

Summary of Issue

“Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions” ([HHS, ODPHP](#)). Health literacy, then, includes access to care; comprehension of not only the health system but also health and wellness principles, including what causes health; and an understanding of care utilization and navigation.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), describe health literacy a little differently, and also highlight numeracy:

Literacy is understanding, evaluating, using, and engaging with written text to participate in the society, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential.

Numeracy is the ability to access, use, interpret, and communicate mathematical information and ideas, to engage in and manage mathematical demands of a range of situations in adult life.

Like health equity, health literacy and numeracy are cross-cutting issues with many parts. Methods to address health literacy and numeracy are many and varied.

Data*

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) estimates that only 12% of adults have proficient health literacy: 53% have intermediate literacy levels, 21% have basic health literacy, 14% are at levels below basic literacy.

Data measures could include:

- Access to care
- Confidence navigating health system
- Linking health behaviors to health outcomes
- Self-efficacy: belief that changing behaviors or actions will result in positive health outcomes
- Reading levels of patients/people; educational opportunities
- Reading level and clarity of available materials

**Lack of Aurora-specific data remains a challenge at this time and suggests an opportunity moving forward*

Current initiatives that address issue

HHS identifies ways in which health literacy can be addressed ([click here for source](#)):

- Simplify written materials
- Improve providers' communication
- Improve patients' ability to self-manage

The National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy names several goals and strategies ([source here](#)):

- “Develop and disseminate health and safety information that is accurate, accessible, and actionable;
- promote changes in the health care system that improve health information, communication, informed decision making, and access to health services;
- incorporate accurate, standards-based, and developmentally appropriate health and science information and curricula in child care and education through the university level;

- support and expand local efforts to provide adult education, English language instruction, and culturally and linguistically appropriate health information services in the community;
- build partnerships, develop guidance, and change policies; increase basic research and the development, implementation, and evaluation of practices and interventions to improve health literacy;
- and increase the dissemination and use of evidence-based health literacy practices and interventions.”

According to the [CDC](#), Colorado does not have an official health literacy or numeracy coalition or initiative, as other states do. However, the [Colorado Society for Public Health Education \(COSOPHE\)](#), the [Colorado Coalition for the Medically Underserved \(CCMU\)](#), and other organizations have health literacy on their radars and likely in their future plans.