Health Literacy Programs and Policy in Canada

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The Institute of Medicine’s Roundtable (IOM) on Health Literacy
Health Literacy: Improving Health, Healthy Systems, and Health Policy
Around the World
New York, NY
September 24, 2012
“Each serving contains 10 grams of ‘OK in moderation’, 5 grams of ‘Not the worst thing you could eat’ and 15 grams of ‘It probably won’t kill you’.”
What is Health Literacy in Canada

“What Health Literacy is the ability to access, understand, evaluate, and communicate information as a way to promote, maintain and improve health in a variety of settings across the life-course.”

Snapshot of Canadian Context

• Health literacy in Canada has been anchored in health promotion efforts and not driven by the medical system

• Pockets of innovative HL programs, initiatives and activities across Canada

• No governmental policies specifically directed at health literacy at any level of government in Canada

• Stronger research in relation to health literacy has been evolving in Canada

• Little private sector engagement
Milestones in Development of HL Movement in Canada

1989
- Ontario Public Health Association Project on Literacy and Health

1994
- Canadian Public Health Association Literacy and Health Program

2000
- First National Conference on Literacy and Health

2004
- Second National Conference on Literacy and Health

2006
- Canadian Council on Learning Research and Reports

2008
- Canadian Expert Panel on Health Literacy Report
- Calgary Institute and Charter on Health Literacy

2012
- Inter-sectoral Approach to Improve Health Literacy for Canadians: A Discussion Paper
Recent Canadian Initiatives

• Health Literacy Scan Project

• Health Literacy Examples from the Field Project

• Learning for Health: Health Literacy Embedded Learning Demonstration Project

• Online Health Literacy Modules for Public Health Professionals
  o Office of Public Health Practice
  o Canadian Medical Association
The purpose of the scan was to address questions of:

1) What examples exist of noteworthy health-literacy activities at a Federal or national level in Canada and a set of comparable countries?

2) What have been the successes, areas of innovation, and challenges of those activities?

3) What do you see as the emerging opportunities and responsibilities for your division, agency or organization to address at this time in the area of health literacy?
### Key Findings: Types of Health Literacy Initiatives in Canada

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<th>Capacity Building / Awareness Raising</th>
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<td>• Training / educating the public / patients</td>
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<td>• Educating health professionals</td>
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<td>• Working with vulnerable groups</td>
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<td>• Producing tailored, targeted programs, reports, and other materials</td>
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<td>• Utilizing social media sites for communication</td>
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<th>Knowledge Development</th>
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<td>• Health literacy definition and concept development</td>
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<td>• Measurement of health literacy levels</td>
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<td>• Identification of best practices by research / demonstration projects</td>
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<th>Infrastructure Building &amp; Partnerships</th>
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<td>• Organizing cross-agency and cross-sectoral collaboration</td>
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<td>• Developing supports to inform policies, regulations, and standards for HL work</td>
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<td>• Requests for additional resources &amp; positions for health literacy work</td>
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(Frankish et al., 2011)
Example 2: Canadian Health Literacy
Examples from the Field Project

(Frankish et al., 2012)
Example 3: HL Embedded Learning Project

Demonstration Sites

Wellness Institute at Seven Oaks General Hospital
- Winnipeg, MN
- Retirees/Older Persons
- Urban
- Service Providers (staff/partners)

South Shore Family Resource Association
- Lunenburg County, NS
- Families
- Rural
- Service Providers (staff/partners)

The Association for New Canadians
- St. John’s, NFLD
- Immigrants/Refugees
- Urban
- Service Providers (staff/partners)

Site Characteristics:
- Community
- Population Served
- Setting
- Facilitators

Health Literacy Components
- Access
- Understand
- Evaluate
- Communicate

1. Identify “Learning for Health” Opportunities
2. Include Health Literacy Learning Tools in Existing Programs
3. Implement Site Specific Approaches
4. Evaluate Implementation Approaches
An Inter-sectoral Approach to Improving Health Literacy for Canadians

**Vision:** A health literacy Canada in which all people in Canada can access, understand, evaluate and use health information and services that can guide them and others in making informed decisions to enhance their health and well-being.

**Mission:** To develop, implement and evaluate an approach that will support, coordinate and build health literacy capacity in Canada.

(Mitic & Rootman, 2012)
Sample Health Literacy Activities

Governments  Health Services  Education Sector  Workplace & Businesses  Community Organizations

Knowledge Development
Raise Awareness & Build Capacity
Build Infrastructure & Partnerships

Moving Forward: Potential for Health Literacy Work in Canada

Some examples of potential...

- Development of **supports/materials** to inform policies and legislation

- Increased **availability/accessibility of resources** that could lead to further action within a supportive environment

- Creation of clearer **incentives and rewards** for engaging in HL work

(Frankish et al., 2011)
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References


