

Health Literacy Resources

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“Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely so they will remember it, and above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light.”

— An Adventure with a Genius:
Recollections of Joseph Pulitzer.

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Foreword

Health literacy is a multifaceted issue with far-reaching implications for the quality of patient care, patient safety, and overall healthcare satisfaction. It can be defined as the extent to which individuals possess the ability to locate, comprehend, and apply information and services to make informed decisions and take actions related to their own health, as well as the health of others (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], n.d.). Studies reveal that this challenge affects more than 77 million Americans, who have difficulty attempting to use health services, obtain quality care, and maintain healthy behaviors because their health literacy is inadequate (Lopez et al., 2021).

To address this critical issue, this guide has been collaboratively compiled by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Librarians and Veterans Health Education Coordinators. Its primary purpose is to provide VHA staff with effective strategies for communicating medical information to Veteran patients in a manner that aligns with health literacy principles, ensuring that information is conveyed in a way that patients can readily understand and act upon.

Within this guide, healthcare professionals will discover a comprehensive list of resources designed to aid them in enhancing health literacy among their Veteran patients. These resources aim to bridge the gap between medical jargon and patient comprehension, ultimately fostering a more informed and empowered patient population.

Developing Health Literate Patient Education Materials

[Clear Communication: Clear & Simple](#)

From the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Clear & Simple provides the steps to creating patient education materials for those with limited literacy skills.

[Health Literacy: Develop & Test Materials](#)

From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this toolkit includes sections on guidelines, tools, testing, visual communication resources, and understanding your audience. Includes [The CDC Clear Communication Index](#) and [Clear Writing Assessment](#).

[Health Literacy Discussion List](#)

This listserv currently has over 1,500 members who post about their experiences and questions about health literacy. This is a helpful group to get feedback on developing patient education materials.

[Health Literacy Online: A Guide to Writing and Designing Easy-to-Use Health Web Sites](#)

This research-based guide developed by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP) includes research-based recommendations and examples to help web managers and health professionals create accessible, understandable health websites.

[Health Literacy Style Manual](#)

The Maximus Center for Health Literacy developed this guide for the Southern Institute for Children and Families and includes information on the appropriate use of plain language, formatting, and styling, sample forms for evaluation of materials, field testing,

and translation issues.

[The Patient Education Materials Assessment Tool \(PEMAT\) and User's Guide](#)

The Patient Education Materials Assessment Tool (PEMAT) is a systematic method to evaluate and compare the *understandability* and *actionability* of patient education materials. It is designed as a guide to help determine whether patients can understand and act on information. Separate tools are available for use with print and audiovisual materials.

[Plain Language: Getting Started or Brushing Up](#)

From the NIH, this training resource consists of sections to help develop plain language skills, including “Before You Start Writing,” “Connecting with Your Readers,” “Presenting Your Information,” “Formatting and Visual Clarity,” and “Testing and Revising.”

[Plain Language Medical Dictionary Widget](#)

The librarians at the University of Michigan Taubman Health Sciences Library have developed a widget that can be placed on websites to translate medical language into plain language.

[The Plain Language Thesaurus](#)

Compiled by the CDC's National Center for Health Marketing, this thesaurus aims to make health information clear and easy to understand and offers plain language equivalents for commonly used medical terms, phrases, and references.

[Simply Put: Tips for Creating Easy-to-Read Print Materials Your Audience Will Want to Read](#)

This guide from the CDC is designed to help translate complicated scientific and technical information into material that captures and keeps the interest of your intended audience.

Universal Symbols In Health Care Workbook: Best Practice for Sign Systems

This summary explores universal symbols from Hablamos Juntos, Society for Environmental Graphic Design (SEGD), and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to help patients navigate the hospital. The symbols can also be used in patient education materials.

Checking Document Readability

[OnlineUtility.org Readability Test](#)

This site uses a tool to test the readability of a portion of text. Paste a section of text into the reading area and click Process Text. Find the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level number, which states the reading level of the text. The aim is for a fifth-grade reading level. This site also processes the text against other readability tools and will also provide a word count and suggestions for simplifying the readability of the text, if desired.

[PMOSE/KIRSCH Document Readability Formula](#)

A readability tool named PMOSE/IKIRSCH, after its creators. This tool evaluates text in fragmented or unusual formats, such as bulleted lists, tables, or nutrition labels.

[Readability on Wikipedia](#)

A thorough background on readability tools, which includes information on the Flesch-Kincaid formula, the Simple Measure of Gobbledygook (SMOG) formula, and the FORCAST formula, developed for the U.S. military. Wikipedia contributors.

