



fact sheet literacy & essential skills

Older Adults

The older you are, the less likely you are to have the literacy skills needed for everyday life in Canada.

A majority of seniors are working at the lowest levels of literacy. Nearly half of Canada's adult population falls below the level needed to participate effectively in today's society.

The increasing literacy demands of everyday life put older Canadians at a disadvantage. Today's seniors grew up in a very different world. Many had their schooling cut short by poverty, war, the Depression, family obligations, lack of access to schools or the lure of good jobs that did not require strong literacy skills.

Literacy skills erode without regular use. Skills need to be used to stay sharp. Learning needs to be lifelong to prevent a reduction in skills. The average Canadian loses one grade level in literacy skills over a lifetime. Even minimal literacy skills are difficult to maintain.

Well-informed seniors enjoy a better quality of life. They tend to be more active, more involved, and able to live in their own homes longer. Seniors with low literacy are at greater risk of experiencing health problems, poverty, and have greater difficulties maintaining their own independence.

Literacy instruction offers many benefits to seniors, yet seniors are underrepresented in literacy programs. Too often, literacy funding targets those whose goal is employment. As a result, literacy programs are not adequately prepared to address the goals, values interests, and sensory needs of older adults.

What can be done?

- Prepare literacy programs to adequately handle the specific needs of seniors.
- Work with existing seniors groups to promote adult literacy.
- Clear and effective communications must target older Canadians.
- More literate seniors can be encouraged to share their valuable talents as literacy tutors.