



## Public Health: A population-based approach to health literacy

Public health agencies have a duty to protect and promote the public's health and well-being. This includes informing people of threats to their health and safety.

In other words, public health communicators are responsible for getting out vital information. This information is often technical or unfamiliar. It is our job as public health professionals to ensure that the information and services we provide can be accessed, understood and used in the daily lives of all in our communities. Public health contexts vary and can include

- Health clinics
- Grocery stores
- Neighborhoods and communities
- Workplaces

According to [a recent CDC blog post](#):

Limited health literacy, however, affects more than communication. It affects how we design, implement and assess public health programs, conduct outbreak investigations, respond to public health emergencies, and monitor and track health conditions in communities.

When we

- provide screening services that require people to fill out forms they don't understand,
- ask residents questions about community conditions that don't make sense to them, or
- provide jargon-filled information about a public health threat that doesn't provide a clear action step to lower the threat

we've missed an opportunity to improve public health.

Estimates show that the average American spends only one hour a year in the doctor's office or a hospital. Consumers access the majority of health information and services in their homes and communities.

Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/training/page575.html>

### Key Words

Integrated approach, Usability of health information, Public health contexts



## Tips for Health Educators

### What we can do!

Improving low health literacy requires a comprehensive set of strategies, including the use of plain language techniques, culturally and linguistically appropriate communication, participatory design, field-tested materials, policy change, and advocacy.

In order to enhance the usability of health information health educators can work to:

- Improve the communication skills of public health professionals, including health educators by taking classes and sharing information about ways to improve health literacy.
- Ensure Cultural and linguistic suitability of health information and services by field testing materials and evaluating programs.
- Work to develop public health infrastructures that facilitate and support healthy behaviors, such as access to care, and healthy food.
- Build community partnerships with non-traditional partners, such as adult educators, librarians and teachers of English as a second language.
- Promote policy changes.

### Start today:

Build 15 minutes into your schedule this week to take the CDC Public Health Literacy Training at <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthLiteracy/training/>

## Strategy in Action

### Using Radio To Improve Health Literacy

Radio Bilingue is the only Latino radio network in the United States, reaching out to listeners in nearly 80 communities across the country. The network features La Cultura Cura, a radio campaign that promotes health and wellness for Spanish-, Mixtec-, and Triqui-speaking farm workers and their families. Language and cultural barriers often keep this population from accessing health care and navigating the medical system.

La Cultura Cura includes talk shows, feature news reports, educational messages, and mini radio dramas—all designed to create health behavior changes, community action, and public policy changes. An evaluation of a recent campaign found that 66 percent of listeners have discussed health programming with others.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, the new reports have prompted new pesticide drift regulations and prompted regulations that address health-related illness and death in fields in California.

*For more on this strategy, visit the townhall summary at:*

<http://www.health.gov/communication/literacy/TownHall/ca.htm>

## Resources

- CDC Public Health Literacy Training  
<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthLiteracy/training/>
- SOPHE Resolution to Improve Health Literacy  
<http://www.sophe.org/Resolutions.cfm>  
[http://www.sophe.org/Sophe/PDF/2010HealthLiteracy\\_GatewaytoImprovingPublicHealth.pdf](http://www.sophe.org/Sophe/PDF/2010HealthLiteracy_GatewaytoImprovingPublicHealth.pdf)
- CDC Health Literacy web site  
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/>