[Test Your Document's Readability – Flesch-Kincaid](#)

An article on readability and how to check for readability in Microsoft Outlook or Microsoft Word.

Health Literacy Measurement Tools

[Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality Health Literacy Measurement Tools](#)

AHRQ's Health Literacy Measurement Tools support the assessment of health literacy in speakers of English and Spanish.

[All Aspects of Health Literacy \(AAHLS\)](#)

This tool measures function, communicative, and critical health literacy in primary healthcare settings to evaluate written health information, communication with health providers, health information management, and appraisal of individual autonomy.

Health Literacy Assessment Using Talking Touchscreen Technology (HealthLiTT)

This subjective tool measures health literacy using the Talking Touchscreen based on item-response theory (IRT) principles for patients with varying literacy skills and computer experience. The self-administered multimedia touchscreen tests prose literacy, document literacy, and quantitative literacy using a 14-item short form. This health information technology is free to use through healthlitt@northwestern.edu and is available in English and Spanish.

[Health Literacy Tool Shed](#)

The Health Literacy Tool Shed is a searchable online database of health literacy instruments and measures. Key characteristics psychometric properties, validation information, and an option to download the tool, if available, are included for each instrument and measure searched.

Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine-Short (REALM-SF)

REALM is a 7-item word recognition test to provide clinicians with a valid, quick assessment of patient health literacy. The REALM-SF has been validated and field-tested in diverse research settings.

Short Assessment of Health Literacy-Spanish and English(SAHL-E&S).

This instrument tests the subject's comprehension and pronunciation (decoding) of health-related terms. The tests are comparable in English and Spanish, with good reliability and validity. This tool is unavailable directly through the VA and needs to be requested through the library.

Short Test of Functional Health Literacy In Adults (S-TOFHLA)

This tool measures the patient's ability to read and understand health-related materials through 4 terms and 2 prose passages. It is available upon request from the VA Library Network.

Health Clip Art, Graphics, and Other Illustrations

NOTE: While the graphics and images may be free, certain restrictions may be noted on the following sites. Please be sure to follow all copyright guidelines when using the images.

[National Cancer Institute \(NCI\) Visuals Online](#)

The NCI Visuals Online database contains images from the collections of the Communication Services Branch and Mass Media Office of the Office of Communications, NCI. The collection spans everything from biomedical, science, and patient-care-related illustrations and provides public access to over 3,600 images.

[National Eye Institute \(NEI\) Photos, Images, and Videos](#)

The NEI provides photos and images on eye anatomy, disease simulations, clinician/patient interactions, and more.

[Improving Health Literacy: United States Pharmacopeia \(USP\) Pictograms](#)

The USP's pictograms are images in .gif or .eps format representing proper ways to take or store medications, precautions, or other important information about a medication that a health care provider should provide to their patient. You must register to use the site.

Online Videos for Clinicians

5 Things to Know about Health Literacy

Tips on providing clear communication to patients to ensure optimal health literacy.

Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion

Patients' testimonials about their experiences in understanding prescription labels.

Culture, Language, and Health Literacy Video - Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA)

Video emphasizes the need to recognize and address diverse consumers and communities' unique culture, language and health literacy,.

Scott Ratzan Defines Health Communication

Dr. Scott Ratzan speaks about the evolution of health communication and outlines how he developed the Journal of Health Communication. He believes clinicians have an ethical duty to use communication to improve the environment and communities, in addition to the lives of individual patients.

"This is Bad Enough"

Short YouTube video of Elspeth Murray reading her poem "This Is Bad Enough," which urges healthcare providers to speak plainly.

Online Patient Education Videos

[Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality Videos](#)

AHRQ has a growing list of videos and podcasts to help patients participate in their health care experience. Some information is available in Spanish.

[CDC](#)

The CDC offers information videos on various public health topics from A to Z to help fight disease and conditions affecting healthy living, workplace safety, environmental health, injury, violence and safety, global health, and more.

[Go4Lifevideos](#)

Created by the National Institute on Aging (NIA), Go4Life offers free sample workout videos for older adults to help with endurance, strength, and balance.

[Mass General Brigham Patient Education Videos](#)

Mass General Brigham providers have created videos to educate patients, families, and friends about various health topics.

[MedlinePlus: Videos and Tools](#)

Patients can view health videos on topics such as anatomy, body systems, and surgical procedures. The website includes health check tools, interactive tutorials, games, calculators, and quizzes. The Surgery Video tab provides links to pre-recorded webcasts of surgical procedures. Caution should be used when recommending them to patients due to the graphic content. The National Library of Medicine (NLM) also presents audio/podcast updates highlighting consumer health news.

