

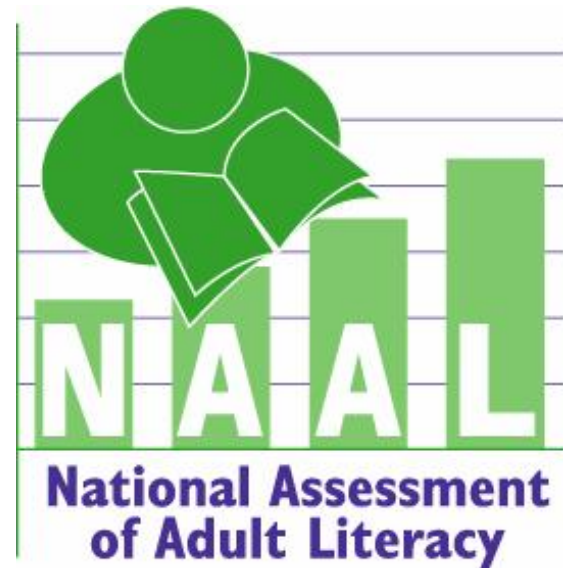
# Health Literacy of America's Adults

Presentation at the  
Meeting of the Minds II Symposium

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# Today's Talk

- Discuss what is meant by health literacy and why the topic is important
- Summarize the findings from the NAAL Health Literacy component and what the data mean for service providers
- Discuss some strategies for improving health literacy and implications for the adult education and literacy field



# Why is Health Literacy Important?

**Affects people's ability to:**

- **Navigate the healthcare system, including locating services and filling out forms**
- **Share health information with providers**
- **Engage in self-care and chronic disease management**
- **Adopt health-promoting behaviors, such as exercising and eating a healthy diet**
- **Act on health-related news and announcements**



# Literacy and Health Outcomes

- **Persons with limited health literacy skills have:**
  - **Higher use of treatment services**
    - **Hospitalization**
    - **Emergency services**
  - **Lower use of preventive services**
  - **Higher use of treatment services results in higher healthcare costs**



# National Assessment of Adult Literacy

- **The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) is the first examination of the literacy skills of America's adults since the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS).**
- **Nationally representative household survey of more than 17,000 adults, including adults in prison.**
- **NAAL health literacy component is new for the 2003 assessment.**



# NAAL Definition of Health Literacy

***The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions***



# Growing Government Commitment to Health Literacy

- **HHS Secretary Leavitt: Prevention and Health Information Technology are priorities for the healthcare system.**
- **Health literacy improvement is one of the Surgeon General's seven public health priorities.**
- **Establishment of *Healthy People 2010* health literacy objective.**
- **ED and HHS Support of health literacy component of the National Assessment of Adult Literacy.**



# Three Types of Questions on NAAL Health Literacy Scale



**Prose**



**Document**



**Quantitative**

# NAAL Health Literacy Questions

- Items simulate the kind of focused reading tasks individuals perform when they want specific information.
- Literacy tasks consist of actual health related materials used by adults in their everyday lives.
- Are designed not to measure background knowledge.
- Open ended response, not multiple choice.



# Sample Abilities Associated With Literacy Levels

- **Below Basic**—locating easily identifiable information in short prose texts and documents; locating numbers and performing simple arithmetic functions.
- **Basic**—reading and understanding information in simple prose and documents; solving one-step arithmetic problems when the operation is specified or easily inferred.



# Sample Abilities Associated With Literacy Levels

- **Intermediate**—reading and understanding moderately dense prose texts and making simple inferences from text; reading information from documents and making inferences; solving arithmetic problems in prose texts and documents when the operation is not specified or easily inferred.
- **Proficient**—reading more lengthy and complex prose text and synthesizing information; integrating, synthesizing, and analyzing multiple pieces of information from more complex documents; using more abstract information from prose texts and documents to solve multi-step problems when arithmetic operations are not easily inferred.



# Health Background Questions

- **Self-rating of overall health**
- **Uncorrected problems with vision or hearing**
- **Diagnosis of learning disability**
- **Insurance (for self and children)**
- **Sources of information about health issues**
- **Preventive health practices**



# Too Many Black Adults Die From the Effects of High Blood Pressure

## TOO MANY BLACK ADULTS DIE FROM THE EFFECTS OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

### DID YOU KNOW?

More than one out of every four Black adults has high blood pressure, according to a two-year survey by Public Health Service in the 1960's. Other studies show as many as one out of three Black adults has high blood pressure.

High blood pressure is the most common chronic disease treated by practitioners in the Black community.

