

Working together to improve communication and health literacy

Presentation for the Australian Council for Adult Literacy
National Conference
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21 September 2012

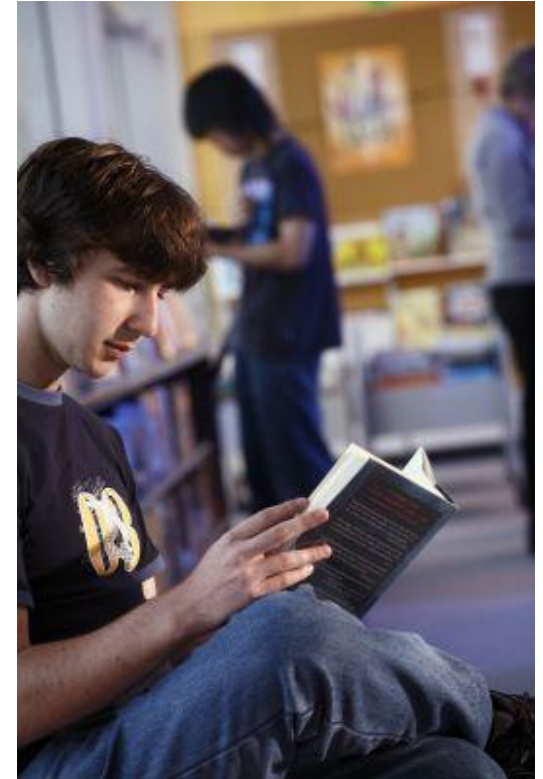
Session outline

1. The link between literacy and health
2. What's happening in health
3. Being a Healthy Woman: An educational resource for women with intellectual disability
4. What adult literacy workers can do

The link between literacy and health

Literacy skills predict health status better than other socio-demographic variables.

One of the most important ways to improve health, is to improve literacy.



Indirect links between literacy and health

- Low literacy = more likely to live in poverty:
 - lack access to a secure food supply
 - live in low quality housing
 - work in unsafe environments
 - more likely to smoke
 - encounter high stress in daily living



Direct links

- Limited in literacy → limited in health literacy
- Health literacy is the ability of a person to make good decisions and act in favour of their health and wellbeing in daily life.

The impact on people

People with poor health literacy:

- have less knowledge of health conditions and treatment
- have more difficulty navigating the health system
- find it harder to interact effectively with health care providers
- have less ability to understand and recall information.



The impact on people

People with poor health literacy:

- have less understanding about the importance of preventive health
- have less understanding about healthy lifestyles.



The impact on people

People with poor health literacy:

- have more difficulty managing their own health
- have more difficulty managing their illnesses.



Impact on use of services

People with low health literacy:

- have greater dependence on health care providers
- use emergency services more
- are admitted to hospital more
- experience more medication and treatment errors.

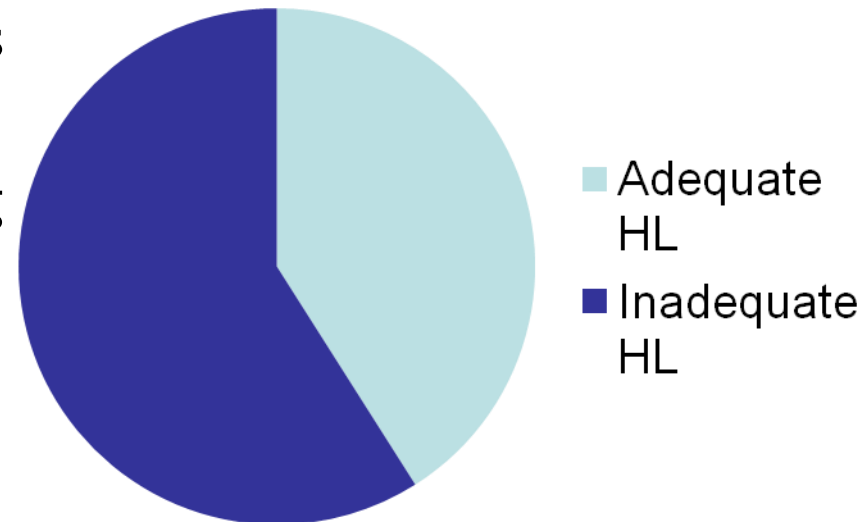


How common is poor health literacy?

41% of adults in Australia have adequate health literacy to do tasks like:

- assess the safety of a product using information on its label
- locate dosage instructions on a medicine bottle.

Health Literacy



How was health literacy assessed?

- 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey
- Assessed prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy and problem solving across a range of health activities:
 - health promotion
 - health protection
 - disease prevention
 - using health services.



Who is not health literate?

