

**Minnesota Action Plan
to Improve Health Literacy
Executive Summary**

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Nearly 9 out of 10 Americans have difficulty using the everyday health information that is routinely available.¹ Recognizing this fact, a broad group of stakeholders came together to develop the Minnesota action plan to Improve Health Literacy.

For Minnesotans to adopt healthy behaviors and make responsible, well-informed health decisions, they must have access to clear, understandable information that is usable. This plan identifies barriers and solutions to improving health literacy.

Identified barriers to health literacy in Minnesota include:

- 1. The health care system is fragmented and complex.** In recent years the health care system has grown increasingly complex and people oftentimes do not understand how or where to seek help.
- 2. The burden of navigating health and health care is placed on the consumer.** The responsibility often falls on patients and their caregivers to find information and connect and coordinate the health care organizations involved in their care.
- 3. There is a lack of understandable and usable information available to consumers.** While many organizations offer tools and resources for understanding health and the health care system, there is often a lack of awareness among the general public and many health professionals that these tools and resources exist. Additionally, existing resources are frequently written or communicated at a level that is beyond the skills of the average consumer due to the use of complicated medical terminology and insurance jargon.
- 4. Sociodemographic differences affect how people understand health information.** Language, income, education, culture, insurance status, age, disability, race and geography all play a role in how people understand and interact with health care.

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

The Minnesota action plan identifies six priorities to improve health literacy.

- 1. Adopt and use health literacy best practices across all verbal, written and visual communication.** To make it easier for consumers to access and understand health information, the health care community should develop and implement best practices for providing written, verbal and visual health information in jargon-free, understandable language.
- 2. Make information about health relevant and accessible.** Patients and their caregivers should have easy access to usable information presented in a variety of mediums so they can understand diagnoses, make treatment and prevention decisions, and evaluate health risks.
- 3. Increase and improve patient-centered resources.** Health care professionals should provide patients with the necessary resources to understand the health care system and receive the most appropriate care. Whether individual assistance is provided in-person, by phone, or online, health care professionals should help patients coordinate and navigate health care.
- 4. Implement and enhance education opportunities at all levels.** Health literacy concepts should be integrated into primary, secondary and professional education.
- 5. Streamline processes within the health care system.** Productive partnerships within the health care system could identify and implement effective strategies and actions to lessen the burden on patients to navigate the fragmented health care system.
- 6. Invest in language and cultural resources.** Because limited English proficiency has a profound impact on health literacy, health care organizations need to take language and cultural differences into account when providing health information.

The Minnesota action plan is intended to serve as a tool for organizations and professionals throughout the broader health community. To truly make a difference in health literacy in Minnesota, organizations will need to work together to actively promote this plan. The 43 co-sponsors of the plan have agreed to prioritize and implement strategies that are appropriate for their organizations. Collectively, we can increase health literacy and improve Minnesota's health care system and health outcomes.