More Black people die as a result of high blood pressure than any other disease.

For every Black person who dies of sickle-cell anemia, at least 100 others die from the effects of high blood pressure.

The rate of death from the effects of high blood pressure for Black people is nearly one and one-half times the rate for White people.

High blood pressure, along with cigarette smoking, contributes greatly to the apparent increased number of heart attacks among Black adults.

If high blood pressure is controlled, strokes, heart attacks and kidney disease can be substantially reduced.

YES, HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE CAN BE TREATED... AND CONTROLLED.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

#### Have your blood pressure checked regularly

Unfortunately, high blood pressure is a silent killer andcrippler. At least half of the people who have high blood pressure don't know it because symptoms usually are not present. The only way you can be sure is to have the doctor check your blood pressure. You should have your blood pressure checked at least once a year, especially if:

(1) you are Black, (2) if you are over 40, (3) if members of your family or close relatives have had high blood pressure or the complications of high blood pressure (stroke, heart attack, or kidney disease), or (4) if you have frequent headaches, dizziness, or other symptoms that may occasionally be related to high blood pressure.

#### Follow your doctor's instructions

High blood pressure can't be cured, but it can be kept under control. Control means keeping your blood pressure as close to normal as possible. That's very important to you — it can prevent a crippling stroke or other serious illness in the future.

The doctor will find a way to control your blood pressure that's most comfortable for you. Then it will be up to you — to take the medicine and follow the prescribed diet, to follow the instructions carefully and to come back regularly for checkups.

Yes, high blood pressure can be controlled, but only if *you* cooperate fully with your doctor.



# Prose and Health Literacy Question

## Prose and Health Literacy Question

Refer to the article on the next page to answer the following question.

According to the brochure, why is it difficult for people to know if they have high blood pressure?

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### Correct answer

Any statement such as the following:  
Symptoms are not usually present  
High blood pressure is silent

### Percentage of adults who answered the question correctly, health literacy scale: 2003

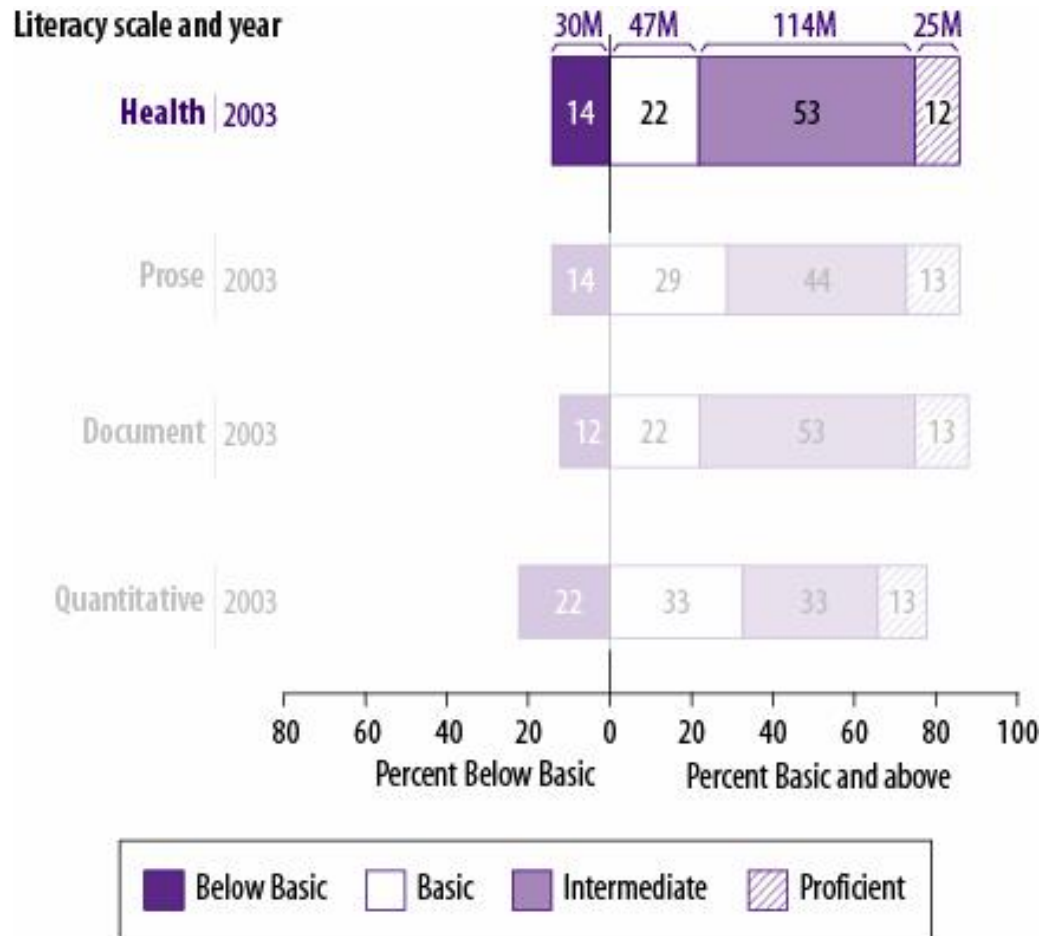
All Adults	<i>Below Basic</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>Proficient</i>
74	10	71	94	100

NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed because of language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 2003) are excluded from these data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.



# Percentage of Adults in Each Literacy Level: 2003



# Percentage of Adults With **Below Basic** Health Literacy in Each Prose, Document and Quantitative Literacy Level

	Below Basic	Basic	Intermediate	Proficient
Prose	<b>50</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>
Document	<b>51</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1</b>
Quantitative	<b>61</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>

# Percentage of Adults in the **Below Basic** Health Literacy NAAL Population: 2003

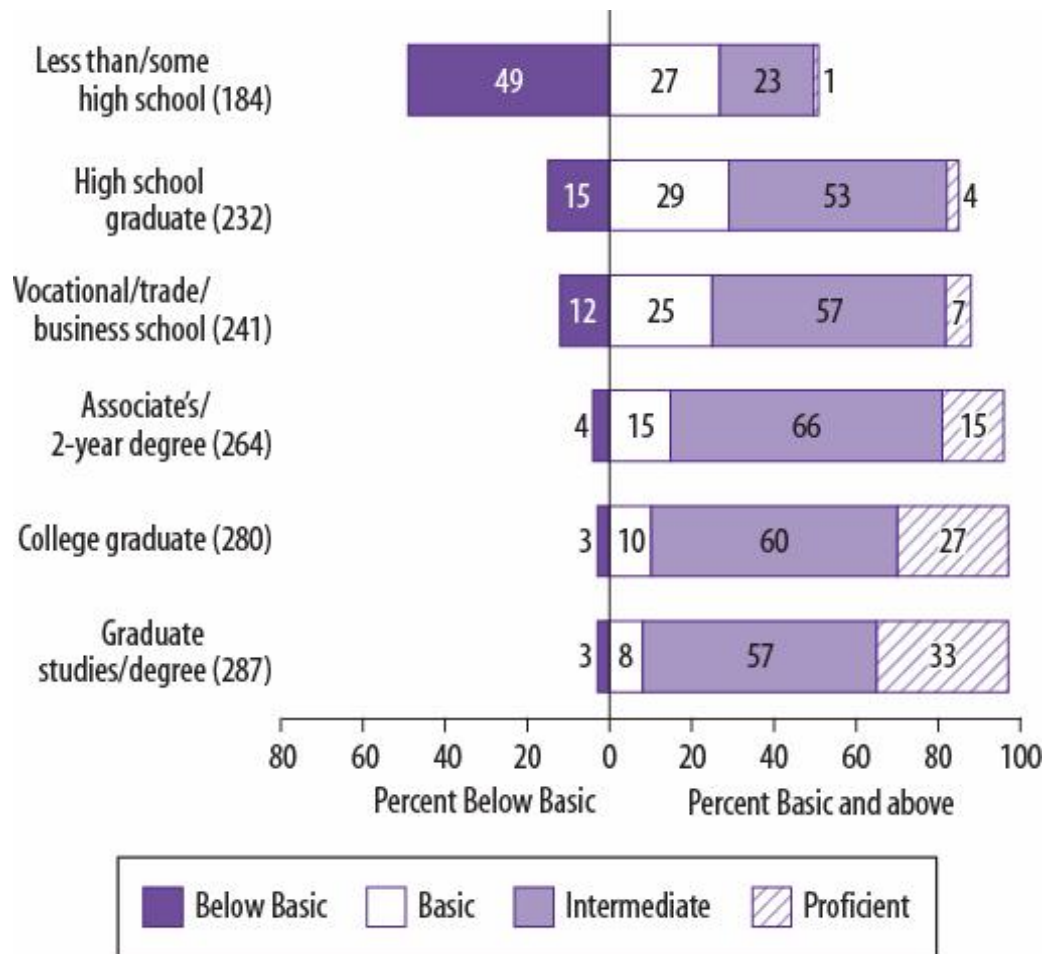
Characteristic	Percent in <i>Below Basic</i> population	Percent in total population
Did not graduate from high school	51	15
Did not speak English before starting school	39	13
Adults reporting poor health	10	4
Hispanic adults	35	12
Age 65+	31	15
No medical insurance	36	18
Did not obtain health information over the Internet <sup>1</sup>	80	43
Black adults	19	12
One or more disabilities <sup>2</sup>	48	30

<sup>1</sup>The "Did not obtain health information over the Internet" category does not include prison inmates because they do not have access to the Internet.

