

# OCTOBER IS HEALTH LITERACY MONTH!

## Message from the Health Literacy Council of Delaware Chair

### Health Literacy as a Pathway to Wellbeing *A Celebration of Health Literacy Month*



*Greg O'Neill, Patient & Family  
Health Education Director,  
Christiana Care*

In an age where health information is abundant, and misinformation is equally (if not more) prevalent, the importance of health literacy cannot be overstated. October

is recognized as Health Literacy month, and the Health Literacy Council of Delaware is using the month to bring awareness to this vital concept statewide.

*“Health Literacy is the ability to obtain, understand, and apply health information to make informed decisions about one’s health and well-being.”*

It serves as the foundation upon which individuals can build a healthier and more fulfilling life. It is multi-faceted, encompassing skills such as reading, listening, analytical thinking, and decision-making (see the article from Michael Villaire).

Far too often, medical terminology and healthcare materials are difficult to understand, especially for those with limited education and/or unfamiliar with the English language. Patients and their loved ones are frequently inundated with information from medical professionals or from their own research, resulting in overload,

confusion, and frustration. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy—a large, nationally representative sample of health literacy in the United States—suggests that

**36%** of U.S. adults have substantial limitations in their ability to understand and use health information necessary to prevent and manage disease and chronic conditions and effectively seek and obtain healthcare.<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to popular belief, health literacy is not exclusively the responsibility of the individual receiving healthcare (see the article from Wilma Alvarado-Little). Medical providers, policymakers, and educators each play crucial roles in ensuring that health information is accessible and comprehensible to all communities. By ensuring all participants in a loved one’s healthcare have a solid foundation of health literacy, we as a state stand to gain:

1. **Improved Health Outcomes:** Individuals with higher health literacy are more likely to engage in preventive behaviors, manage chronic conditions effectively, and adhere to treatment plans. This leads to better health outcomes and reduced healthcare costs.



<sup>1</sup> Kutner, M., Greenberg, E., Jin, Y., and Paulsen, C. (2006). *The Health Literacy of America’s Adults: Results From the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NCES 2006–483)*. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

2. **Enhanced Patient-Provider Communication:**

Effective communication between healthcare providers and patients is vital for accurate diagnosis and treatment. Health-literate patients can ask questions, understand instructions, and actively participate in their care.

3. **Increased Health Equity:** Research shows that a person's level of health literacy is closely linked to socioeconomic status and education level. Improving health literacy can help reduce health disparities by giving everyone, regardless of their background, the tools to take control of their health.

4. **Increased Autonomy:** A health-literate individual not only possesses the knowledge needed to make informed decisions about their health, but they are confident in their choices, promoting a sense of autonomy and self-efficacy.

The Health Literacy Council of Delaware was founded to initiate these gains for the First State. Under the auspices of the Delaware Literacy Alliance, the Council brings together, key leaders and stakeholders from anchor healthcare, education, and state institutions to chart a path forward for health literacy integration across the age and culture spectrum. The Council already has made significant strides. We have received a generous grant from Highmark Delaware (see the article from Denee Crumrine). We have

also helped launch standard development for the statewide Community Health Worker Apprenticeship program (see the article from Tim Gibbs), which has successfully graduated 27 newly certified Community Health Workers, with a fourth cohort well underway.

Additionally, we are in the early stages of integrating health literacy into high school and post-secondary curricula, as well as building a dedicated workforce pipeline from our state colleges into in-demand healthcare careers in Delaware (see the article from Peg Enslin). These and many other endeavors culminate into one dedicated vision-achieving more equity through health literacy.

Health literacy is an essential skill that inspires individuals to take control of their health. It is a key fixture in achieving positive health outcomes, reduced healthcare costs, and increased health equity. **This October, join the Health Literacy Council of Delaware as we highlight this imperative aspect of healthcare.** Ultimately, health literacy is not just a concept; it is a path to empowerment, better health, and a brighter future for all.

