

Definitions of Health Literacy

The ability to read, understand and act on health care information.

(Center for Health Care Strategies Inc)

An individual's ability to read, understand and use the information necessary to enjoy good health and to obtain adequate health care in order to maintain their health.

(Fineberg, 2004)

The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

(US Dept of Health and Human Services, Healthy People 2010)

The wide range of skills, and competencies that people develop over their lifetimes to seek out, comprehend, evaluate, and use health and information and concepts to make informed choices, reduce health risks, and increase quality of life.

(Zarcadoolas, Pleasant & Greer, 2003; 2006)

The ability to read and comprehend prescription bottles, appointment slips, and the other essential health-related materials required to successfully function as a patient.

(AMA Council of Scientific Affairs, 2000)

- The ability to read, understand and act upon health information;
- Reading, understanding and having the competence to make health decisions;
- Essential for service user engagement - relevant to whole population; and,
- Critically important in tackling health inequalities that require targeted approaches.

Coulter (2008)

Fundamental literacy refers to the ability to read, write, speak, and work with numbers.

Scientific literacy refers to the skills and abilities to understand and use science and technology.

Civil literacy refers to skills and abilities that enable citizens to recognise public issues and participate in civil society.

Cultural literacy refers to the ability to recognise, understand, and use the collective beliefs, customs, and worldview, and social identity of diverse individuals to interpret and act on information.

Zarcadoolas, Pleasant, & Greer (2005)

The ability of individuals to access and use health information to make appropriate health decisions and maintain basic health. For health and education researchers, the concept is a broad one. It includes whether individuals can read and act upon written health information, as well as whether they possess the speaking skills to communicate their health needs to physicians and the listening skills to understand and act on the instructions they receive.

Canadian Council on Learning, Health Literacy in Canada (2007) (p.3)

