

Guide for Providers: Health Literacy

BACKGROUND:

- Health literacy describes the skills needed to get, understand and use information to make good decisions about health¹.
- Health literacy includes more than just the ability to read.
- Health-care providers are often unaware of their patient's health literacy levels.
- 60% of Canadian adults do not have the necessary skills to manage their health and make health decisions on their own¹.
- Limited health literacy can lead to medication errors, adverse events and even death.

¹Ref: Expert Panel of Health Literacy, 2008

HOW DO I SCREEN FOR LIMITED HEALTH LITERACY?

Asking a patient 'how confident are you in filling out medical forms by yourself?' If answers 'somewhat', 'a little' or 'not at all' vs. 'Very Comfortable or 'Quite a bit' =>limited health literacy

WHAT ARE TOOLS I CAN USE WITH PATIENTS WHO HAVE LIMITED HEALTH LITERACY?

Teach back is way to assess understanding in your patients. Ask a patient or family member to demonstrate or explain what they need to know or what they need to do, using their own words. If patient is not able to teach back correctly, explain again and recheck.

RESOURCES FOR HEALTH-CARE PROVIDERS:

- 1** CMA/Public Health Agency of Canada launched CME course on health literacy available free of charge at [HTTPS://WWW.MDCME.CA/COURSEINFO.ASP?ID=119](https://www.mdcme.ca/courseinfo.asp?id=119).
- 2** Toolkit to help you practice teach-back effectively:
[HTTP://WWW.TEACHBACKTRAINING.COM/USING-THE-TEACH-BACK-TOOLKIT](http://www.teachbacktraining.com/using-the-teach-back-toolkit).
- 3** Use of health information in plain language available at:
[HTTP://WWW.UHN.CA/PATIENTSFAMILIES/HEALTH_INFORMATION](http://www.uhn.ca/patientsfamilies/health_information)