Happy national Health Literacy Month! To celebrate, each year we launch a new campaign with helpful resources to assist you in your work to improve health literacy.

The theme for this year’s Health Literacy Month campaign is health literacy and health equity.

Health equity is about removing unfair differences in health status or health resources between groups of people – whether they are divided based on education, age, race, language or socioeconomic status. Health equity is crucial for overall public health, but it isn’t attainable without improving health literacy.

The two concepts are closely tied. People most likely to experience low health literacy are also most likely to experience health disparities. It’s important to understand both equity and literacy, and how the two are interconnected.

As a part of this campaign, we have developed a Health Literacy and Health Equity Toolkit that shares key messages, talking points, helpful statistics and resources that you can use. We also created a poster for internal use at your organizations, which can be posted in your office or a common space.

Thank you for all you do to improve health literacy throughout the year. We hope that these campaign materials support you and your efforts to improve people’s health and understanding of the health care system.

Did you know?

Compared to only 9% of Whites who had below basic health literacy:

- 24% of Blacks had below basic health literacy
- 25% of American Indians and Alaska Natives had below basic health literacy
- 41% of Hispanics had below basic health literacy

The Health Literacy of America’s Adults: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2003.

Additional tools

To support your health literacy and health equity efforts, we offer the following free, easy-to-access resources:

Plain Language Campaign – The plain language strategy is all about using simple, easy-to-understand words across all verbal, written and visual communications.

Numeracy and Health Literacy – Numeracy is an aspect of health literacy that includes the quantitative skills necessary to understand numerical directions such as medication adherence or measuring blood sugar levels.

Ask Me 3® – A program that encourages patients to ask providers specific questions to better understand their health.
Applying health literacy best practices to advance health equity

There are many health disparities across Minnesota. In fact, a report released in 2015 by MN Community Measurement found that our state has some of the largest racial, ethnic and geographic inequities in health status and incidence of chronic disease in the country.

Everyone deserves a chance to lead a healthy life, regardless of their background, socio-economic status or other factors. Knowing that these sorts of health disparities exist, health equity efforts focus on trying to provide the highest level of health care for all people.

As we know from our Health Literacy and Health Equity Campaign, a key component of achieving health equity across different populations is health literacy. As described in one of the Minnesota Health Literacy Action Plan’s Priority Areas, it’s important to invest in language and cultural resources so that health information is clear to people of many different backgrounds and cultures.

A good example of this work is HealthPartners’ recently launched Hmong Stroke Initiative. In partnership with the American Stroke Association, the initiative team integrated health literacy best practices into English versions of patient education materials on stroke-related topics. These materials were then translated into Hmong. Limited English proficiency has a profound impact on health literacy, so creating materials in different languages helps even the playing field for patients who speak different languages.

HealthPartners also took it a step further by making these materials culturally appropriate for the Hmong population. This involved working with members of the Hmong community when developing the materials to ensure the messaging and images would reflect their values and beliefs. For instance, because of this outreach, materials that list physical activity include examples popular within the community like gardening and walking. The materials also include photos of Hmong people, so readers can see themselves reflected in the resources.

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