

PLAIN LANGUAGE CAMPAIGN

TALKING POINTS & KEY MESSAGES

PRIMARY MESSAGES

- Low health literacy has become increasingly concerning.
- Plain language is a tool that improves health literacy.
- Everyone appreciates plain language when it comes to their health or insurance information.
- Nearly 9 out of 10 Americans struggle to understand health information that is available.
- The primary responsibility for increasing the use of plain language and improving communication lies with health and insurance professionals and the organizations they work for.
- The Plain Language Campaign is intended to serve as a tool for a wide range of health organizations to improve health literacy and the use of plain language in Minnesota.
- Plain language is one of the strategies supporting the Minnesota Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy priority of adopting and using health literacy best practices across all verbal, written and visual communication.
- To learn more, contact the Minnesota Health Literacy Partnership at 651-662-0986 or healthliteracymn.org/contact-us.

WHY ARE HEALTH LITERACY AND PLAIN LANGUAGE IMPORTANT?

- Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the ability to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make good health decisions.
- Nearly 9 out of 10 Americans struggle to understand health information that is available.
- Complex medical terminology and confusing health insurance jargon affects people's ability to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services.
- People of all ages, races, incomes, and education levels are affected by limited health literacy. But seniors, minority groups, and people with disabilities, low incomes, limited reading skills, or limited English proficiency are more likely to experience communication barriers and misunderstandings.
- Health literacy is important for everyone because, at some point in our lives, we all need to be able to find, understand and use health information and services.
- Patients have the right to understand health care information that is necessary for them to safely care for themselves, and to choose among available alternatives.
- Health care professionals have a duty to provide information in simple, clear and plain language and to check that patients have understood the information before ending the conversation.

- Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires that federal agencies use “clear Government communication that the public can understand and use”.
- In MN, Governor Dayton’s 2014 executive order on plain language requires all state agencies to “use commonly used language, write in clear and concise sentences, and reduce the use of jargon and acronyms that make state government nearly impossible to understand”.

PLAIN LANGUAGE IS A TOOL THAT IMPROVES HEALTH LITERACY & HEALTH OUTCOMES

- Plain language is:
 - using everyday words
 - simple, clear and concise
 - communication your audience can understand the first time they hear or read it
- It allows people to find what they need, understand what they find, and act appropriately on that understanding to best meet their needs.
- Low health literacy is linked to poor health outcomes but plain language can help facilitate health behavior change and allow patients/consumers to make informed choices leading to improved health outcomes.
- Plain language also:
 - Makes your message stand out
 - Improves communication
 - Shows patient focus
 - Eliminates barriers
 - Improves patient safety
 - Reduces time spent explaining
 - Improves compliance
- Plain language is one of the strategies to achieve the key priorities of the **Minnesota Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy** [released March 2016].

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