

# Executive Summary

## *Third Biennial Health Literacy Summit* March 31 - April 1, 2009

Co-Presenting Sponsors:



Lead Sponsor:



## **Statement of Purpose:**

**To explore the impact of health literacy on health care and the many ways in which both literacy providers and health care providers are addressing health literacy.**

### **Project Aim**

On March 31 and April 1, 2009, Wisconsin Literacy, Inc. hosted its Third Biennial Health Literacy Summit with presenting sponsorship from Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Wisconsin and Verizon. The objectives of the summit originally included the opportunity to showcase health literacy interventions throughout the state that were positively impacting health outcomes, hear from Dr. Andrew Pleasant, an expert in the newly forming field, about the impact of this issue both within and outside of the health care community, and to look at new opportunities for collaboration among those working in health literacy.

Shortly after announcing Wisconsin Literacy's Third Biennial Health Literacy Summit, interest began to spread among neighboring states and far away states that were beginning to address health literacy. In short order, we were able to put together an agenda that included national experts and model programs in health literacy that drew attention from a state, regional and national audience. A Pre-Summit State Partners meeting provided a rare opportunity to have the collective thoughts of many experts in the field comment and advise on a national plan.

### **Highlights**

- A keynote address offered a social scientist's perspective on the multi-faceted impact of health literacy by Dr. Andrew Pleasant, of Rutgers University and co-author of the book *Advancing Health Literacy: A Framework for Understanding and Action*.
- Dr. Cynthia Baur, from the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Chair of the federal Health Literacy Workgroup, provided an update on a Department of Health and Human Services' national Health Literacy Action Plan.
- Dr. Christina Cordero from The Joint Commission discussed their newly formed standards in the areas of language, literacy and culture and how this relates to new recommendations for communication and cultural competence.

- Dr. James Kimmey and Arthur Culbert, Ph.D from the Missouri Foundation for Health shared their vision for the newly formed Health Literacy Missouri office and its extensive repository of health literacy resources.
- A presentation on the data analysis on health literacy costs by Wisconsin counties, based on the work of Dr. John Vernon, principle analyst on the 2007 Health Literacy Costs Study from the University of Connecticut, School of Business.
- Laurie Martin, researcher at RAND Corporation, presented a geographic analysis on mapping health literacy hot spots.
- Julie McKinney, moderator of the National Institute for Literacy's Health Literacy Discussion List, shared the benefits of NIFL's health literacy resources.
- A health literacy adult learner group began to explore ways they can be more involved in advocacy work around health literacy.
- Experts presented research-based interventions in health literacy and health literacy programs and curricula to improve health communications for patients and health care providers.

## **Stakeholders**

Once key participants and presenters were established, we recognized the rare opportunity to have stakeholders from 13 different states and the District of Columbia participate in a pre-summit meeting. The Missouri Foundation for Health took on a key role in planning and sponsoring the pre-summit meeting and dinner on the eve of the Health Literacy Summit. The work of the pre-summit group focused on the National Call to Action to Improve Health Literacy presented by the Health Literacy Task Force Chair from the Dept. of Health & Human Services/ CDC. Dr. Baur took recommendations from the group on the *National Call to Action to Improve Health Literacy* and its relevance and application to state and local efforts in health literacy.

Further discussion included plans to consider the formation of a national coalition of states that could include an advocacy roll in health care reform at some point in the future. The role and resources that different states could offer in furthering the development of a national coalition were also discussed. A sub group formed from this larger group of 30 stakeholders that continues to meet on periodic conference calls. A Midwest coalition of states, including Minnesota, Missouri, Iowa and Wisconsin also gathered at

the pre-summit meeting and the summit to further collaborate on a group panel presentation that was made at the Institute for Healthcare Advancement's Annual Health Literacy Conference in California in May 2009. This group continues to communicate with each other in sharing information and resources, including on how they have gone about forming their own statewide health literacy initiatives.

The attendance at the summit represented a majority of participants working in health care. The adult literacy field was represented by Wisconsin Literacy member agency representatives looking for health literacy curricula and collaborative projects that they could implement in their communities. A small group of adult learners was involved in sessions that explored their role in statewide efforts.

### **Summit Outcomes**

Wisconsin Literacy's 2007 Health Literacy Summit focused on raising awareness as well as creating four regional health literacy committees that could maintain viable efforts and initiatives in their respective communities. The 2009 Health Literacy Summit went a step beyond awareness to present health literacy interventions in various settings that are impacting health outcomes, giving participants concrete steps and ideas to take back to their health care or adult literacy programs. The adult literacy student group was able to formulate an initial outline of ways learners may act as advocates as part of a statewide plan.

At the 2009 summit, workshops and informational sessions highlighted current interventions and projects in health literacy, primarily in the state of Wisconsin but also in other areas around the country. Included in these were presentations on health literacy projects that addressed the needs of the health care community and the adult literacy community and how they might both serve and educate using health literacy concepts such as clear communication, universal design or patient empowerment programs. The summit provided many learning opportunities to address health literacy from both sides of the coin, that of provider and patient.

The Pre-Summit State Partners meeting provided a rare opportunity to have collective thoughts of many health literacy experts representing state organizations to comment and advise on a national plan.

## **In Summary**

While the original intent of the 2009 Health Literacy Summit was to address a statewide audience, Wisconsin Literacy was able to bring together a national representation of health literacy experts, both as presenters and participants. A summit of this nature that focuses on current interventions and models for communities and states resounded strongly with the audience and many participants expressed a strong desire to continue the Health Literacy Summit on a biennial basis. Since the event, Wisconsin Literacy has been called upon to present its path to building a statewide, grassroots health literacy coalition with newly forming efforts in communities throughout the country.

The highly rated strength of Wisconsin Literacy to form collaborations among a multitude of organizations representing health care and adult literacy positions the agency to address the issue from both sides of the fence. It will continue to remind the public audience that the health risks and cost of health literacy must not be placed on the "individual's" capacity to obtain, process and understand, but on *all* that are involved in the receiving and providing sides of health care. In that vein, the revised definition of health literacy will be at the heart of Wisconsin Literacy's focus in its work:

*"Health Literacy is the capacity of individuals, **organizations and communities** to obtain, process, understand and **share** basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions."*

## **Link to Webcast**

<http://www.wisconsinliteracy.org/HealthLiteracySummit.php>