



# Improving Health Literacy in Health Communications and Health Education

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# Our Time Together

- Introductions
  - Maryland University of Integrative Health
  - Claudia Joy Wingo
  - Rebecca Pille
- Background
  - Status on the evolving field of health literacy
- Application
  - Using health literacy principles and practices to improve community health communications and health education
- Questions and Answers

# Introductions

## Who we are and Where we're from



**MUIH IS ONE OF THE NATION'S LARGEST,  
MOST PROGRESSIVE ACCREDITED  
UNIVERSITIES COMPLETELY DEDICATED TO  
INTEGRATIVE HEALTH.**



# Status on Evolving Field of Health Literacy

- Expansion from health care domain to additional domains of disease prevention and health promotion
- Broadening from basic literacy and numeracy to psychosocial and environmental factors
- Increasingly important – cultural competency
- Research articles increased from 1,000 in 2007 to 5,000 in 2012 (Estacio & Comings, 2013)

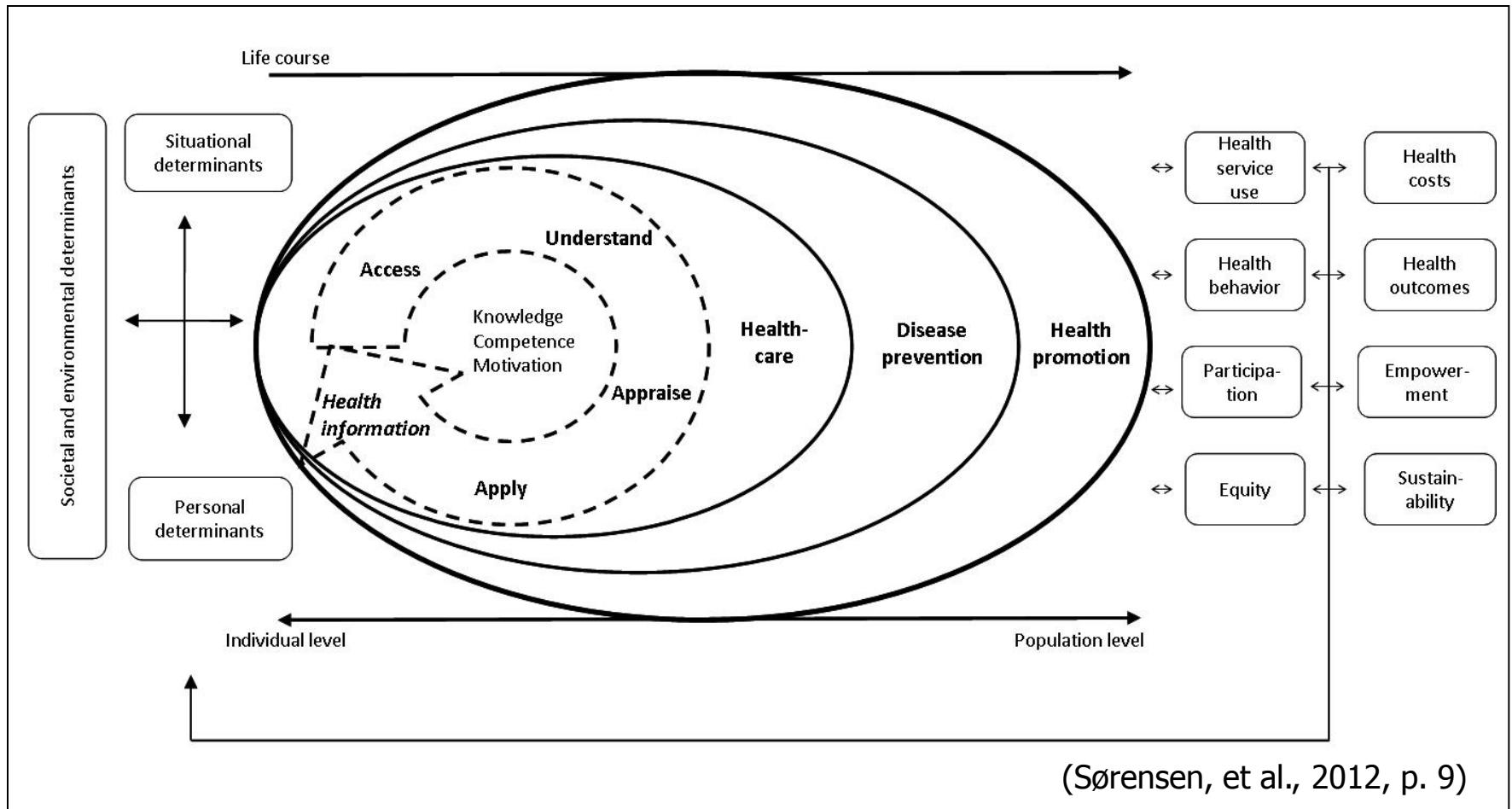
# Integrative Definition for Health Literacy

*Health literacy concerns an individual's knowledge, motivation, and four competencies—accessing, understanding, appraising, and applying health information—related to making judgments and decisions within the three health domains of health care, disease prevention, and health promotion (Sørensen et al., 2012)*

# Integrative Definition for Health Literacy

- Four core competencies:
  - **accessing health information** -- *the ability to seek, find, and obtain information on determinants of health;*
  - **understanding health information** --*the ability to comprehend information on determinants of health and derive meaning;*
  - **appraising health information** --*the ability to interpret, filter, judge, and evaluate information on determinants of health;* and
  - **applying health information** -- *the ability to communicate and use information on determinants of health to make informed decisions* (van der Heide et al., 2013, p. 3).

