

## HEALTH AND LEARNING

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### Health Literacy: A Vital Component of Health Promotion

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### Outline

- What is health promotion?
- What is health literacy?
- Why is health literacy a vital component of health promotion?
- To what extent is health literacy among seniors problem?
- What are the determinants of health literacy for seniors?
- What can be done to address health literacy in seniors?

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Health promotion is...

- “the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health”

(W.H.O., Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986)

## Principles of Health Promotion

- Involves population as a whole
- Acts on the determinants of health
- Combines diverse approaches
- Aims at public participation
- Health professionals have enabling role

(W.H.O.-EURO., Concepts and Principles of Health Promotion, 1984)

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### Prerequisites for Health

Peace...shelter...education...

Food...income

Stable eco-system

Sustainable resources

Social justice

Equity

(W.H.O., Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986)

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### Health Promotion Values

- Health
- Social Justice
- Power Sharing
- The Environment
- Enrichment of individual and community life

(Kahan and Goodstadt, 2005)

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### Health Promotion Approaches

- Communication
- Education
- Legislation
- Fiscal Measures
- Organizational Change
- Community Development
- Spontaneous Local Activities

(W.H.O., Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986)

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### Health Promotion Action Areas:

- Building healthy public policy
- Creating supportive environments
- Strengthening community action
- Developing personal skills
- Reorienting health services

(W.H.O., Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, 1986)

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# Key Concepts in Health Promotion

- Health
- Empowerment
- Healthy Communities
- Determinants of Health
- Quality of Life
- Health Literacy

(Rootman, 2008)

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### Health Literacy is...

- the ability to access, understand, evaluate and communicate information as a way to promote, maintain and improve health in a variety of settings across the life-course (CPHA Expert Panel on Health Literacy).

(Rootman and Gordon-El-Bihbety, 2008)

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### Literacy is...

- “the ability to understand and use reading, writing, speaking and other forms of communication as ways to participate in society and achieve one’s goals and potential” (CPHA Expert Panel on Health Literacy)

(Rootman and Gordon-El-Bihbety, 2008)

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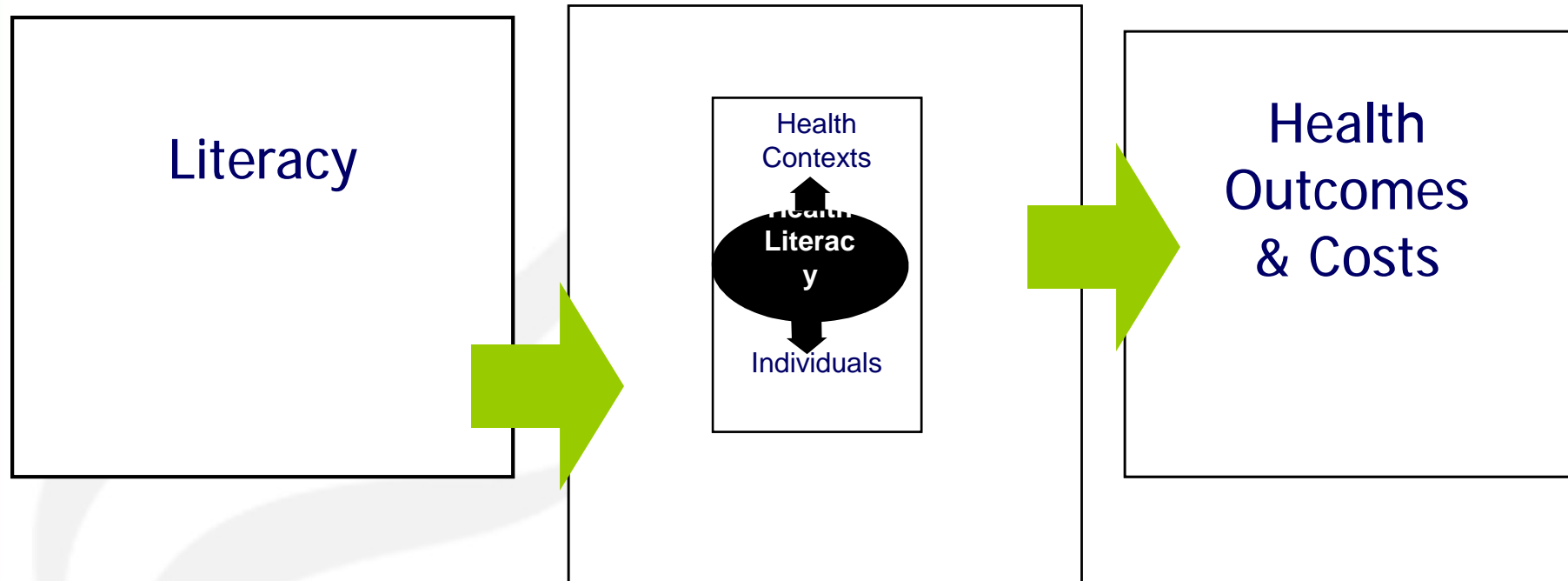
### Literacy and Health or Health Literacy?

