

# The Importance of Health Literacy

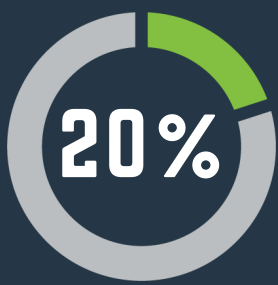
## What is Health Literacy

Health literacy is defined as “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.”

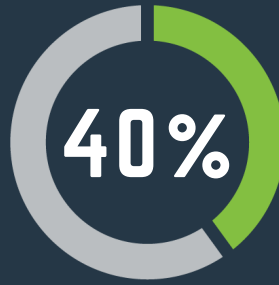
Source: S.C. Ratzan and R.M. Parker. Introduction, National Library of Medicine Current Bibliographies in Medicine: Health Literacy. (Bethesda, MD: 2000).

## The Facts

Most health information is written at the 10th grade level or higher, **but...**



Percentage of U.S. citizens who read at a 5th grade level or below



Percentage of seniors read at or below the 5th grade level



Percentage of African Americans & Hispanics read at or below the 5th grade level.

## Consequences of Low Health Literacy

**4X**  
higher  
health care costs

**6%**  
more  
hospital visits

**2 DAY**  
longer  
hospital stays

Source: Partnership for Clear Health Communication at the National Patient Safety Foundation.

## Risk Factors for Low Health Literacy

- Members of minority groups
- Low income
- People who did not graduate from high school
- Non-native English speakers
- The elderly

## Economic Impact



Low health literacy costs...

**\$7,500** more per year/person

**\$ 238** billion annually in the U.S.

**\$ 685** million annually for central Texas

## How to Address Low Health Literacy



Make print, oral, and electronic health information easier to understand



Provide education to improve literacy skills and empower individuals



Reform health care delivery to be more patient-centered

Source: Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc.

visit [www.safercaretexas.org](http://www.safercaretexas.org) for more information