



In the Know:

Health literacy news and best practices

July 2017

HealthEast improves health literacy efforts with Hmong and Karen communities

For Minnesotans to adopt healthy behaviors and make responsible, well-informed health decisions, they need to have access to clear, understandable information. As HealthEast discovered last year, this can be difficult when language and cultural barriers exist.

In 2016, HealthEast learned that many Hmong and Karen patients were having trouble understanding complications of, and treatment for, their obesity.

Using the Minnesota Health Literacy Action Plan as a guide, HealthEast worked with University of Minnesota Public Health master's students to interview doctors, cultural liaisons, and interpreters, and review the educational materials they provide to Hmong and Karen patients facing obesity.

HealthEast found that these materials were not culturally relevant. For example, the materials had too much content and featured photos of Western foods, rather than traditional Hmong and Karen foods. Additionally, these patients came



Community members gathered at the Hmong American Church in Maplewood for a flu shot clinic.



HealthEast educates community members about healthy foods at a health fair at Freedom School in the Frogtown neighborhood of Saint Paul.

from different educational backgrounds, and many of the patients were not able to read the materials.

HealthEast developed a scoring system for educational materials based on guidelines set forth in the Minnesota Health Literacy Action Plan.

As a result of this work and its partnership with the Minnesota Health Literacy Partnership, HealthEast is providing cultural relevancy training to its doctors and medical staff. Additionally, HealthEast is working with Hmong and Karen community members to make sure that materials are culturally and linguistically relevant.

This important work is helping reduce barriers that Hmong and Karen patients face in understanding health information and making responsible health decisions.

What is health literacy?

According to the U.S. Department of Education, nearly **9 out of 10 Americans** have difficulty understanding everyday health information.



Health literacy refers to:

- A patient's ability to obtain, understand and act on health information.
- The capacity of health care providers and health care systems to communicate clearly, provide health education, and empower patients.

Health Literacy Action Plan is here to help

The [Minnesota Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy](#) outlines six priorities with actionable strategies to improve health literacy in a variety of settings. Strategies range from improving patient-centered resources to enhancing education opportunities at all levels to investing in language and cultural resources.

The plan was developed by 42 organizations – all of which are part of Minnesota's health care community. Download it today and start implementing new strategies tomorrow!

Tips for tackling health literacy

Our responsibility as a health care community is to communicate clearly. Without clear communication, it is difficult for people to adopt healthy behaviors, follow medical advice, or understand their health insurance plans. To advance health literacy in Minnesota, we need to work together to actively promote strategies that improve patients' understanding of health care.

Here are some ways to easily implement health literacy strategies in your organization.

- **Use plain language:**
Avoid using medical terms that patients may not understand. Instead, use “living room” language to convey the message more clearly. Here are some examples:
 - **Anti-inflammatory** ... helps swelling go away
 - **Benign** ... not cancer
 - **Contraception** ... birth control
 - **Oral** ... by mouth
 - **Adverse** ... bad
 - **Lipids** ... fats in blood
 - **Monitor** ... keep track of or watch
 - **Diet** ... what you eat



- **Improve interpersonal communication:** Slow down the pace of your speech. Use plain, non-medical language and analogies that anyone could understand. Focus on three or fewer key concepts so that you don't overwhelm patients.
- **Simplify materials and forms:** Keep materials short and simple. Explain concepts in plain language that is free of jargon. Use clear headings, bullets, and lots of white space.

More resources are available in the [Minnesota Health Literacy Partnership's Health Literacy Toolkit](#).

October is Health Literacy Month

Throughout October, highlight ways that your organization is improving how it communicates with patients and caregivers. Make it a priority to implement at least one new strategy to improve health literacy.

Health Literacy Campaign Toolkit Builds Awareness

Join us at our Minnesota Health Literacy Partnership meeting on Wednesday, September 6, as we launch the Health Literacy Campaign Toolkit. The toolkit is a resource to help organizations build awareness around improving health literacy.

Upcoming events

[Community-Based Health Literacy Interventions workshop](#)

Roundtable on Health Literacy
Washington, D.C. (or webcast)
• July 19

[Minnesota Health Literacy Partnership meetings](#)

Minnesota Literacy Council
Saint Paul
• August 2
• September 6
• October 4

[International Conference on Communication in Healthcare & Health Literacy Annual Research Conference](#)

American Academy on Communication in Healthcare | Baltimore
• October 8-11

Become a member of the Minnesota Health Literacy Partnership

Join our statewide collaborative effort to address low health literacy rates in a coordinated and cost-effective way.

Members include:

- Health care companies, clinics and providers
- Community organizations
- Social service agencies
- Individuals interested in health literacy

Members have access to health education materials and training curricula, as well as monthly networking and informational meetings.

Visit our [website](#) for more information.

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