

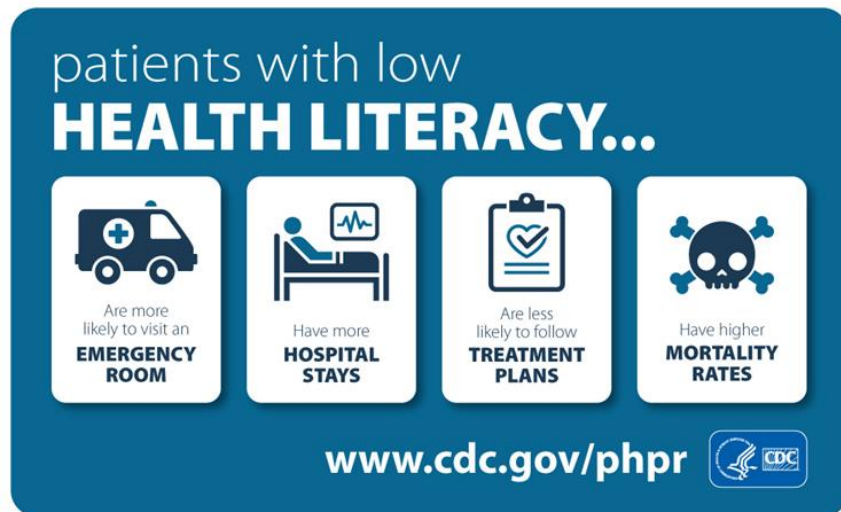
Health Literacy Plan

Background:

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. Persons with low reading levels, hearing impairment, visual impairment, and more have the right to health information that they can easily find and use. According to the Milken Institute, at least 88 percent of adults living in the United States are health literacy deficient and unable to navigate the healthcare system and promote their well-being.¹ Limited health literacy affects people of all backgrounds and is associated with worse health outcomes². It is our responsibility to ensure our community can make these life-changing decisions about their health on their own.

Kern County Public Health created a Health Literacy Action Plan with the intent to improve health literacy through a multisector collaboration effort involving individuals, families, community partners, and professionals. Our vision for this plan is to improve the well-being of our community by guiding programs in creating and presenting health

information that is easy to understand and use. Individuals will have the informational tools needed to prevent or manage disease and promote their overall health. This plan is intended to guide our work and will be reviewed annually for sustainability throughout the department.



Methodology:

Program experts, community partners, and individuals were surveyed to identify the barriers accessing and utilizing health information provided by Kern County Public Health. A total of 48 surveys were completed and the findings are outlined under *Barriers to Health Literacy*. This section was used to develop the *Priority Areas and Strategies* of this Health Literacy Action Plan. Once drafted, community partners were asked to review the plan to assure it is supportive of our diverse communities and the strategies proposed addressed barriers to health literacy that were identified during the assessment. The review consisted of reaching out to the initial fourteen (14) community partners, in which we received feedback from five (5) respondents. The overarching response was positive, with the health literacy plan requiring no revisions. Refer to Appendix A: *Health Literacy Action Plan Partners* to see a list of community partners and program experts engaged in the development of this plan.

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Barriers to Health Literacy:

The process of creating the Health Literacy Plan started with investigating the department's internal Health Equity Taskforce's perspectives. The team answered the CDC's Honest Assessment sheet, which was then evaluated and analyzed to observe trends among members and barriers they face. These results assisted with the direction of the department-wide survey encompassing both Kern County Public Health and Environmental Health Division viewpoints. The responses were collected and analyzed to create a final survey sent to the department's community partners. The results demonstrated the same common trends and overarching themes when creating or presenting messaging, outlined as follows:

- Materials not being translated in multiple languages or having a translator (30.2%)
- Information being long and wordy (27.1%)
- Information being technical (14.7%)
- Messaging is intimidating (11.6%)
- Not having a live person to answer questions (9.3%)
- No barriers (6.9%)

Lastly, the survey identified not having enough channels to communicate with the community to create an impact, increase awareness, and promote behavioral change as a barrier as well.

