



What is Health Literacy?

Health literacy is the ability to obtain, process, and understand basic health information to make appropriate health decisions. Health literacy skills enable individuals to effectively communicate with providers, become engaged in their own health care, and follow treatment plans.

Health Literacy

Why is it important?

Healthy literacy has a direct impact on health outcomes, as well as health care spending. Individuals with low health literacy may have difficulties reading thermometers, using inhalers, breastfeeding properly, scheduling necessary health screenings, following post-operative instructions and maintaining medication adherence. Consequently, low health literacy is estimated to cost the United States health care system between \$50 billion to \$73 billion annually.

Who has low health literacy?

According to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), 36% of adults have a basic or below basic level of health literacy. Basic or below basic signifies increased difficulties interacting with health care providers, following clinical direction, engaging in preventive care through self-management or illness prevention and navigating through the health care system to find proper support. Other studies revealed that 26% of people did not understand when their next appointment was scheduled, 42% did not understand how to take medication on an empty stomach and up 78% misinterpret warnings on prescription labels.

Identifying and addressing low health literacy

If providers observe warning signs that lead them to suspect low health literacy is an issue, providers are encouraged to take the following actions to help engage members in their own care and improve health outcomes.

- **Avoid medical terminology.** Use easy-to-understand plain language and phrases when discussing health conditions and treatment options, such as the examples in the table below.

Medical Term	Plain Language
Contraception	Birth control
Hypertension	High blood pressure
Referral	Send you to another doctor
Radiology Department	X-ray Department

- **Do not overload the member with information.** Instead of going into great detail, which can be overwhelming and confusing, focus on the most important big-picture issues, reiterating key points and phrases to improve comprehension and retention.
- **Employ the teach-back method.** Respectfully explain to members that you want to make sure they have all the information they need and understand your instructions. Follow this by asking questions such as, “Can you explain to me how you will take your medicine?” or “What will you tell your family about your condition when you get home?” It is important for the member to repeat the key medical information by engaging in a dialogue that is comfortable for you and the member. Repeat and clarify as necessary.
- **Incorporate more visual aids.** Pictures, diagrams and/or models are effective for showing members what you are trying to explain.
- **Utilize AmeriHealth Caritas Florida as a resource.** If you have members struggling with health literacy, please refer them to the Rapid Response and Outreach Team at **1-855-371-8072**. Case managers can help provide members with more information about their medical conditions, offer medication reminders and follow-up regarding their appointments or tests. In addition, case managers can also help them connect with other beneficial community resources and translation services.