<sup>2</sup>Disabilities include vision, hearing, learning disability, and other health problems.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL).

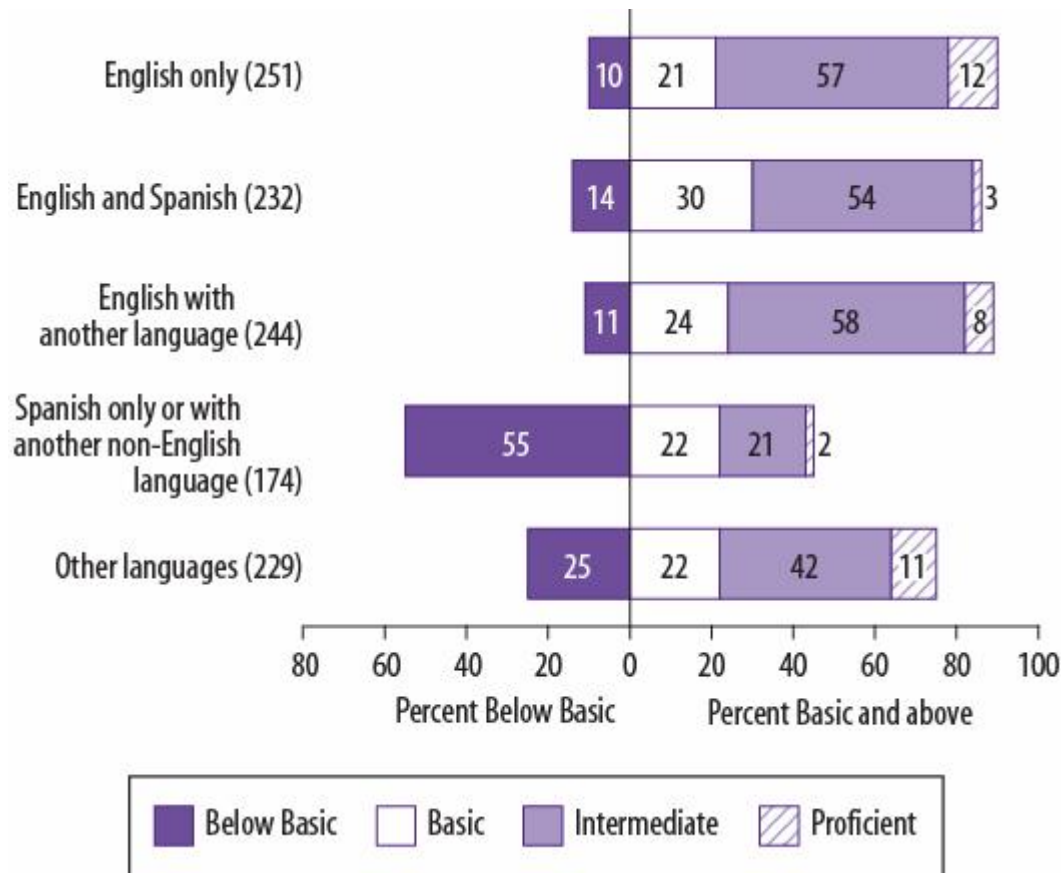
# Percentage of Adults in Each Health Literacy Level, by Educational Attainment: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

