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.

2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)
## Literacy Levels of Adults in America

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

2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)  
* Estimates
# Literacy, Race and Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NALS Level</th>
<th>% of Pop.</th>
<th>% of White</th>
<th>% of Asian</th>
<th>% of Black</th>
<th>% of Hisp</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>74</td>
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</table>

2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)
## Literacy and Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NALS Level</th>
<th>% of Pop.</th>
<th>% of 16-18</th>
<th>% of 19-24</th>
<th>% of 25-39</th>
<th>% of 40-49</th>
<th>% of 50-64</th>
<th>% of 65+</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)
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 is offers an opportunity to be truly helpful to people
So, what to DO?