- “Literacy and health” refers to the recent understanding that literacy is a determinant of health, both for individuals and for populations. This is due, in part, to the impact of literacy skills on socio-economic status, employment, quality of life and use of health services.
- “Health literacy”, on the other hand, relates more directly to the ability to access information, to make appropriate health-related decisions and to understand and manage interaction with the healthcare system.

(Hauser & Edwards, 2006)

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### *Health Literacy Framework*



*(I.O.M., 2004)*

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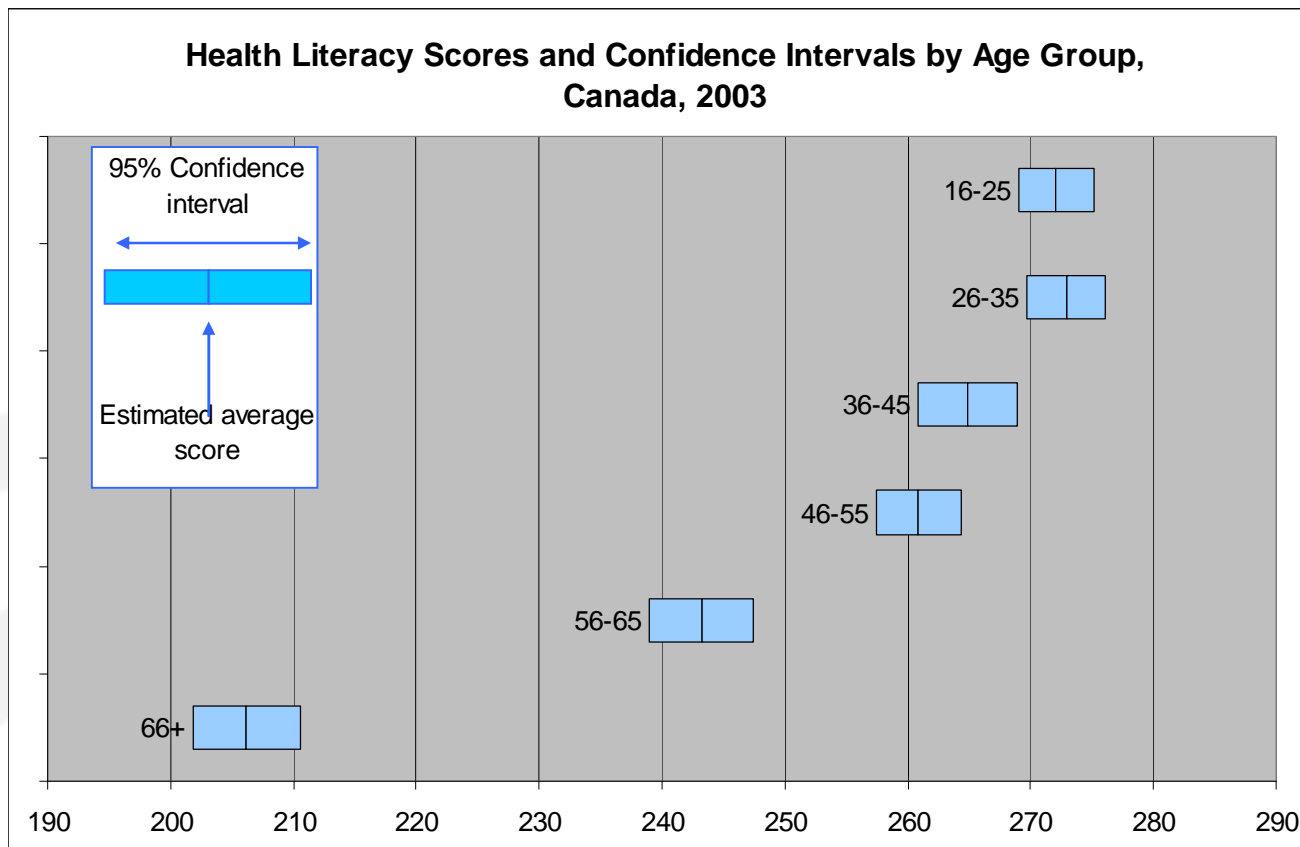
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### Why is Health Literacy a vital component of Health Promotion?