**To learn more about the Delaware Health Literacy Council, or to join, please contact Greg O'Neill at [GONeill@Christianacare.org](mailto:GONeill@Christianacare.org), Co-Chair Megan McNamara Williams at [megan@deha.org](mailto:megan@deha.org), or Adara Scholl at [ascholl@pmgconsulting.net](mailto:ascholl@pmgconsulting.net).**



*Our very own Greg O'Neill speaks with Helen Osborne, the highly acclaimed author and founder of Health Literacy Month, on a systems perspective of health literacy.*

*[Listen to the podcast here!](#) ▶*

**OCTOBER IS HEALTH LITERACY MONTH!**

Brought to you in partnership with the Health Literacy Council of Delaware.

Knowledge is the key to better health.



On October 23, Governor John Carney will formally announce October as Health Literacy Month at the Carvel building

in Wilmington. By signing an official proclamation, the Governor declares the state's acknowledgment of this vital initiative. We are deeply grateful for this act, and we look forward to continued efforts to enhance health literacy in the First State.

**To learn more and register for events, click the links provided below!**

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
2 <a href="#">U.S. Health Literacy Policy &amp; Press Event</a> , 11a-1230p Virtual Event	3 <a href="#">Health Literacy in Action Conference</a> Virtual Event	4	5 <a href="#">Health Equity Network Session: Hader Warraich, MD</a> , 4p-5p For event link, please email: goneill@christianacare.org	6
9	10	11	12	13
Throughout the month, use our promos, and share Health Literacy Month within and across your networks!				
16	17 <a href="#">Health Literacy through the Lens of Trauma-Informed Healing</a> , 10a-1p Virtual Event	18	19 <a href="#">Effects of an Educational Health Promotion Program on Mental Health Literacy and Maternal Wellbeing</a> , 8a-10a, Virtual Event <a href="#">Accelerating Clinical and Translational Research Webinar</a> , 12-1p Virtual Event	20
23	24 <a href="#">Delaware Annual Healthcare Forum</a> , 8a-430p Bally's Dover Casino Resort, Rollins Center, Dover, Delaware	25	26	27 Get Tips from an NPD! 11a-1p In-Person Event, Union Hospital
30 <a href="#">Health Literacy Research Conference – Health Literacy Lessons for the Age of AI</a> Virtual Event	31 <a href="#">Health Literacy Research Conference – Health Literacy Lessons for the Age of AI</a> Virtual Event	<p>Why not start celebrating early? In September 27-29, join the <a href="#">Health Care Education Association (HCEA) Virtual Conference: Patient Education Improves Quality and Outcomes</a></p> <p>Participate in the Network of the National Library of Medicine's (NNLM) #citeNLM Wikipedia Edit-a-thon, facilitated by the University of Pennsylvania. Click <a href="#">here</a> to learn more.</p> <p>Join the 2023 Bayhealth Nursing Research Conference in November! To learn more, visit: <a href="#">Bayhealth.org/research-conference</a></p>		

Brought to you by



in Partnership with the **Health Literacy Council of Delaware.**

# 2023 UNITED STATES HEALTH LITERACY POLICY & PRESS EVENT: TAKING ACTION FOR A HEALTHIER NATION

The National Council to Improve Patient Safety Through Health Literacy, the Memory Keepers Discovery Team at the University of Minnesota School of Medicine, and other partnering health literacy experts across the nation hosted the 2023 United States Health Literacy Policy & Press Event, on October 2, 2023.

This crucial gathering brought together policymakers, press/media, health professionals, researchers, educators, healthcare leadership, and advocates to address the pressing issue of health literacy and advocate for systems-level policy change to improve clear health communication across the nation.

*It has been over 10 years since the National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy, yet no major system's approach to addressing health literacy has been enacted.*

In order to meet the Healthy People 2030 objectives, reduce healthcare expenditures, and increase patient safety, education, satisfaction, and health promotion, we need policymaker and education and healthcare leadership support.

