

OVERVIEW

The Health and Learning Knowledge Centre's Adult Working Group (AWG) conducted consultations to identify themes, gaps and needs for Canadian adults with literacy challenges.

Participants included adults with literacy challenges and service providers from Vancouver, British Columbia; Regina, Saskatchewan; Toronto, Ontario; Montreal, Quebec; and Lunenburg, Cumberland, and Truro, Nova Scotia.

The report highlights the barriers faced by these individuals and provides some recommendations to better support the health of this group. Some of these are directed to policy-makers and others to health-care and service providers.

Those papers [from the pharmacist] are too long. They have too many big words.

– **COMMUNITY MEMBER, Regina, Saskatchewan**

THE QUESTIONS WE ASKED

- What health means to adults with literacy challenges
- How they keep in good health
- How they learn about health and get the information they need (barriers and what is working well)
- Their experiences with what is working well in the health-care system and what is not, and who should learn what
- What needs to be done

THE PARTICIPANTS

Participants in the consultations were adults with literacy challenges and service providers who work with them. The Adult Working Group worked closely with Dr. Marina Niks; Vancouver's Life Skills Centre; Vancouver Community College, and [with](#); Regina's Family Literacy Network; Saskatchewan Literacy Commission; Toronto Adult Student Association; Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy; and the Nova Scotia Community College to host the consultations.

THE METHODOLOGY

Consultations were held to gather information. In total, 74 community members and 21 service providers participated.

- Three focus groups took place in Vancouver, BC, and two in Toronto, ON. One focus group was held in Regina, SK. In Nova Scotia, Truro was the host site and Lunenburg and Cumberland joined via video conferencing.
- Each consultation was three to four hours long. At the beginning of the consultation, ethics and informed consent procedures were conducted with participants.
- Participants also completed an anonymous participant profile sheet which provided information on gender, age range, employment status and level of education.

I can't afford it [health]. No means or time to get there.

– **COMMUNITY MEMBER, Truro, Nova Scotia**

KEY FINDINGS:

The main barriers to good health

- Poverty means lack of affordability of healthy food and certain health services
- Racism and discrimination
- Lack of access to health services

Key barriers to accessing information about health

- Lack of knowledge about where to go or what to ask
- Literacy tied to understandings of medication and preventative care
- Communication with doctors
- Lack of computer skills and how to find trustworthy information on the internet

Key barriers to accessing health-care services

- Inability to navigate the health care system
- Discriminatory treatment when receiving health services
- Long wait times to see a doctor and get health services
- Difficult experiences and communication with doctors
- Lack of support during recovery

WHAT SHOULD COME NEXT?

Supporting research by funding:

- The documentation of social factors that affect the health of adults with literacy challenges
- Research on interventions that work to improve the health of adults with literacy challenges both at the level of policy and practice
- New research-in-practice projects that focus on health

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Address social factors related to poverty, employment, food security, and housing
2. Offer cultural sensitivity training for health care providers
3. Have more plain language writing for health-related information
4. Develop multi-faceted, clear language strategies for relaying health-related information beyond print materials
5. Offer workshops and discussion groups on health topics to adults with literacy challenges.

THE RESEARCH TEAM

These consultations were conducted by the following members of the Health and Learning Knowledge Centre's Adult Working Group and their partners:

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Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier

Allan Quigley

Hélène Grégoire

The Health and Learning Knowledge Centre is composed of a 17-member consortium led by the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria. The centre brings together a wide variety of professional health and learning individuals based in British Columbia, Yukon and across Canada.

The AWG focuses on four priority groups: adults with low-literacy levels, immigrants and refugees, adults living with HIV/AIDS, and adults living in rural and remote communities.