



While few Canadian citizens are fully illiterate, almost half of the adult population possess deficient reading, writing, and mathematical skills. According to Statistics Canada and the OECD, 48% of Canadians 16 years of age or older are below the basic level of literacy that is considered necessary to meet those demands (as cited by the ABC Canada Literacy Foundation, 2008).

Literacy skills – reading, writing, and mathematical skills among adults for whom English or French is their first language – are considered essential to meet the demands of a society that is increasingly information-based. Most citizens are literate to a certain degree. However, these individuals simply need additional tutoring to raise their literacy skills to a level in which they can confidently participate at work, home and in the community (ABC Life Literacy of Canada, 2012).

*Adult literacy is usually measured on a prose and document literacy scale of 1 to 5. Level 3 (equivalent to high school completion) is the desired threshold for coping with the rapidly changing skill demands of a knowledge-based economy and society (Statistics Canada, 2008).*

While Alberta adolescents tend to have slightly above average literacy skills on some performance measures compared to their peers in other Canadian provinces (Statistics Canada, 2009), such skills can only be retained into adulthood if they are continually used throughout life in the home, workplace, and community. Individuals who are employed in areas that under-utilize these essential skills run the risk of literacy atrophy since they are not used regularly. Recent reports suggest that regular reading is one of the most important determinants of health literacy (Government of Alberta, 2009).

*Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Quebec and Nunavut have more people with low literacy than the national average. Yukon, British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan have fewer people with low literacy (Statistics Canada, 2005).*

Most Alberta employers (81%) agree that there is a need for improved literacy and essential skills among the workforce and are equally concerned about the essential skill levels of future employees (Centre for Family Literacy, February 2009). In a survey commissioned by ABC Canada, nearly one half of managers and executives working in the private sector would not know how to help a worker if that individual approached them with concerns about their low level of literacy (ABC Canada, 2009).

Conversely, there is a concern among employees regarding their literacy capacity. A little over three quarters (77%) of working Albertans believe that current levels of adult literacy are a problem. 79% of Canadian workers 'strongly agree' that if they were to lose their job today, they would have the necessary literacy skills to secure a new job. The remaining survey participants (21%) were less confident that they possessed the literacy skills needed to find and hold on to new employment (ABC Canada, 2009).



Literacy is a predictor of economic success at both the individual and national level. Research by Coulombe et al. (2006a) estimates that up to 55% of long-term differences in per capita GDP growth rates can be explained by adult literacy levels. At the individual level, people with higher literacy skills are more likely to be employed, make higher wages, and depend less on social assistance (Osberg, L., 2000; Green DA, and Riddell C., 2007; Raudenbush, SW and Kasim RM., 2002; Statistics Canada and OECD, 2005).

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