This event served as an excellent opportunity to engage with expert speakers, access the latest resources, and interview key thought leaders in the field of health literacy. To access the recording of this virtual event, [see here](#).



# ON THE NATIONAL FRONT

## LET'S REMOVE THE BARRIERS AND BE BETTER

Michael Villaire, Chief Operating Officer, Institute for Healthcare Advancement



### Welcome to October, also known as Health Literacy Month.

Created in 1999 by Helen Osborne, Health Literacy Month is an opportunity for those of us in the field to reach out and spread the word about what health literacy

is, why it's important, and what we can all do to help improve health literacy in our own space.

Every year, the list of activities taking place during October in pursuit of this objective continues to grow. If you're interested in joining in, [visit \*healthliteracymonth.org\*](https://www.healthliteracymonth.org) for ideas, tools, and plenty of information about health literacy, brought to you by the Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA). IHA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit public benefit corporation, whose mission is to advance health literacy toward health equity. Our job is to provide you with the tools you need to be the best health literacy advocate you can be.

There are lots of ways to think about health literacy. I do a fair number of lectures on health literacy, often in the form of a Health Literacy 101 lecture. These talks are mainly designed for those who have never heard of health literacy (or only heard about it in passing) and want to know more. One of the tenets of health literacy is brevity; short, easy-to-understand messages tend to be understood and used better than long-winded messages with too much information.

So, one way I talk about health literacy is that it's a way to remove barriers. Think about all the ways your message can be misunderstood/not understood/ignored completely by the recipient.

### WRITTEN MESSAGES

- **Unable to read**—text grade reading level beyond the reader's ability.
- **Looks too hard to read**—no headings, limited white space, dense text with no graphics.
- **Jargon**—using words such as *hypertension* rather than *high blood pressure*, for example.
- **Language**—not written in reader's preferred/native language.
- **Too much information**—writer did a brain dump of everything they know on the subject, rather than focusing on what the reader needs to know.

### SPOKEN MESSAGES

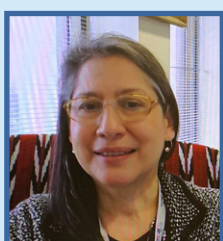
- **Not taking into account the listener's situation**—if you've just told someone they have cancer, they're likely not going to be listening too closely to the next thing you say.
- **Not establishing trust**—if you are rushing, not listening, or if the patient has had a previous bad encounter with the healthcare system.
- **Not testing if your message has been understood**—using a tool such as teach-back
- **Not taking conversational turns**—Say something, listen to what the other person has to say, and build upon that.
- **Not using qualified interpreters**—for those who need language access services.

**And these examples don't even scratch the surface. There are plenty of ways you can learn to use health literacy practices to become a health literacy advocate. Visit us at [healthliteracysolutions.org](https://www.healthliteracysolutions.org).**

# ON THE REGIONAL FRONT

## HEALTH LITERACY INITIATIVES AND LESSONS LEARNED WITHIN PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES

*Wilma Alvarado-Little, MA MSW, Associate Commissioner New York State Department of Health & Director, Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities Prevention*



Located in the northeastern part of the United States, New York State is extremely diverse - from the perspectives of culture, history, language, geography, economy, to name a few.

Spreading across approximately 55,000 miles and taking into consideration the diversity of health needs across the state, the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH) is dedicated to improving the health of all New Yorkers. **This is evident in a Prevention Agenda which is New York State's health improvement plan, the blueprint for state and local actions to improve the health and well-being of all New Yorkers, and to promote health equity in all populations who experience disparities<sup>1</sup>.** In addition, strategies for successful partnerships include long standing relationships with local health departments, community health centers, hospital systems, community-based organizations, individuals, and groups who rely on the State Department of Health for quality services to achieve health equity and eliminate health disparities. This report provides an overview of previous, current, and forthcoming health literacy activities spearheaded by the New York State Department of Health Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities Prevention (OMH HDP) that support the importance of effective communication and health literacy across the Department.