- Outcome of health promotion actions
- Mechanism through which education determines health
- Means of empowering people and reducing health inequities
- Contributes to improved health and quality of life
- Requires all health promotion approaches and action areas

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Source: Health Literacy in Canada: A Healthy Understanding, CCL, 2008, based on IALSS 2003

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### Low Health Literacy by Age Group in Canada, 2003

| <u>Age</u> | <u>% Below Level 3</u> |
|------------|------------------------|
| 16-25      | 50%                    |
| 26-35      | 49%                    |
| 36-45      | 53%                    |
| 46-55      | 59%                    |
| 56-65      | 68%                    |
| 66+        | 88%                    |

Source: State of Learning in Canada 2007, Canadian Council on Learning, based on IALSS 2003

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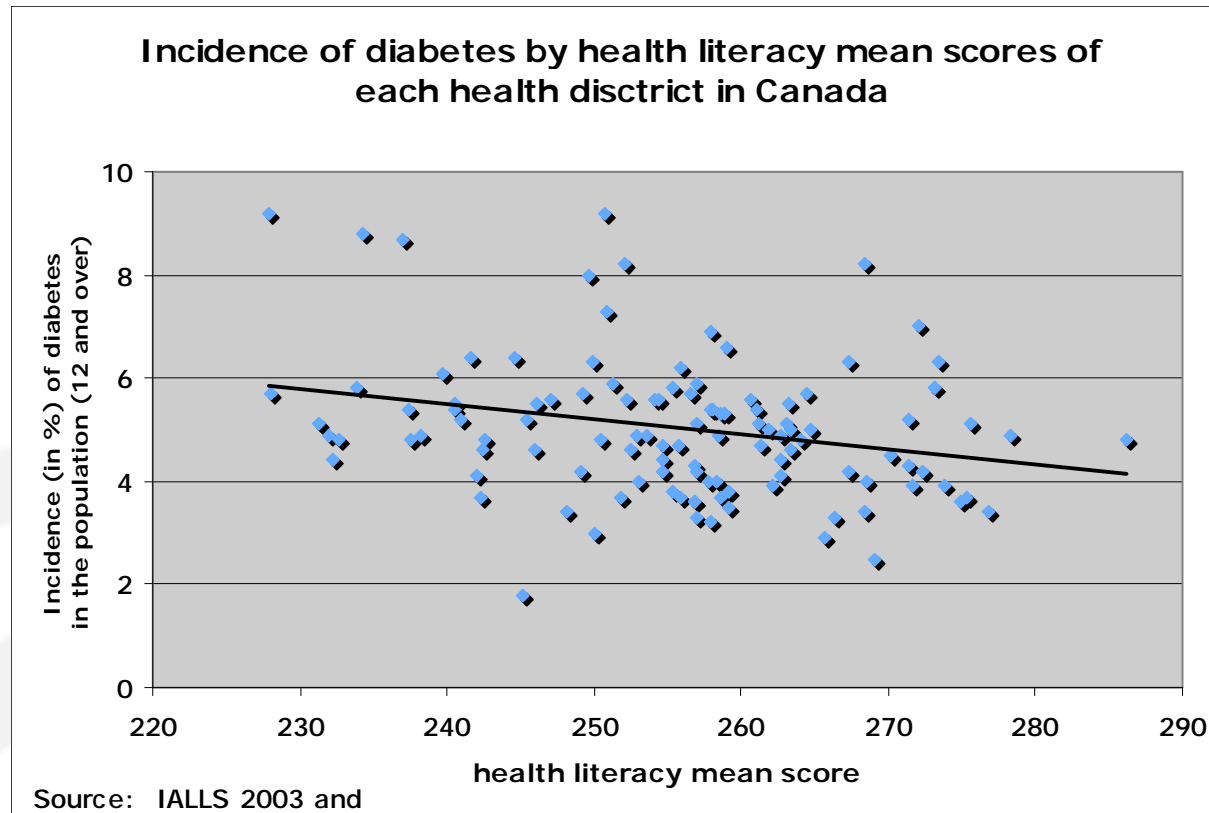
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### Health Literacy and Health-Related Outcomes (I.O.M., 2004)

