



Advocate for Health Literacy in Your Organization

Health professionals must commit to advocating for improved health literacy in our respective organizations. We must embed health literacy in our programs, policies, strategic plans, and research activities.

You can advocate for health literacy in your organization.

- Make the case for health literacy improvement
- Incorporate health literacy into mission and planning
- Establish accountability for health literacy activities

Make the case for health literacy improvement

Include health literacy in staff training and orientation.

Training staff will increase awareness of the need for addressing health literacy and improve their skills for communicating with the public.

- Include information on health literacy in staff orientation.
- Make a presentation on health literacy at your next staff meeting.
- Circulate relevant research and reports on health literacy to colleagues.
- Post and share health literacy resources.

Identify specific programs and projects affected by low health literacy.

How can addressing health literacy improve the effectiveness of these programs? What existing or ongoing organizational activities contribute to the improvement of health literacy? How can these activities be recognized and supported?



Target key opinion leaders with health literacy information.

Brief senior staff and key decisionmakers on the importance of health literacy. Explain how health literacy relates to the organization's mission, goals, and strategic plan and how it can be incorporated into existing programs. Be specific!

Use the following **talking points** to make the case for health literacy improvement:

1. Only 12 percent of adults have Proficient health literacy, according to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy. In other words, nearly 9 out of 10 adults may lack the skills needed to manage their health and prevent disease.
2. Furthermore, 14 percent of adults (30 million people) have Below Basic health literacy. These adults were more likely to report their health as poor (42 percent) and more likely to lack health insurance (28 percent) than adults with Proficient health literacy.
3. There is a mismatch between the reading level of health information and the reading skills of the public. In addition, there is a mismatch between the communication skills of lay people and health professionals.
4. Adults with limited literacy skills are less likely to manage their chronic diseases and more likely to be hospitalized than people with stronger literacy skills. This leads to poorer health outcomes and higher healthcare costs.
5. People's ability to understand health information is related to the clarity of the communication. Health professionals' skills, the burden of medical jargon, and complicated healthcare delivery systems affect health literacy.
6. The benefits of health literacy improvement include improved communication, greater adherence to treatment, greater ability to engage in self-care, improved health status, and greater efficiency and cost savings to the health system as a whole.
7. Enhancing health literacy does not always require additional resources. It is a method for improving the effectiveness of the work we are already doing.

Incorporate health literacy into mission and planning

Include specific goals and objectives related to improving health literacy in strategic plans, performance plans, programs, and educational initiatives. Goals and objectives may be population based (for example, achieving *Healthy People 2010* Objective 11-2) or specific to the mission of the organization.

Convene a work group to develop a health literacy agenda for your organization.

Seek input and collaboration from a broad cross-section of employees.

Include health literacy in grants, contracts, and memorandums of understanding.

Recommend that all products, including educational materials, forms, and questionnaires, be written in plain language and tested with the intended users. Encourage contractors, grantees, and partners to indicate and evaluate how their activities contribute to improved health literacy.

Incorporate health literacy into Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs). These include requests for proposals (RFPs), applications (RFAs), corrections (RFCs), and program announcements (PAs). In addition, provide proposal reviewers with basic health literacy information and training when appropriate.

Establish accountability

Include health literacy improvement in program evaluation.

Incorporate health literacy objectives into evaluation criteria for programs and projects.

Include health literacy improvement in budget requests.

Designating funding for health literacy activities will hold staff and management accountable and encourage evaluation.

Implement health literacy metrics.

Implementing metrics or measurable objectives for your organization will help establish accountability for health literacy activities. Below are examples of health literacy metrics.

Our organization will:

1. Apply user-centered design principles to 75 percent of new Web pages.
2. Ensure that all documents intended for the public are reviewed by a plain language expert.
3. Provide all new employees with training in cultural competency and health literacy within 6 months of their date of hire.