Stanford Health Library

Videos on various health topics, including cancer, dental, surgery, wellness, and more.

Veterans Health Library

The Veterans Health Library is designed and available to all Veterans, their family members, and the public, no matter where the Veteran receives care. It covers topics like wellness, heart and lung problems, diabetes, mental health, senior health, and rehabilitation. In addition, it provides a wide variety of trusted and consistent health information for Veterans, including attractive and colorful 'Go-To Guides,' a library of more than 150 videos and more than 1,500 printable health and medication information sheets in English and Spanish.

Resources

* = (Available on the VA Network; for [remote access](#))

Books

Ferri, Brittany. (2021). *An occupational therapist's role in health literacy and integrated care*. Nova Science Publishers. ISBN-13: 9781536195491

Health literacy: New directions in research, theory and practice. (2017). IOS Press. ISBN-13: 9781614997900

Kline, Jo. (2017). *The 60-minute guide to health literacy: A common sense approach to informed medical decision making*. Providentia. ISBN-13 9780692955062

Logan, Robert A., & Siegel, Elliot R. (Eds.). (2020). *Health literacy in clinical practice and public health: New initiatives and lessons learned at the intersection with other disciplines*. IOS Press B.V. ISBN-13: 9780692955062

*Lopez, C., Kim, B., & Sacks, K. (2022). [Health literacy in the United States: Enhancing assessments and reducing disparities](#).

*Okan, Orkan, Bauer, Ullrich, Levin-Zamir, Diane, Pinheiro, Paulo, & Sørensen, Kristine. (Eds.). (2019). [International handbook of health literacy: Research, practice and policy across the lifespan](#). Policy Press. ISBN-13: 9781447344513

Osborne, Helen. (2018). *Health literacy from A to Z: Practical ways to communicate your health message* (Second edition). Aviva Publishing. ISBN-13: 9781947937130

*Rowlands, G. (2018). [What is the evidence on existing policies and linked activities and their effectiveness for improving health literacy at national, regional and organizational levels in the WHO European Region?](#) WHO Regional Office for Europe. ISBN-13: 978-9289053198

Saboga-Nunes, Luis A., Bittlingmayer, Uwe H., Okan, Oorkan, & Sahrai, Diana. (Eds.). (2021). *New approaches to health literacy: Linking different perspectives*. Springer VS. ISBN-13: 9783658309084

Stewart, Melissa N. (2020). *The art and science of patient education for health literacy* (First edition). Elsevier. ISBN-13: 9780323609081

Wittenberg, Elaine, Goldsmith, Joy V., Ragan, Sandra L., & Parnell, Terri A. (2020). *Caring for the family caregiver: Palliative care communication and health literacy*. Oxford University Press. ISBN-13: 9780190055233

Journal Articles

Brega, A. G., Hamer, M. K., Albright, K., Brach, C., Saliba, D., Abbey, D., & Gritz, R. M. (2019). Organizational health literacy: Quality improvement measures with expert consensus. *HLRP: Health Literacy Research and Practice*, 3(2), e127-e146.

Glick, A. F., Brach, C., Yin, H. S., & Dreyer, B. P. (2019). Health literacy in the inpatient setting: implications for patient care and patient safety. *Pediatric Clinics*, 66(4), 805-826.

Harris, L., Ginzburg, S., Brach, C., Block, L., & Parnell, T. A. (2019). A model collaboration to develop a health literate care curriculum: preparing the next generation of physicians to deliver excellent patient outcomes and experiences. *NAM Perspectives*, 2019.

Koh, H. K., Brach, C., Harris, L. M., & Parchman, M. L. (2013). A proposed 'health literate care model' would constitute a systems approach to improving patients' engagement in care. *Health Affairs*, 32(2), 357-367.

Santana, S., Brach, C., Harris, L., Ochiai, E., Blakey, C., Bevington, F., Kleinman, D., & Pronk, N. (2021). Practice full report: Updating health literacy for healthy people 2030: Defining its importance for a new decade in public health. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, 27(6), S258.

Journals

[*Health Literacy Research and Practice \(HLRP\)](#)

HLRP is an Institution for Healthcare Advance open-access journal. A journal that provides clinical and behavioral information for best practices and research geared towards practitioners and investigators. For those who engage in health literacy practices and research in education, epidemiology, health services, and public health.

[*Patient Education and Counseling](#)

This is an international journal for interdisciplinary healthcare professionals, and researchers. A journal that explores models of counseling, communication, and education within healthcare.