# Health Literacy Competencies and Health Domains



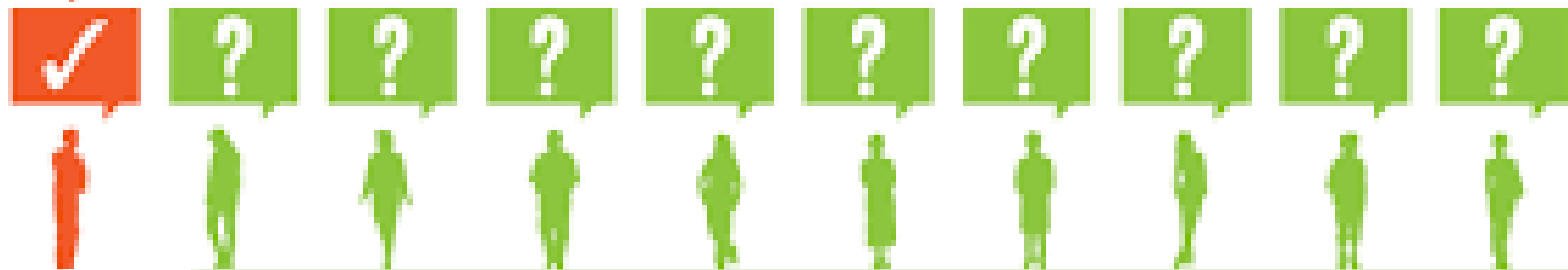
# Where to Start?





# Realize the Breadth of the Issue

Only **10% of adults** have the skills needed to use health information that is routinely available in health care facilities, retail outlets, and the media.



What about the other 90% of us?

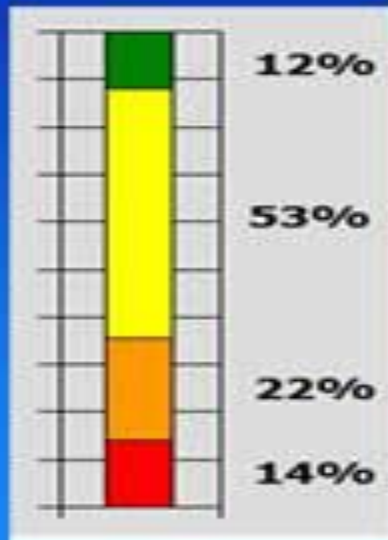
Image courtesy of [www.communicatehealth.com](http://www.communicatehealth.com)

# What We Know



## Health Literacy in America

### National Assessment of Adult Literacy Survey Results:



Proficient: Define medical term from complex document; calculate share of employee's health insurance costs

Intermediate: Determine healthy weight from BMI chart; interpret prescription and over-the-counter drug labels