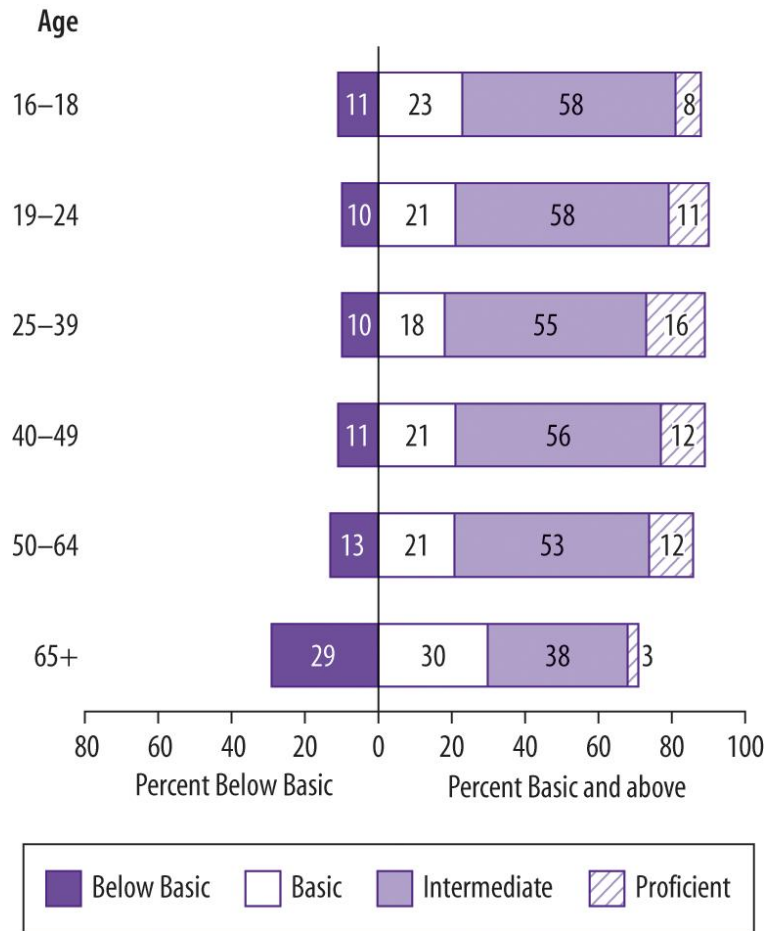
# Percentage of Adults in Each Health Literacy Level, by Languages Spoken Before Starting School: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

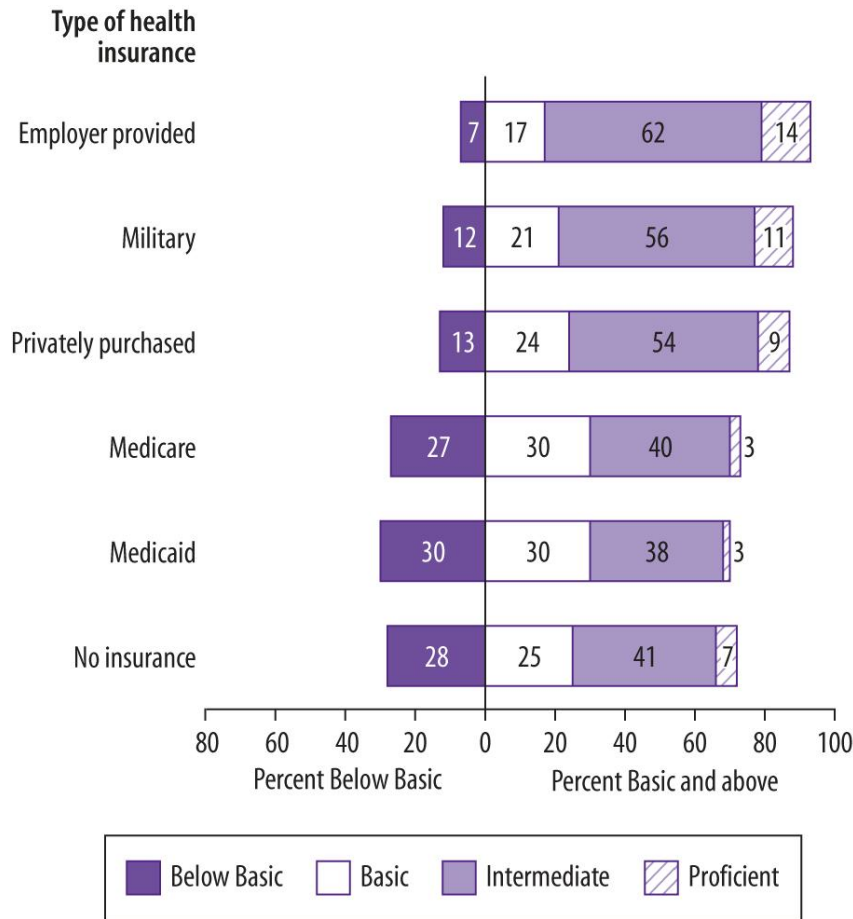
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

# Percentage of Adults in Each Health Literacy Level, by Age: 2003



Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed because of language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure. Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