Websites

[AHRQ Health Literacy](#)

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) is the lead US federal agency charged with improving the safety and quality of healthcare for all Americans. AHRQ develops tools and data to improve the US healthcare system and help consumers, healthcare professionals, and policymakers make informed decisions. AHRQ has developed many resources to address health literacy including:

- Improvement Tools including [Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit](#)
- Professional Education and Training
- Patient Education and Engagement Resources including [The SHARE Approach](#), [Communicate Clearly](#), [Teach-Back](#))
- Publications: Guiding frameworks, articles, and reports on health literacy
- Becoming a Health Literate Organization
- Research Tools, Data, and Funding
- [Health Literacy and Cultural Competency](#)
- [Pharmacy Health Literacy Center](#)
 - AHRQ provides pharmacists with recently released health literacy tools and other resources, including a discussion group to exchange ideas and experiences with peers about health literacy challenges.

Ask Me 3

Ask Me 3® is a patient educational program that encourages patients and families to ask their providers three specific questions to better understand their health conditions and what they need to do to stay healthy: 1. What is my main problem? 2. What do I need to do? 3. Why is it important for me to do this? The site has presentation tool kits for professionals and patients, which includes fact sheets, brochures, statistics, logos, guidelines and more.

CDC: Health Literacy

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed a website that provides information and tools to improve health literacy and public health. These resources are for all organizations that interact and communicate with people about health, including public health departments, healthcare providers and facilities, health plans, government agencies, non-profit/community and advocacy organizations, childcare and schools, the media, and health-related industries.

[Center for Plain Language](#) (via Google Chrome)

The Center for Plain Language has been working to fix brain-numbing language by supporting laws that will make Plain Language the law of the land, and by training writers who want to be understood. Videos demonstrate the hazards of convoluted language; viewers can sign a petition urging plain language in all documents and learn more about plain language.

[Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion | The National Academies Press](#)

The Institutes of Medicine's Committee on Health Literacy documents the health literacy problem and describes its origins, consequences, and solutions. Published in 2004, this online book is often cited in health literacy studies and guides.

[Health Literacy Month](#)

Each year, October is observed as Health Literacy Month. Author Helen Osborne, who established the month in 1999, wanted to increase access to healthcare information. Several camps and workshops are organized for healthcare practitioners, discussing ways to improve health literacy worldwide.

[Health Literacy Practices in Primary Care Settings: Examples From the Field](#)

This report funded by the Commonwealth Fund and Kaiser Permanente, identifies health literacy practices that providers commonly use to improve communication with patients during clinical visits.

[Joint Commission: Speak Up](#)

The Joint Commission's revamped Speak Up program is a patient safety initiative to encourage patients to ask their health care providers questions. Various copyright-free pamphlets on medical and surgical care, pain management, patients' rights, and more are

available at the site.

[MedlinePlus - Health Information from the NLM](#)

Health topics such as anatomy, body systems, illnesses, and surgical procedures. The website includes health check tools, interactive tutorials, games, calculators, and quizzes. The Surgery Video tab provides links to pre-recorded webcasts of surgical procedures. Caution should be used when recommending them to patients due to the graphic content. The NLM also presents audio/podcast updates highlighting consumer health news.

[National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy](#) HHS has compiled this report with seven goals and multiple strategies to improve the national health literacy rate.

[National Network of Libraries of Medicine—Health Literacy](#)

Health literacy is highlighted in a chapter from “Consumer Health: An Online Manual,” written for librarians. Contents include definition, skills needed for health literacy, background, the role of the consumer health librarian, support, health literacy organizations and programs, bibliographies and weblibliographies, and health literacy listservs.

[Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Health Literacy Resources](#)

A comprehensive list of initiatives and online resources designed to learn more about health literacy, communication and cultural competence. Many sites offer publications and articles within embedded links.

[Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Health Literacy Online Guide](#)

This research-based guide will help you develop intuitive health websites and digital tools that can be easily accessed and understood by all users — including the millions of Americans who struggle to

find, process, and use online health information.

[PlainLanguage.gov](#)

This government website offers information on the Plain Language initiative through examples, guidelines for content and layout in documents, an online tutorial, and numerous resources, including links to writing tools.

[Program for Readability in Science & Medicine \(PRISM\)](#)

The Program for Readability In Science & Medicine (PRISM) is a Group Health Research Institute initiative to improve the readability of consent forms and other print materials used in communication with study participants. Established in 2005, PRISM's suite of resources includes The PRISM Readability Toolkit, plain language editing and consultation, and online and in-person training workshops.