- More likely hospitalization and negative disease outcomes
- Inappropriate medication use and compliance with physician orders
- Less use of preventive services and less care seeking
- Difficulties using health care system
- Less expression of health concerns
- Poorer diabetes control
- Higher rates of diabetes
- Higher mortality

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Source: Health Literacy in Canada: A Healthy Understanding, CCL, 2008, based on IALSS, 2003

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### Increasing chronic disease and health literacy:

- The number of people with arthritis in Canada aged 15 and older is projected to increase from approximately 4.59 million in 2006 to 5.5 million in 2016 (Health Canada, 2003)
- One of the ways to address chronic disease which is being increasingly used is patient self-management (McGowan, 2005)
- Low health literacy is a barrier to effective self-management. A review of randomized control trial studies found that 62% of patients with lower reading skill levels were unable or unwilling to engage in self-management (Johnston et al., 2006)
- Improving literacy and health literacy should lead to improved self-management of chronic diseases

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### Low literacy and premature mortality among older adults

- A recent U.S. study found that older adults with inadequate and marginal health literacy levels had a 50 per cent higher mortality rate over a five-year period than those with adequate skills. (Baker et al., 2007)
- Low health literacy was the top predictor of mortality after smoking, and was a more powerful variable than both income and years of education
- Another study found that limited literacy was independently associated with a nearly two-fold increase in mortality in the elderly. (Sudore, et al, 2006)

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### Challenges faced by Older Adults with Low Literacy and Health Literacy

