

What is health literacy?

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, Title V, defines health literacy 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.

Health Literacy Capacity and Skills

Capacity is the potential a person has to do or accomplish something. Health literacy skills are those people use to realize their potential in health situations. They apply these skills either to make sense of health information and services or provide health information and services to others. Anyone who needs health information and services also needs health literacy skills to

- Find information and services
- Communicate their needs and preferences and respond to information and services
- Process the meaning and usefulness of the information and services
- Understand the choices, consequences and context of the information and services
- Decide which information and services match their needs and preferences so they can act

Anyone who provides health information and services to others, such as a doctor, nurse, dentist, pharmacist, or public health worker, also needs health literacy skills to

- Help people find information and services
- Communicate about health and healthcare
- Process what people are explicitly and implicitly asking for
- Understand how to provide useful information and services
- Decide which information and services work best for different situations and people so they can act

Researchers can choose from many different types of health literacy skill measures.

What is health literacy?

Organizational Health Literacy

Organizational health literacy is what organizations and professionals do to help people.

- Find
- Process
- Understand
- Decide on health information and services. Organizations that remove health literacy barriers are health literate.

How Can Organizations, Communities, and People Improve Health Literacy?

The resources on this site will help you learn about health literacy and what you, your organization or community can do to improve it. The goals and strategies in the National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy are a good place to begin. You also can check the Institute of Medicine's discussion and commissioned papers for proposed solutions on many health literacy topics.

Businesses, educators, community leaders, government agencies, health insurers, healthcare providers, the media, and many other organizations and people all have a part to play in improving health literacy in our society.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

For more information, visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/Learn/>