# Percentage of Adults in Each Health Literacy Level, by Type of Health Insurance Coverage, 2003

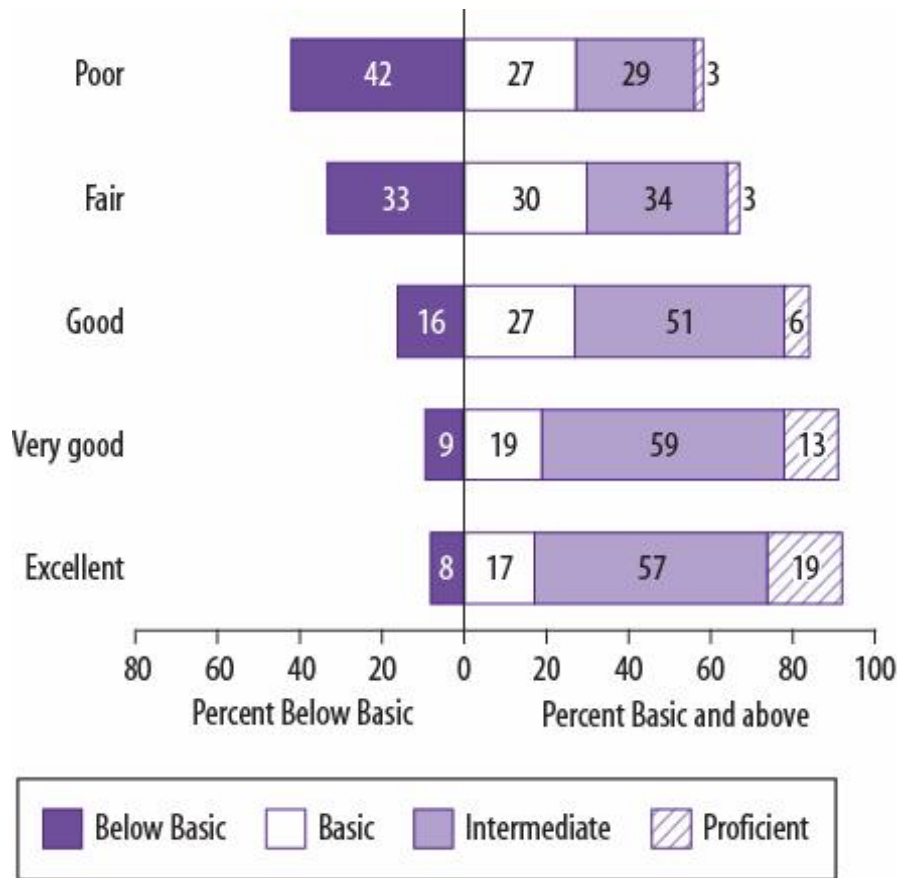


Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed because of language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.



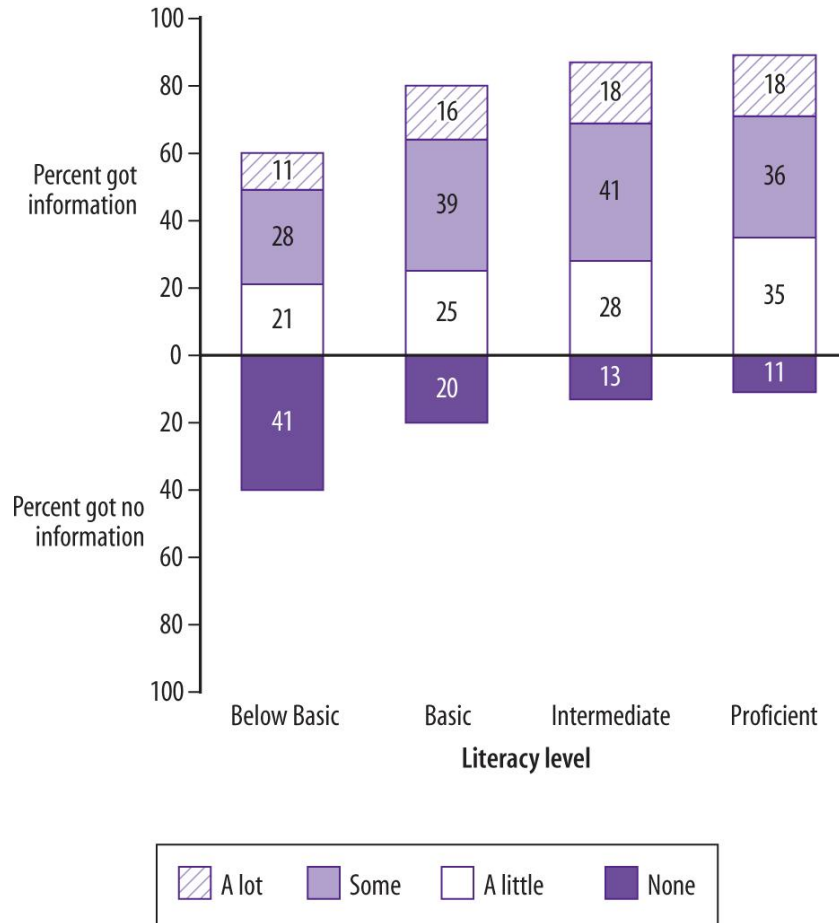
# Percentage of Adults in Each Health Literacy Level, by Self-Assessment of Overall Health: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