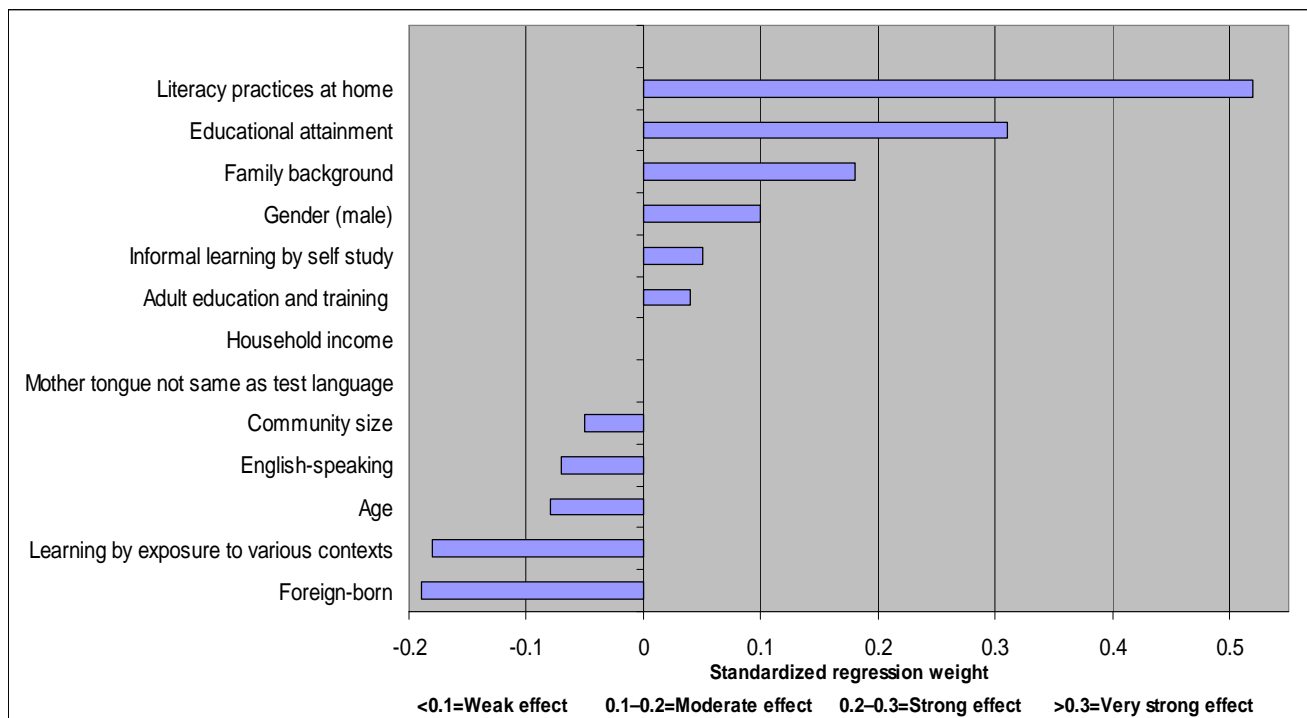
- Stigma
- Increasing literacy demands
- Isolation
- Poverty
- Perceptual or cognitive difficulties
- Difficulty maintaining their health, safety, independence and self-esteem
- Programs exclude older adults or don't meet their needs
- Perceived relevance of adult education
- Health education materials tend to require strong literacy skills
- Health workers are not trained to recognize literacy deficits

(Rootman and Gordon-El-Bihbety, 2008)

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### Factors Predicting Health Literacy for Adults aged 66 and over



Source: Health Literacy in Canada: A Healthy Understanding, CCL, 2008, based on IALSS, 2003

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### Strategies for Addressing Health Literacy

1. Improve skills required to be health literate
2. Provide services appropriate for people with all skill levels

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### An Example of Strategy #1

- *Mental Fitness for Life* is an 8-week series of intensive workshops based on grounded research that includes the following topics: Goal Setting; Critical Thinking; Creativity; Positive Mental Attitude; Learning; Memory; and Speaking your Mind.
- Evaluations suggest that the program has a positive on health, and that there is a need to promote mental fitness, like physical fitness, as a health promoting behavior that supports the progressive development of the individual across the lifespan.
- For more information see: Cusack et al., 2003 and Cusack and Thompson, 2005)

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### A Second Example of Strategy #1

- *The Computer for Elder Learning* project used free computer training as outreach tool to recruit older adults for literacy skills upgrading
- Although it failed to recruit people with low literacy skills, participants reported that they were reading and writing more due to the computer and more confident about their reading and writing skills.
- For more information, go to:  
<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/elder/Elder.pdf>

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### An Example of Strategy # 2

- The National Literacy Program developed *Guidelines for medication packaging and labeling for older adults*
- Process: Reviewed literature, consulted with stakeholders; collected samples of packaging and labeling materials; developed guidelines; held national symposium
- Outputs: Guidelines, resources

Available at:

<http://www.nlhp.cpha.ca/Labels/seniors/english/GoodMed-E.pdf>

## A Second Example of Strategy #2

- The Older Adult Literacy Resource Manual is two-part workshop resource manual intended to help trainers of literacy tutors, and others , to raise awareness of the particular needs of older adult literacy learners.
- Available from: <http://library.nald.ca>

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### Conclusions

- Health Literacy among older adults is an issue that needs to be addressed in Canada
- It can be done either by improving health literacy skills or by providing services appropriate for people with all skill levels
- There are some innovative efforts in Canada to address the health literacy needs of older adults
- Most of the efforts are short-term and not well supported
- Few of them have been evaluated rigorously

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### Recommendation

Older adults, seniors' organizations, gerontologists, governments and others need to pay more attention to the issues of literacy and health literacy among older adults and should participate in the development and implementation of a comprehensive Pan-Canadian strategy.

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