



Draft National Action Plan on Improving Health Literacy

Cynthia Baur, Ph.D.
National Center for Health Marketing
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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What is Health Literacy?

- Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to *obtain, process, and understand* basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health *decisions*.
 - Healthy People 2010

Factors that Affect Health Literacy

- Health literacy is dependent on both individual and systemic factors
 - Communication skills of lay people and professionals
 - Knowledge of lay people and professionals of health topics
 - Culture
 - Demands of the healthcare and public health systems
 - Demands of the situation/context

Who is at risk?

- The problem of limited health literacy is greater among:
 - Older adults
 - Those who are poor
 - People with limited education
 - Minority populations
 - Persons with limited English proficiency (LEP)

Foundations for National Action Plan

- Healthy People 2010 Objective
 - 2003 action plan
- NIH/AHRQ/CDC Program Announcement to fund health literacy research
- 2003 NAAL data
- 2006 Surgeon General's Workshop on Improving Health Literacy
- 2007-08 Town Halls

Healthy People 2010

Health Literacy Objective

- 11-2: Increase the health literacy of the population
 - Measured by data from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)
- Prior to NAAL, action plan to engage stakeholders in various activities
 - Communicating Health: Priorities and Strategies for Action, 2003
- Responsible for HHS Health Literacy Workgroup
 - Cross-agency workgroup for priorities, product reviews, collaboration and funding

Measuring Health Literacy for Healthy People 2010

- Health literacy was a new component of the NAAL
 - Nationally representative sample of more than 19,000 adults aged 16 and older in the United States
 - Assessment of English literacy using prose, document, and quantitative scales

Measuring health literacy

- Tasks used to measure health literacy were organized around three domains:
 - Clinical: Filling out a patient form
 - Prevention: Following guidelines for age-appropriate preventive health service
 - Navigation of the healthcare system: Understanding what a health insurance plan will pay for

Measuring health literacy

- Proficient: Can perform complex and challenging literacy activities.
- Intermediate: Can perform moderately challenging literacy activities.
- Basic: Can perform simple everyday literacy activities.
- Below Basic: Can perform no more than the most simple and concrete literacy activities.
- Nonliterate in English: Unable to complete a minimum number of screening tasks or could not be tested because did not speak English or Spanish.

The Bottom Line

- Only 12 percent of adults have Proficient health literacy. In other words, nearly 9 out of 10 adults may lack the skills needed to manage their health and prevent disease.
- Fourteen percent of adults (30 million people) have Below Basic health literacy. These adults are more likely to report their health as poor (42 percent) and are more likely to lack health insurance (28 percent) than adults with Proficient health literacy.

Surgeon General's Workshop on Improving Health Literacy

- Purpose
 - Present the state of the science on health literacy from a variety of research disciplines and practice perspectives
 - Establish an evidence base to inform action steps

Workshop Format

- Panel 1: Health Literacy, Literacy and Health Outcomes
 - Conclusions: 1) strong, independent association between limited health literacy and poor health outcomes 2) healthcare demands exceed skills
- Panel 2: Meeting the Health Literacy Needs of Special Populations
 - Conclusions: Culture, language and age affect health literacy and health outcomes

Workshop Format, cont.

- Panel 3: Toward an Informed and Engaged Public
 - We can use evidence-based strategies from communication and other fields to improve health literacy
- Overall conclusions
 - Enough data exist to substantiate health literacy as a major public health problem
 - Costs of NOT taking action should be considered in addition to costs for improvement activities

Town Halls

- New York City, Sacramento, St. Louis, and Tampa
- Presentations of local activities to improve health literacy
- Discussions and breakouts
 - Small groups worked on visions for a health literate America and strategies and steps needed to realize vision

National Action Plan

- Goals, high level strategies and actions
- All sectors included in the solutions
- Status March 2009: draft
 - Requires HHS clearance
 - Development led by HHS staff but not a plan for government alone
 - Expect plan will be presented to the incoming HHS Secretary and/or Surgeon General for support

Scope

- Core principle: everyone has the right to accurate, understandable, and easily accessible health information and services that could make a difference in their health, longevity and quality of life
- Call for a response from all sectors involved in health information and services

Goal 1

- Develop and disseminate health and safety information that is understandable and accessible to everyone.
- Examples of strategies
 - Health Professionals: Involve members of the target population, including persons with limited health literacy, in planning, evaluation, implementation, and dissemination efforts. Collaborate with the target audience to create materials and messages.

Goal 1 continued

- Examples continued
 - Health professionals: Promote health literacy improvement through professional and advocacy organizations.
 - Individuals and Families: Inform local public health and safety officials about the need for clear health communication. Take advantage of existing feedback channels (such as public Websites, community forums, or suggestion boxes) to request plain language public health information.
 - Individuals and Families: Volunteer to review and give feedback on drafts of health information.

Goal 2

- Promote changes in the healthcare system to improve communication with patients and foster shared decision-making
- Examples of strategies
 - Health Professionals: Work with accrediting bodies to standardize medical education curricula to include communication coursework that focuses on health literacy and cultural competency.

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Goal 2 continued

- Examples continued
 - Healthcare Administrators: Increase awareness of and compliance with Title VI, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and other laws designed to ensure that individuals with limited English proficiency can access medical care. This includes providing comprehensive language access at every point of contact, including interpreter services, to meet the needs of diverse patient communities.

Goal 3

- Include accurate and developmentally appropriate health and science education in early education through university level.
- Examples of strategies
 - Educators: Advocate for the adoption of National Health Education Standards.
 - Individuals and Families: Advocate for the inclusion of health education in local school curricula.

Goal 4

- Support and expand local efforts to provide adult education, English language instruction, and information services – such as libraries and community centers – that improve health literacy

Goal 4 continued

- Examples of strategies
 - Educators and community service providers: Support community-based programs that empower people to be more involved and active in health and that teach skills, such as computer use, to assist people in acquiring credible health information.
 - Health professionals: Invite an adult education class to visit your health center.

Goal 5

- Encourage all sectors of society to contribute to health literacy improvement
- Examples of strategies
 - Mass media: Include training on health reporting and health literacy in schools of journalism.
 - Mass media: Use local and community media to raise awareness of health information, services, and overcome barriers to care.

Goal 5 continued

- Examples continued
 - Philanthropic and Advocacy Organizations: Create cross-disciplinary coalitions to promote and advocate for health literacy improvement. Increase attention and leverage funding for health literacy initiatives.
 - Food and Drug Industries: Encourage industry and academia to develop and test innovative ways to improve communication of medication information on over-the-counter (OTC) drug labels that will help ensure safe and effective use.

Goal 6

- Increase research and evaluation to develop and assess evidence-based interventions
- Examples of strategies
 - Researchers: Develop stronger individual and population measures of health literacy. Specifically, additional measures are needed to capture the full range of skills needed for health literacy, including listening, speaking, and conceptual knowledge.

Goal 6 continued

- Examples continued
 - Researchers: Assess the barriers and strategies to improve public access to health information as well as barriers and strategies to enhance health information seeking.
 - Public health professionals: Remove barriers that prevent persons with limited health literacy skills from participating in clinical trials and other health-related studies.

Conclusion

- Six principles for National Action
 - Cross-disciplinary
 - Strategic and evidence-based
 - Evaluate
 - Continuous public education
 - Include laws, policies and other institutional factors
 - Involve communities most affected by limited health literacy