**The current initiatives reflect a multilevel approach to improve effective communication and health literacy across the Department's internal and external partners.** The NY health

literacy initiatives developed within the past two years strengthen the case to address health equity, support innovative programs and policies as well as posit research efforts for future DOH and statewide initiatives. In addition, the health literacy initiatives promote collaborative efforts across organizations and communities and identify successful strategies to identify disparities among New York's racial and ethnic minority populations. As previously mentioned, the New York State Department of Health is the first health department at the state level in the United States to execute an organization-wide health literacy survey. Qualitative insights from the survey will address the following areas: adding to the current knowledge base for the full spectrum of health literacy issues which involve the definition of health literacy, mandated or optional training, and current DOH efforts.

**The NYS DOH Health Literacy efforts are recognized as an important aspect of the provision of healthcare services.** Health information should be presented in a manner that is relevant, understandable, and resonates with the diverse communities throughout New York State. OMH HDP staff address health literacy in the many aspects of programs and initiatives. It applies to data, the public, and work environments. It is also infused in areas of language access and cultural and linguistic competency.

**DOH is seen to be the front runner in providing information about health and healthcare and can achieve health equity when information is understood, explained in a manner that resonates with the individual, and provides this in an environment of trust and collaboration.**

<sup>2</sup>[1] [health.ny.gov/prevention/prevention\\_agenda/2019-2024/](https://health.ny.gov/prevention/prevention_agenda/2019-2024/). Retrieved April 4, 2019.



# Health Equity Network Sessions

Conversations About Topics That Matter



One October 5, Christiana Care hosted the Health Equity Network Sessions conversation with Dr. Haider Warraich, who recently joined the FDA and is focused on chronic disease.

Dr. Warraich is the Director

of the Heart Failure Program at the VA Boston Healthcare System and Assistant Professor of Medicine at the Harvard Medical School. He also serves as an Associate Physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital. He has published more than 150 papers, including in the New England Journal of Medicine and the Journal of the American Medical Association. His research focuses on heart disease, end of life care, and disparities in the health system. He frequently writes for the New York Times and Washington Post, and he is the author of the books *Modern Death*, *State of the Heart*, and *The Song of Our Scars*.

During his presentation, Dr. Warraich spoke to the paradigm shift that has occurred concerning life expectancy, which has remarkably doubled within just 150 years. However, despite the increase of the quantity of life, the quality of life has drastically decreased, in large part due to chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and chronic lung disease.

*"It is evident that the years that we live free of disability have actually decreased over time."*



**Eight of the 10 most common causes of death in the United States are now all chronic conditions starting with heart disease, which remains our #1 cause of death.**

Dr. Warraich shared some interesting facts throughout his presentation:

- The healthcare system pays the most for drugs that treat common conditions like atrial fibrillation, which is an abnormal heart rhythm or heart failure, or high cholesterol, and other chronic conditions, particularly diabetes.
- **58%** of Americans live with more than one chronic condition.
- **20%** of Americans ages 20 to 29 have more than one chronic condition.
- Around the world, the four most common causes of death are all chronic diseases: cardiovascular disease, cancer, lung disease, and diabetes.
- **30%** of Caucasian deaths and **60%** of African American deaths from heart disease are preventable.
- Minority communities, as well as rural communities, face significant barriers to quality healthcare and health information. Dr. Warraich shared, ***"We don't have physicians practicing where they're actually needed, which is in fact a very concerning thing."***

The solution to changing chronic condition outcomes lies in the collaboration of interventions, including public health messaging, policy, and technical innovation. Dr. Warraich stated, *"I think we must focus in on the fact that health literacy, patient engagement, and patient centered care are really going to be at the heart of anything that we do."*

This was a powerful presentation, and we look forward to Dr. Warraich's continued efforts to resolve the health challenges in front of us.