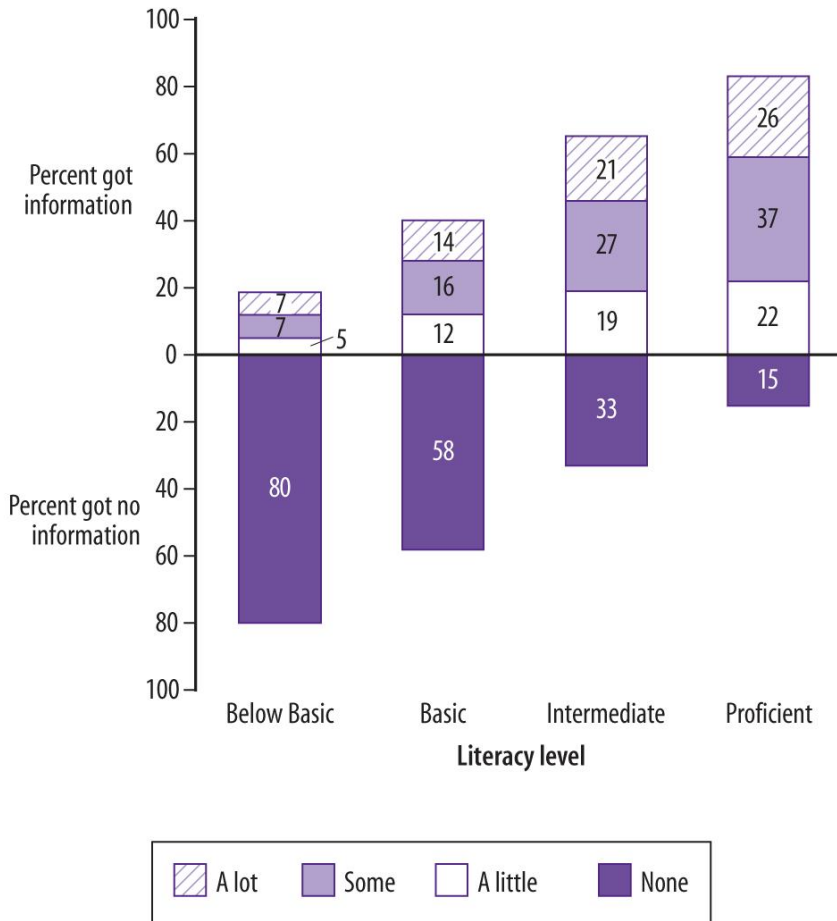
# Percentage of Adults Who Got Information About Health Issues From Books or Brochures



Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed because of language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure. Prison inmates are not included in the Internet category because they do not have access to the Internet. Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