Priority Areas & Strategies:

Goal 1: Develop and disseminate health and safety information that is accurate, accessible, and actionable.

- Strategy 1: Provide fifth grade reading level guidance for the development of all department information.
- Strategy 2: Find resources and leverage technology that will ensure department information provided to the community meets the fifth-grade average reading and literacy level.
- Strategy 3: Use platforms that will deliver departmental health information and services at the time, in the place, and in multiple formats to meet the needs of the community.

Actions:

- Purchase Health Literacy Adviser software to have the ability to run readability assessments.
- Implement Health Literacy Adviser software into department's promotional messaging to reach a maximum of fifth-grade reading and learning levels.
- Create resources that demonstrate best practices in clear communication and information design. Materials will ensure simple and plain language is used in the development of new messaging. (Visually impaired)

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- Review and improve existing department materials to make them more accessible and understandable to users by assuring materials are at the fifth-grade literacy level.
- Public health information intended for individual reach will be available in at least two formats, such as but not limited to, printed materials, canvassing, email, phone calls, mail, presentations, and at health fairs.
- At minimum there will be at least two promotional messaging streams for each media campaign, such as but not limited to, radio ads, press releases, printed materials, mail, canvassers, and/or social media. These streams will be chosen based on the target population and community's accessibility and unique needs to ensure reach.

Goal 2: Promote changes within Kern County Public Health to improve access to health information, communication, informed decision-making, and access to health services.

- Strategy 1: Use different types of communication and tools with the community, including direct education, vetted pictures, and models to support written and oral communication with the community.
- Strategy 2: Use technology, including social media, to expand community access to the public health team and necessary information.
- Strategy 3: Create a section on the Kern County Public Health webpage to promote simplified language, common questions, community services and resources for our community partners and members.

Actions:

- Develop a Community section under the department's webpage to promote resources that will contribute to health literacy, resources for community partners and members, and gather feedback of existing services or service needs.
- Facilitate the sharing of resources and tools for improving health literacy by including them on our department's webpage and social media platforms.
- Create a health education program that will focus on building rapport with communities and provide in-person health education.
- Health Educators will canvass various communities to promote local services, provide health education, and link the community to department resources.

Goal 3: Support and expand local efforts to provide bilingual education and culturally and linguistically appropriate health information services in the community.

- Strategy 1: Create opportunities for health education and learning in communities through creative uses of technology and multimedia.
- Strategy 2: Provide in-person health educational services to the community we advocate for in the community we serve.
- Strategy 3: Ensure that health and safety information is culturally and linguistically appropriate and motivating.
- Strategy 4: Ensure the Kern County Public Health webpage is available in multiple languages.

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Actions:

- Health Educators will assist with readability evaluations, ensuring that information is linguistically and culturally appropriate through multiple lenses.
- Health Educators will attend in-person events representing the department to provide health education and resources based on needs.
- Department promotional messaging to be available in at least two languages.
 - Consider providing promotional messaging in a third language based upon census data, community profiles, and translational services available.
- Collaborate with community partners to review health and safety information to ensure the department is being culturally and linguistically inclusive of the communities we serve.

Conclusion/ Statement of Commitment:

Kern County Public Health commits to providing resources that are understood and comprehended by the residents of Kern County. To accomplish this, a wide variety of materials need to be screened using health literacy readability software to assure materials align with the national average literacy levels. This task intends to be accomplished through department-wide trainings to ensure all resources are screened and implemented using the same policies and guidelines.

Appendix A: Health Literacy Plan Acknowledgements

Bakersfield America Indian Health Project, Inc.

California State University, Bakersfield

CapK Head Start

Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch

Community Partners and Program Experts

First 5

Greenfield Family Resource Center

Kern County Public Health

Kern County Human Services

Kern Behavioral Health and Recovery Services

Kern Community College District

Kern County Superintendent of Schools

Kern Health Systems

Kern Medical Outpatient Clinics

Mountain Community Family Resource Center

Native Star Foundation

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