

What is Health Literacy?

Health literacy is defined by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as: the degree to which an individual has the capacity to obtain, communicate, process and understand basic health information and services to make appropriate health decisions. It includes knowing how to describe symptoms, where to find help for health issues, how to understand medical information and how to safely manage the use of medication. Increasing health literacy is essential to empowering people to manage their health and advocate for their family's and their own wellbeing, as well as reducing the burden on Canada's health care system.



Health Literacy in Canada

- According to the Canadian Public Health Association, 60% of Canadian adults and 88% of seniors are not health literate. Some seniors cannot follow instructions on a medicine bottle. (*Examples of Health Literacy in Practice* – Canadian Public Health Association, 2014)
- Health literacy is a stronger predictor of health status than socioeconomic status, age, or ethnic background. (*Health Literacy: Concept Analysis* – National Library of Medicine, 2005)
- Every person has a right to health. The ability to realise that right depends on everyone understanding their health, being able and empowered to make healthy choices, and being able to access effective interventions. (*Why is Health Literacy Failing So Many?* – The Lancet, 2022)
- Patients with low health literacy are more likely to make errors when interpreting medication instructions and warning labels. (*Patients with Low Health Literacy Make More Errors Interpreting Instructions and Warnings* – Institute for Safe Medical Practices, 2023)
- 60% of adults in Canada are unable to obtain, understand and act upon health information and services and to make appropriate health decisions on their own. Seniors, immigrants and unemployed people have, on average, lower levels of health literacy skills. (*Health Literacy in Canada: A Healthy Understanding* – Canadian Council on Learning, 2008)
- Providing chronic patients with education on self-management combined with ongoing supervision by a case manager could create savings of over \$2,000 per patient per year. (*A Vision for a Health Literate Canada* – Canadian Public Health Association, 2008)