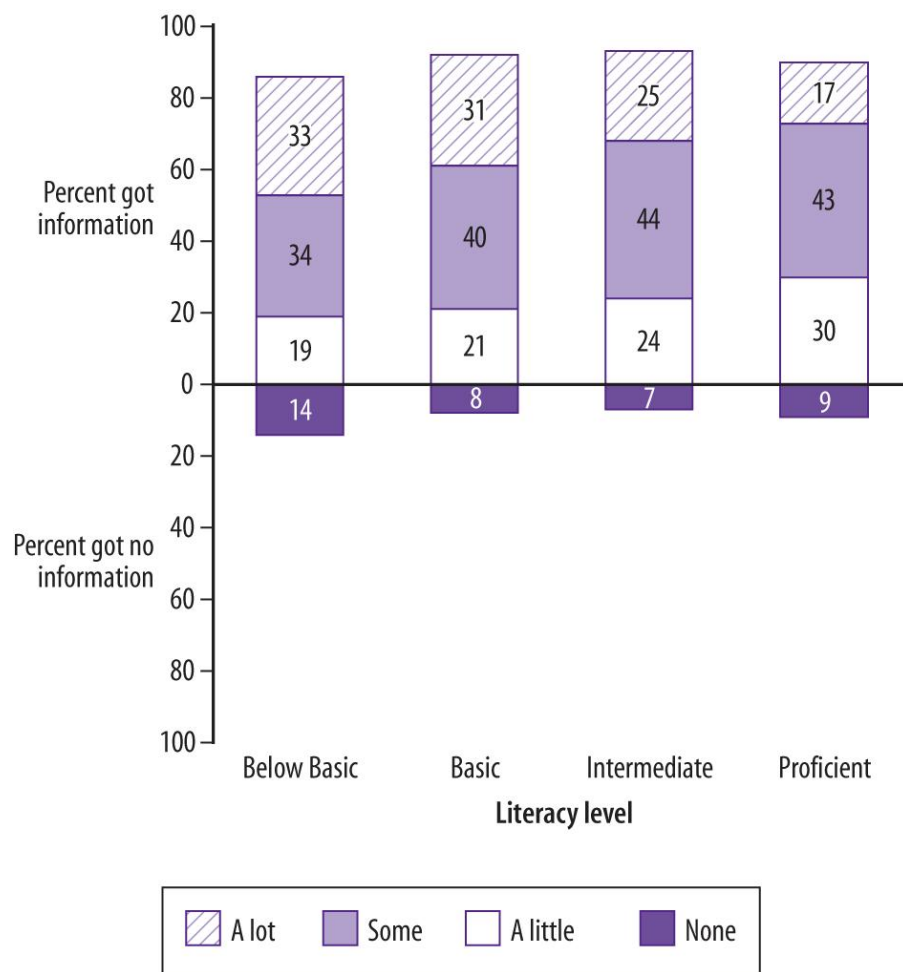


# Percentage of Adults Who Got Information About Health Issues From Internet



Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed because of language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure. Prison inmates are not included in the Internet category because they do not have access to the Internet. Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

# Percentage of Adults Who Got Information About Health Issues From Nonprint Media; Radio and Television, by Health Literacy Level 2003



Note: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed because of language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.  
 Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.



# What does the NAAL Health Literacy Data Mean?

- **Members of minority groups whose first language is not English, and have less than a high school education are likely to have limited literacy skills and lack resources –this may increase existing disparities in health care.**
- **Unnecessary communication barriers due to poorly designed health materials and services contribute to health disparities.**
- **Older Americans are at increasing risk due to low health literacy, more frequent medical needs, and confusing health information.**



# What Strategies for Improving Health Literacy Should be Pursued?

- Efforts to improve health literacy should expand beyond plain language and patient-provider communication to include *systems* and *structural* change.
  - Usability of health information/services
  - Building health-related knowledge
  - Advocating for organizational change
- Improve communication skills of health professionals and the public



# What are Implications for Adult Education?

- **“Improving” health literacy requires the action by health care providers, drug companies, and by the adult education community**
- **States should consider the development of partnerships between health providers and adult education providers**



# What are Implications for Adult Education?

- **Special attention needs to be paid to specific populations groups, especially:**
  - **Adults whose first language is not English**
  - **Older adults**
  - **Women with children**
- **Instruction should include information about health related topics.**



# What are Implications for Adult Education?

- **Consider incorporating health materials, such as those used on NAAL, as part of instruction.**
- **Develop professional development activities that discuss the importance of health literacy.**
- **When developing a health literacy curriculum, the “digital divide” is especially problematic because of increasing use of the web for obtaining information and scheduling medical appointments.**



# Taking Responsibility for Health Literacy Improvement

***A health literate America is a society in which health systems and institutions take responsibility for providing clear communication and adequate support to facilitate health-promoting actions based on understanding.***

**Institute of Medicine, 2004**



# Upcoming Reports

## Expected Release

- **Literacy In Everyday Life:** *A report of literacy in family, workplace, and community.* **Late Fall 06**
- **Literacy Behind Bars:** *Report on a nationally representative sample of adult inmates in state and federal prisons.* **Winter 07**
- **Basic Reading Skills and the Literacy of America's Least Literate Adults:** *Report on the oral reading fluency and performance of a supplemental sample of the least literate adults.* **Spring 07**



# Published NAAL Reports

- **A First Look at the Literacy of America's Adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, December 2005.**  
[www.NCES.ed.gov/NAAL](http://www.NCES.ed.gov/NAAL)
- **Key Concepts and Features of the 2003 NAAL, December 2005.** [www.NCES.ed.gov/NAAL](http://www.NCES.ed.gov/NAAL)
- **A First Look at the Literacy of Adults in Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, Oklahoma.** [www.air.org](http://www.air.org)

