

## Health Literacy as a Pathway to Wellbeing:

### A Celebration of Health Literacy Month

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In an age where health information is abundant, and misinformation is equally (if not more) prevalent, the importance of health literacy cannot be overstated. The Health Literacy Council of Delaware is bringing this concept to the attention of Delawareans, statewide. Health Literacy is the ability to obtain, understand, and apply health information to make informed decisions about one's health and well-being. It serves as the foundation upon which individuals can build a healthier and more fulfilling life. It is multi-faceted, encompassing skills such as reading, listening, analytical thinking, decision-making, and in many cases, knowledge and understanding of digital platforms.

Far too often, medical terminology and healthcare materials are difficult to understand, especially for those with limited education, or individuals unfamiliar with the English language. Patients and their loved ones are frequently inundated with information from medical professionals or from their own research, resulting in overload, confusion, and frustration. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy – a large, nationally representative sample of health literacy in the United States – suggests that 36% of U.S. adults have substantial limitations in their ability to understand and use health information necessary to prevent and manage disease and chronic conditions and effectively seek and obtain healthcare.<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to popular belief, health literacy is not exclusively the responsibility of the individual receiving healthcare. Medical providers, policymakers, and educators each play crucial roles in ensuring that health information is accessible and comprehensible to all communities. By ensuring all participants in a loved one's healthcare have a solid foundation of health literacy, we as a state stand to gain:

1. **Improved Health Outcomes:** Individuals with higher health literacy are more likely to engage in preventive behaviors, manage chronic conditions effectively, and adhere to treatment plans. This leads to better health outcomes and reduced healthcare costs.
2. **Enhanced Patient-Provider Communication:** Effective communication between healthcare providers and patients is vital for accurate diagnosis and treatment. Health-literate patients can ask questions, understand instructions, and actively participate in their care.
3. **Increased Health Equity:** Research shows that a person's level of health literacy is closely linked to socioeconomic status and education level. Improving health literacy can help reduce health disparities by giving everyone, regardless of their background, the tools to take control of their health.

4. **Increased Autonomy:** A health-literate individual not only possesses the knowledge needed to make informed decisions about their health, but they are confident in their choices, promoting a sense of autonomy and self-efficacy.

The Health Literacy Council of Delaware was founded to initiate these gains for the First State. Under the auspices of the Delaware Literacy Alliance, the Council brings together key leaders and stakeholders from anchor healthcare, education, and state institutions to chart a path forward for health literacy integration across the age and culture spectrum. The Council has already made significant strides, such as standard development for the statewide Community Health Worker Apprenticeship program, which has successfully graduated 27 newly certified Community Health Workers. The fourth cohort is well underway.

We are also in the early stages of integrating health literacy into high school and post-secondary curricula, as well as building a dedicated workforce pipeline from our state colleges into in-demand healthcare careers in Delaware. These and many other endeavors culminate into one dedicated vision-achieving more equity through health literacy.

Health literacy is an essential skill that inspires individuals to take control of their health. It is a key fixture in achieving positive health outcomes, reduced healthcare costs, and increased health equity. As we ramp up for the new year and what 2024 may bring, join the Health Literacy Council of Delaware as we highlight this imperative aspect of healthcare. Ultimately, health literacy is not just a concept; it is a path to empowerment, better health, and a brighter future for all.

To learn more about the Delaware Health Literacy Council, or to join, please contact Greg O'Neill at [GONeill@Christianacare.org](mailto:GONeill@Christianacare.org), Megan McNamara Williams at [megan@deha.org](mailto:megan@deha.org), or Adara Scholl at [ascholl@pmgconsulting.net](mailto:ascholl@pmgconsulting.net).

## References

1. Kutner, M., Greenberg, E., Jin, Y., & Paulsen, C. (2006). The Health Literacy of America's Adults: Results From the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NCES 2006-483). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

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