# LOCAL HAPPENINGS

## HEALTH LITERACY COUNCIL OF DELAWARE RECEIVES BLUEPRINTS FOR THE COMMUNITY GRANT

*Denee Crumrine, Corporate Communications Manager, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware*



**Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware is proud to support the Health Literacy Council of Delaware through the BluePrints for the Community Grant Program.**

BluePrints for the Community,

housed by the Delaware Community Foundation, was established to increase access to care and reduce health care disparities in Delaware. The program has contributed over \$35 million to the community since its inception in 2007. This year, the program awarded the Health Literacy Council of Delaware \$200,000 for its health information communication efforts.

*“Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware and Highmark Health Options are actively engaged with statewide literacy improvement efforts and are pleased to support the Health Literacy Council of Delaware,” stated Nick Moriello, president of Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware. “By ensuring Delawareans have the tools and resources they need to understand their health information, while simultaneously making inclusive accommodations as healthcare organizations, we can promote better health decisions and ultimately improve health outcomes.”*



**53% of American adults find it difficult to understand health information**



**36% are unable to use basic health information to make decisions about their health (Kutner et al., 2006)**

Furthermore, roughly 35% of Delawareans, aged 16 to 74, are not proficient readers, and at least 20% read below a sixth-grade level, (PMG, 2023). Improving health literacy can help reduce health disparities and healthcare costs by giving everyone in the First State, regardless of their background, the tools to take control of their wellbeing.

The Health Literacy Council of Delaware plans to use the grant to develop an official state Health Literacy awareness campaign and a dedicated state website. Both initiatives aim to increase access to quality informational materials and care, and simultaneously reduce health disparities in all communities, particularly Delaware’s uninsured and underserved populations. These dedicated efforts will provide access to reliable training materials, best practices, and resources to support clear communication across health institutions and organizations. Content will be regularly updated and informed by leading organizations, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Institute for Healthcare Advancement, and the National Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine.

**The Health Literacy Council of Delaware was founded to elevate Health Literacy as a priority for the First State.** Under the auspices of the Delaware Literacy Alliance, the Council brings together, key leaders and stakeholders from anchor healthcare, education, and state institutions to chart a path forward for health literacy integration across the age and culture spectrum.

*“This grant will help us achieve impactful changes for the vulnerable populations of the state,” said Greg O’Neill, Patient & Family Health Education Director at ChristianaCare and Chair of the Health Literacy Council of Delaware. “We are extremely excited and grateful for this opportunity.”*

Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware serves approximately 500,000 members through the company’s health care benefits business. It is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies.

**For more information, visit [highmarkbcbsde.com](http://highmarkbcbsde.com).**



# HEALTH LITERACY IN THE FIRST STATE

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING HEALTH LITERACY SKILLS

*Peg Enslin, Health Sciences Education Associate, Delaware Department of Education*



Our education system has a huge responsibility to teach literacy to the students we serve. Literacy is not just the responsibility of the ELA teacher but a commitment of all teachers to have all students

reading and writing in their discipline. The Career & Technical Education (CTE) Health Science and Health Education educators have an even greater responsibility to teach health literacy to their students.

Teaching students how to obtain, process, and understand health information and services is needed to make the right health decisions.

*“By intentionally focusing on our young people and teaching health literacy, we can significantly influence the health of the next generation.”*

Good health is complicated because of all the available information. Not all information is accurate, and some may even be dangerous. Healthcare is continuously improving, technology is becoming more sophisticated, and healthcare providers are learning more about the field of medicine every day. Certain medical and behavioral conditions are on the rise, and there is an enhanced sense of urgency to support our communities through crises such as the COVID pandemic and long-term medical and behavioral conditions that have resulted.

