



SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC HEALTH



Herschel S. Horowitz

Center for Health Literacy

at the University Of Maryland College Park School Of Public Health

Health literacy is the ability to obtain, process, and understand health information needed to make informed health decisions.



The Herschel S. Horowitz Center for Health Literacy

at the University Of Maryland
College Park School Of Public Health

The Nation's First Academic-Based Endowed
Health Literacy Center.


Health Literacy is the ability to obtain, process, and understand health information needed to make informed health decisions. Both individuals and health environments help or hinder health literacy.

Health Literacy: What's the problem?

Nearly half of all American adults, including those who are well-educated and informed, have difficulty understanding basic health information, such as medication instructions, insurance and consent forms, even hospital signs. Only 12% of Americans have proficient health literacy skills.

People who don't understand their health condition and provider's instructions are:

- More likely to skip important preventive measures such as early childhood immunizations and flu shots;
- Enter the healthcare system sicker than they should be;
- More apt to have, and be less able to manage, chronic conditions;
- Using hospitals and emergency services more often than those that do understand their providers, resulting in increased costs.



**Health literacy can
save lives, save
money, and improve
the health and
well-being of millions
of Americans.**

--Surgeon General
Richard Carmona (2003)

The Horowitz Center: What Do We Do?

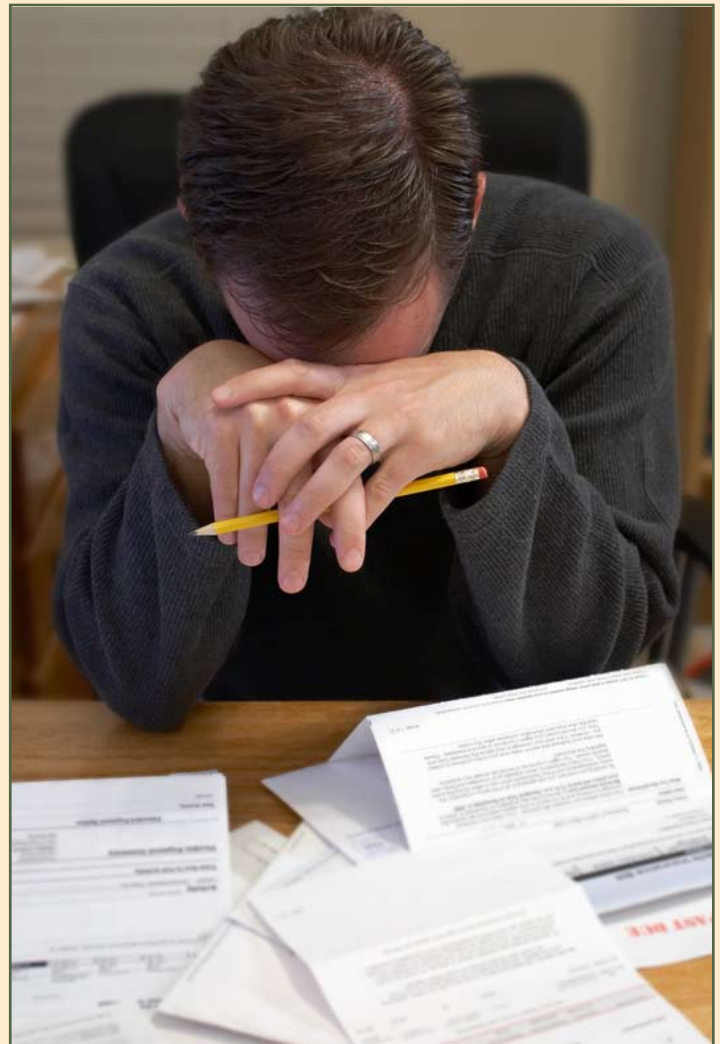
The Herschel S. Horowitz Center for Health Literacy was established in 2007 to make health care systems less intimidating, more user-friendly and ultimately more effective for consumers. Consumers often fail to take care of themselves properly simply because they don't understand the health professional's jargon-filled language.

Poor communication leads to poor health for too many and higher health care costs for all of us.

The Center educates the health care workforce, educators, and policy makers about both the need to communicate more effectively and about the strategies they can employ to be better heard and understood. The Center also educates the public about how to be a better consumer of health care.

The Center's Major Goals:

- **Educate** the current and emerging public health workforce about health literacy;
- **Update** practitioners and policymakers on the latest health literacy science;
- **Ensure** that health literacy science is incorporated in research, education and public policy, and is advanced by conducting research, developing and testing interventions;
- **Use** the latest proven techniques to improve health literacy in Maryland, especially in communities where people are most vulnerable.



Although health consumers are being asked to make ever-more complicated choices, over 300 studies have shown that health information cannot be understood by most of the people for whom it was intended.

--National Academies Press called "Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion."

Public health professionals must provide clear, understandable, science-based health information to the American people. In the absence of clear communication and access to services, we cannot expect people to adopt the health behaviors we champion.

--Surgeon General's Workshop on Improving Health

The Horowitz Center: What Did We Accomplish, 2007 to 2010?

The Horowitz Center for Health Literacy has:

- **Created a Health Literacy Associates Program** to bring together people, ideas and resources to advance and apply health literacy to public health.
- **Created a Speaker Series** that showcases the leading thinkers, researchers, and practitioners who are shaping the field of health literacy.
- **Initiated the first course on health literacy** at the School of Public Health, University of Maryland College Park.
- **Offered continuing education workshops** to help public health professionals apply health literacy principles in diverse practice settings.
- **Developed collaborative partnerships** with local, state, and national institutions, agencies and communities to improve health outcomes with health literacy practices.
- **Increased the number of community-oriented and community-based research projects** by pursuing innovative, multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research to address health literacy.
- **Developed and implemented strategies for disseminating research findings** to practitioners, policy makers, educators and the public.
- **Installed its first Visiting Health Literacy Senior Scholar.** Dr. Rima Rudd, Senior Lecturer on Society, Human Development, and Health at Harvard University's School of Public Health is internationally known for her work in health literacy and especially health environment assessments.



Get Involved! Join *Health Literacy Maryland*

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has issued a *National Action Plan for Health Literacy* to make health information and services easier to understand and use. The plan recommends multiple strategies that health care workers and public health professionals can use to boost the effectiveness of health information communication.

The Horowitz Center invites everyone to join *Health Literacy Maryland*, a new statewide coalition

that will adopt strategies for Maryland and put them into action.

To join the coalition or to learn more:

- Visit www.sph.umd.edu/literacy
- Email UMDSPHHealthLiteracy@umd.edu with your contact information and ask to join the ListServe for the most current information; or
- Call the Center at 301-405-2356.

The Horowitz Center is endowed and named to honor the legacy of Dr. Herschel S. Horowitz, scientist, educator, and public health advocate. Dr. Horowitz believed that researchers had a responsibility to communicate risks to health, promote methods of maintaining health, generate healthy policies for the community, educate communities, and serve as expert witnesses where necessary. The Center was established with a gift from Dr. Alice M. Horowitz and family and is part of the Dean's Office of the University of Maryland College Park School of Public Health.