[Staying Healthy: An English Learner's Guide to Health Care and Healthy Living](#)

Staying Healthy is an award-winning curriculum that is used throughout the United States. It is written at a 4th-5th grade reading level and is suitable for low intermediate level ESOL learners and above. "Staying Healthy for Beginners" is written at a lower reading level, making it more accessible to learners at the high beginner level.

Workshops & Committee Summaries

*Alper, Joe. (2018a). *[A proposed framework for integration of quality performance measures for health literacy, cultural competence, and language access services: Proceedings of a workshop](#)*. The National Academies Press. ISBN-13: 978-0-309-46672-1

*Alper, Joe. (2018b). *[Community-based health literacy](#)*

[interventions: Proceedings of a workshop](#). The National Academies Press. ISBN-13: 978-0-309-46672-1

*Alper, J., National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (U.S.), National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (U.S.), & National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (U.S.) (Eds.). (2018a). [Building the case for health literacy: Proceedings of a workshop](#). The National Academies Press.

*Alper, Joe, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (U.S.), National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (U.S.), & National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (U.S.) (Eds.). (2018b). [Health literacy and older adults: Reshaping the landscape: proceedings of a workshop](#). The National Academies Press. ISBN-13: 978-0-309-47946-2

*Alper, Joe, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (U.S.), National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (U.S.), National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (U.S.), & National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (U.S.) (Eds.). (2018c). [People living with disabilities: Health equity, health disparities, and health literacy: Proceedings of a workshop](#). The National Academies Press. ISBN-13: 978-0-309-45789-7

VA Library Network Office Patient Education Resources

* = (Available on the VA Network; for [remote access](#))

* [Access Databases](#)

Multiple databases, including AccessEmergency Medicine, AccessMedicine, AccessPharmacy, and AccessSurgery. There are 5,000 topics listed under “acute advisor,” “adult advisor,” “medicine advisor,” and “pediatric advisor.” Patient handouts can be customized with a logo or personal message for patient handouts. The reading level is specified as “layman’s terms”. VA materials are in English.

* [Clinical Key](#) and [ClinicalKey for Nursing](#)

This resource is evidence-based, peer-reviewed, and authored predominantly by Elsevier Interactive Patient Education. There are over 15,000 educational handouts. Standard patient education materials are written at 5th-8th grade reading levels. Also, there are “Easy to Read” handouts written at a 2nd-4th grade reading level. Patient materials are available in both English and Spanish.

* [LexiComp Online for Dentistry](#)

There is a patient education module with information on prescription medications, OTCs, herbal products, conditions, and/or procedures. Over 7,500 patient leaflets are available in 5th-7th grade reading levels. English and Spanish and medication leaflets are available in up to 19 languages.

* [Natural Medicines](#)

Information for patients regarding alternative therapies and dietary supplements, which includes benefits, side effects, supplements safety, drug interactions, and other information.

***Nutrition Care Manual (NCM)**

Evidence-based patient education handouts regarding nutrition care for 100+ conditions, topics, and diseases. Note: Use Google Chrome to access NCM; certain functions do not work when using Internet Explorer.

***Psychiatry Online**

Information for patients regarding mental disorders to include risk factors, symptoms, and treatment options.

***UpToDate**

UpToDate has two patient education options: “The Basics,” which are short overviews that are written utilizing plain language principles. The other option is “Beyond the Basics,” which are overviews that are longer detailed information.

***VisualDX**

VisualDX includes patient handouts, listed as “Information for Patients,” for over 200 common diseases and medical images. Patient materials can be customized. Patient materials are at a 5th grade reading level and available in English and Spanish.

Training Opportunities

VHA TMS Health Literacy Training

- VHEC Professional Development Program 2020: Developing a Health Literacy Toolbox (VA 43480)
- Patient Education for Poor Readers (NFED 4643723)
- Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support (DSMES) and Diabetes Self-Management Training (DSMT) at VHA (VA 131006064)
- Information Literacy (NFED 7002824)
- Building Digital Literacy (NFED 4613063)
- Developing Cultural Literacy (NFED 4606338)

CDC Health Literacy Training

Training for those working with health information or in services to ensure effective and equitable healthcare delivery for all; pertaining to plain language, health literacy, and culture and communication.

AHRQ Health Literacy Professional Education and Training

Training modules for health care professionals and leaders to ensure individuals comprehend their options and make informed choices.

Health Literacy Training from Organizations Other than CDC

Training and resources regarding health literacy practices to foster a better understanding in health care interactions with patients and the public.

NLM Health Literacy On Demand

A narrated tutorial to learn more about organizational health literacy, personal health literacy, and communication practices.

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<https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/health-literacy-healthy-people-2030>