliar with medical and health care terminology
- Being unfamiliar with medical and health care concepts
- Having limited English literacy and proficiency
- Having perspectives that differ from the mainstream based on:
  - A person's cultural perspectives and/or health beliefs
  - A person's experiences with group-based discrimination  
(ethnic group, income, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance)

**2b.**

**Inadequate Health Literacy:  
What Contributes to It**

**PROVIDER  
Factors**

# Summary

## What Contributes To It – Provider Factors

- The increasing complexity of the health care system
- Lack of awareness of inadequate health literacy as an issue
- Providers with ineffective skills in:
  - consumer friendly verbal communication
  - consumer friendly written communication
  - consumer friendly web-based communication
  - effective cross-cultural communication
  - language interpreting and translation

# Summary

## What Contributes To It – Provider Factors

- Regulatory requirements for complicated language
- IT limitations on using effective layout and typography
- Lack of an effective plan to address inadequate health literacy as an issue

# 3.

## **Inadequate Health Literacy: How It Makes People Feel**

# **Inadequate Health Literacy**

## **How It Makes People Feel**

- **Unsure/confused**
- **Hesitant/resistant**
- **Anxious/fearful**
- **Embarrassed/ashamed**
- **Angry/frustrated**

# 4.

## **Inadequate Health Literacy: Who is Most Likely to Have It**

# Adult Literacy in the United States

**43 per cent of the nation's adults read at very basic levels or below.**

# Literacy Levels of Adults in America

<u>Reading Ability</u>	<u>NAAL Level</u>	<u>*Approx Grade Level</u>	<u>% of Pop.</u>
- Below Basic	1	0-5	14
- Basic	2	6-8	29
- Intermediate	3	9-12	44
- Proficient	4	College	13

2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)

\* Estimates

# Literacy, Race and Ethnicity

<u>NALS</u> <u>Level</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Pop.</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>White</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Asian</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Black</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Hisp</u>
1	14	7	14	24	44
2	29	25	32	43	30
Totals	43	32	46	67	74

# Literacy and Age

<u>NALS</u> <u>Level</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Pop.</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>16-18</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>19-24</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>25-39</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>40-49</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>50-64</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>65+</u>
1	14	11	11	12	11	13	23
2	29	37	29	25	27	27	38
Totals	43	48	40	37	38	40	61

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# 5.

# Why to Be Concerned About It

# **Inadequate Health Literacy**

## **Why To Be Concerned About It**

- **It affects health outcomes**
- **It is expensive**
- **It is legally risky**
- **It can affect member acquisition, satisfaction and retention**
- **It offers an opportunity to be truly helpful to people**

**So, what to DO?**