Teaching students about health and healthcare systems, how to schedule appointments, access and read pamphlets and other forms of media, and how to make informed choices has never been more important. **Health literacy can place students on a trajectory of healthy living for their entire lives.** Educators need to be very intentional about teaching students how to navigate healthcare

systems. Whether it be medical or behavioral health, there is a plethora of variables such as acute and chronic, conditions that may require long-term maintenance that each person needs to learn how to effectively navigate.

As we consider teaching students about health and supporting students in developing health literacy skills, we are influencing the students' knowledge of health, healthcare, and how to live healthy lifestyles. Moreover, consider the groups of people such as family members and other consumers of healthcare that students encounter through their role within their communities or as healthcare professionals themselves. Parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and many others can be supported and influenced by the knowledge of health and development of health literacy skills for which students develop. Consider the young person who becomes a healthcare professional and the influence they will have on other consumers of healthcare. **That influence will have a significant impact on the health of future generations.**

Educators in conjunction with health professionals, public, and community health workers need to devote time and be intentional in teaching health literacy to ensure our youth have knowledge about health and how to live healthy lifestyles. The knowledge gained will benefit many others in our local communities and beyond.



# COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS AND HEALTH LITERACY IN DELAWARE IS GOOD FOR EVERYONE

Tim Gibbs, Executive Director, Delaware Academy of Medicine and Delaware Public Health Association



As many readers of this newsletter are aware, Community Health Workers

(CHWs) are on the rise nationally and locally, and they are a priority of the Academy/DPHA. CHWs have been called by numerous names over the years (health ambassadors, promotores de salud/promotora, health navigators, outreach workers, peer educators, and more), and they fill an essential role in the public health and clinical team:

- Outreach and Education,
- Coaching and Social Support,
- Care Coordination, and
- Advocacy (<https://chwdelaware.org/about-us/what-are-chws/>).

*“In Delaware, we are fortunate to be a part of a groundswell of effort to elevate CHWs with a common educational curriculum.”*

Ultimately, we are working as part of a larger team of stakeholders toward State codification of the CHW profession, including CHW certification and new ways in which to fund their work, moving them from grant funded positions to reimbursed positions in a variety of key and strategic settings.

The groundswell effort has many moving parts, including the newly formed Community Health Workers Association of Delaware (<https://chwdelaware.org/>), spearheaded by Delaware Division of Public Health. Funding from Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is also supporting Statewide educational programs and stipends for attendees of those programs. New Castle County programming has been funded via the Public Health Management Corporation,

and Kent and Sussex programs have been funded through the Sussex County Health Coalition (SCHC).

**Of the core competencies of CHWs, health literacy (and a CHW’s ability to impart health literacy to the general public) is a key teachable attribute around which there is a lot of action and energy.** Health literacy has been a byline of this organization for years, stemming from our previous work as the State of Delaware’s medical library system, and continuing today through our programs like Delaware Mini Medical School.

To be more engaged on the health literacy forefront in Delaware, and to connect with our partners at the newly emerging Health Literacy Council of Delaware, led by Greg O’Neil, Co-Chair Megan McNamara Williams at [megan@deha.org](mailto:megan@deha.org), or Adara Scholl at [ascholl@pmgconsulting.net](mailto:ascholl@pmgconsulting.net).

As the basic training programs for CHWs have been created and rolled out by PHMC and the SCHC, we have been heartened to witness their emphasis on health literacy as a core competency. If you are interested in becoming a CHW, links to those HRSA funded training programs and application for stipends are here:

- <https://chwcove.org> (PHMC Program for New Castle County)
- <https://www.delawarechw.com/> (SCHC Program for Kent and Sussex Counties)

Higher level CHW training also entails additional health literacy education as a requirement of the State of Delaware’s Department of Labor’s CHW apprenticeship program and Division of Public Health. As the State’s affiliate to the American Public Health Association, we are 100% behind this push.