Basic: Understand simple patient education handout

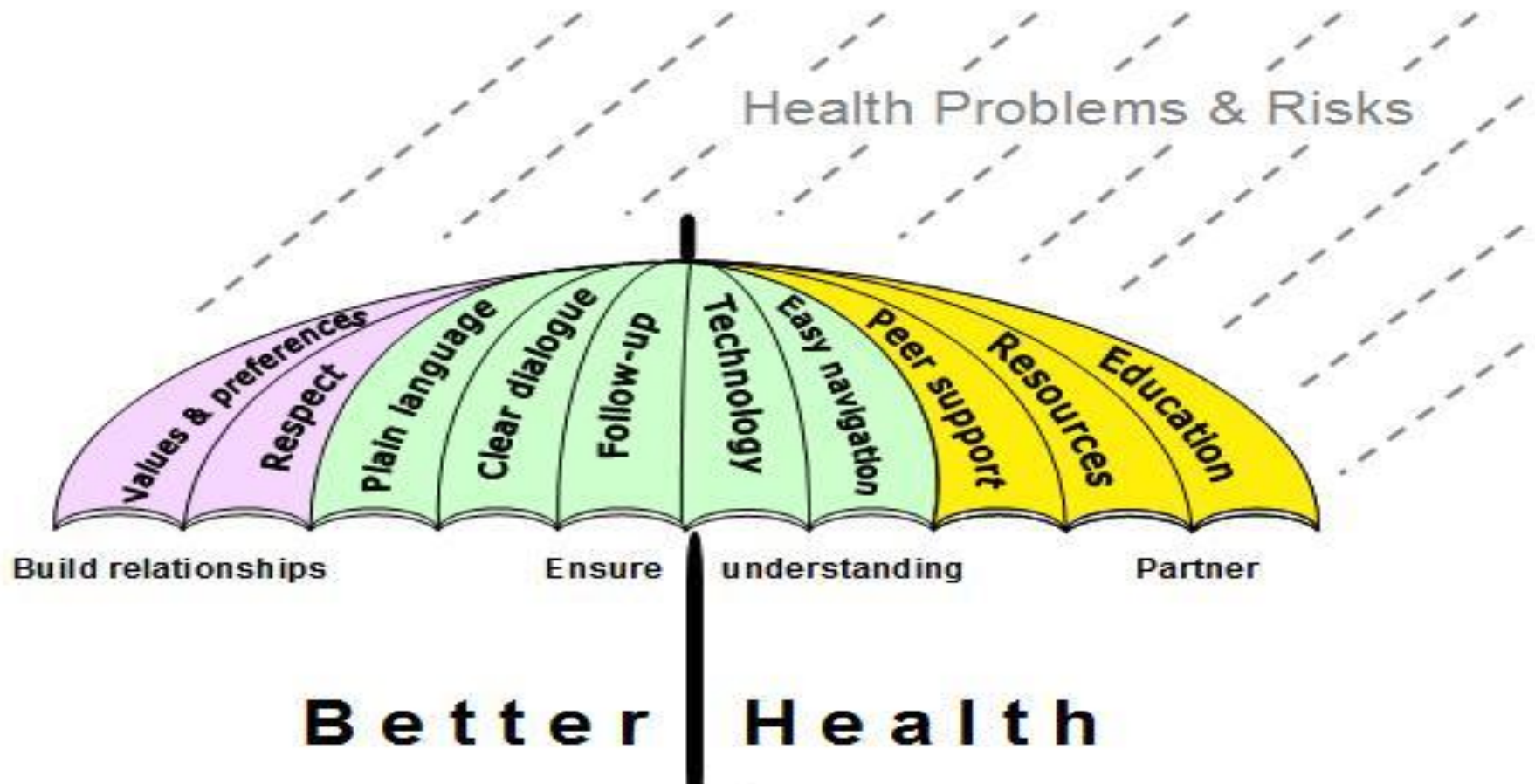
Below Basic: Circle date on appointment slip, understand simple pamphlet about pre-test instructions

\*Approximately 45% of high school graduates have limited health literacy

**SOURCE:** 1) Futerer et al. (2006); 2) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011). Literacy Training for Public Health Professionals. <http://www.cdc.gov/TOE/HealthRegistration/DefaultPage.aspx?ref=06-2011> **Foundin:** Hribstein, G. B., Johnson, H. L. (2007). Strategies to Reduce Communication Between Staff and Patients: Training Program for Pharmacy Staff. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

# Strategies for Improving Health Communications

## The Health Literacy Umbrella



# Strategies: Five Steps for Better Communication

**5** **S**peak slowly

**T**each back

**E**ncourage Questions

**P**lain Language

**S**how examples



# Strategies: Clear Communication

## Plain Language and Health

|                                     |   |  |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Passive sentences                   | → | Active sentences                                   |
| Long paragraphs                     | → | Short paragraphs                                   |
| Poly-syllable words                 | → | Mono or bi-syllable                                |
| Clinical language                   | → | Colloquial language                                |
| Past/mixed tense                    | → | Present tense                                      |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> person (they, s/he) | → | 2 <sup>nd</sup> or 1 <sup>st</sup> person (you, I) |



# Strategies: Understanding the Practice

## Health Literacy *Operationalized*

### ROLES

### METHODS

### OUTCOMES

*Health literacy allows the public and personnel working in all health-related contexts to find, understand, evaluate, communicate, and use information. Health literacy is the use of a wide range of skills that improve the ability of people to act on information in order to live healthier lives. These skills include reading, writing, listening, speaking, numeracy, and critical analysis, as well as communication and interaction skills.*

(Calgary Charter on Health Literacy, 2008)

# Strategies: The 4 C's



## Communication

- Facilitation, Outreach, Media Tools, Action letters

## Connection

- Common Visions & Goals, Inspiration

## Culture

- Social Determinants of Health, Cultural Competency

## Collaboration

- Community Involvement & Projects, Advocacy

# Strategies: Support

## Key Players

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- Partnership for Clear Health Communication/AskMe3 Initiative  
<http://www.npsf.org/askme3/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Simply Put  
[http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/Simply\\_Put.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/Simply_Put.pdf)  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of  
Disease Prevention and Health Promotion  
<http://www.health.gov/communication/literacy>
- “Health Literacy Online: A Guide to Writing and Designing  
Easy-to-Use Health Web Sites” (U.S. Dept. HHS)  
<http://www.health.gov/healthliteracyonline/index.htm>



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- van der Heide, I., Rademakers, J., Schipper, M., Droomers, M., Sørensen, K., & Uiters, E. (2013). Health literacy of Dutch adults: A cross sectional survey. *BMC Public Health, 13*, 1-11. Retrieved from <http://bmcpublikealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458>

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