- People highly likely to have poor health literacy are:
 - **people who are illiterate**
 - elderly, young and culturally /linguistically diverse people
 - people of low socio-economic status
 - people with chronic mental illness
- 30% of people with a Bachelor degree have inadequate health literacy.

Facts

- A large proportion of people do not understand what we tell them about their health and wellbeing.
- This has a very significant impact on people's health and wellbeing, and the efficiency of our health and human services.
- Its about communication **and** health literacy.

What are we doing about it?

Bridging the communication gap



Permission to use this image was provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, USA

What are we doing about it?

- Communication and Health Literacy Action Plan
- Aims of the Action Plan:
 - improve service environments
 - enhance communication skills
 - improve health literacy.
- Partner organisations

Bridging the Communication Gap

Communication and Health Literacy Action Plan

1 July 2011–30 June 2013

Helping people access, understand and use information we provide
about health and wellbeing and our services and care.

Last revised 13 March, 2011



Department of Health and Human Services



Health education

- Communication skills and health literacy of future health workers
 - Surveying health literacy of UTAS medical students
 - UTAS undergraduate nursing curriculum
 - UTAS post graduate projects



Staff development

Communication and Health Literacy Toolkit, to help staff:

- communicate better
(e.g. verbal and non verbal)
- use teach-back methods
- respond to special communication needs
- remove literacy-related barriers to services
(e.g. forms and signage)
- promote health literacy, including through use of the arts.



Staff development

Training is being delivered to help health workers improve their verbal communication.



Improve health literacy

- DHHS is partnering with LINC Tasmania to:
 - promote literacy awareness training
 - develop a referral process to adult literacy support
 - include referral in systems.
- Encouraging childhood literacy in our service settings.



Improve the health literacy of specific population groups

BEING A HEALTHY WOMAN



An educational resource for women with intellectual disability, their families, health care providers, carers and support workers

Resource:
Being a Healthy Woman

Improving the health literacy of specific population groups

ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU

- Choose your target group!
- Use evidence-based material which promotes health literacy using appropriate language and methods



You have a right to learn about your health and your body.

Ask questions. If you don't understand tell the doctor.

You should talk to the doctor when something changes to your body. You may feel sick or have a pain.

A doctor can talk about your feelings, help you stay healthy and help you when you are sick.

You can take someone with you to the doctor. It may make it easier to talk to the doctor. The doctor should still talk to you.

ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU 1

We need your help!

With your clients:

1. Work out if health literacy is a priority.
2. Start the conversation.
3. Use health resources to teach literacy and numeracy.
4. Teach skills for interacting with health and wellbeing workers.



I. Is health literacy an issue?

- Shared indicators of low literacy and health literacy.
- Additional indicators of low health literacy.



Is health literacy a priority right now?

- Is there a health concern?
- Is the person having trouble navigating the health system?
- Is the person ready?

2. How to start the conversation about health literacy

- Make it part of your everyday work, your normal processes.
- It's a sensitive subject!
- Informal is best.
- Be supportive.
- Respect client privacy.



3. Use health resources to teach literacy and numeracy

- Medical consent form = document literacy
- Medication safety info = document literacy
- Medical brochure = prose literacy
- Lifestyle news article = prose literacy



Use health resources to teach numeracy and problem solving

- Medication doses = numeracy
- Healthy eating = numeracy
- Assessing risks = problem solving
- Managing symptoms = problem solving



4. Help people develop skills to interact with health workers

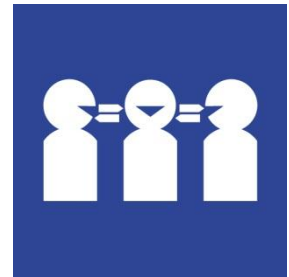
Health care workers have a responsibility to communicate clearly and help people understand.

Empowered clients who ask questions and check their understanding can manage their health better.



Teach and encourage people to

- Keep a diary of symptoms
- Ask questions
- Check their understanding
- Involve significant others
- Use interpreters / the National Relay Service
- Ask for non-written information.



What do you currently do?

?????

How do you / can you support
people with health literacy needs?

?????

What can we do better?

?????

How can health and human service providers better support people with literacy needs?

?????

What is the next step?

- Talk to your colleagues about the links between literacy and health literacy
- Advocate for the importance of health literacy
- Find out if your clients want help with their health literacy
- Discuss your clients' health literacy needs
- Help people apply literacy and numeracy to health
- **Empower clients** to ask questions and interact with health workers effectively.

Contact details

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Further information

- The Department of Health and Human Services Communication and Health Literacy webpage can be accessed here:
http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/pophealth/health_literacy
- The Communication and Health Literacy toolkit and resources for teaching health literacy will be added to this website over the next few months.
- You can join the health literacy mailing list by contacting health.literacy@dhhs.tas.gov.au