

The significance of health literacy...

...lies in its impact on individuals' ability to understand and navigate health information, make informed decisions, and actively participate in their well-being, thereby contributing to improved health outcomes.

In the episode *"Empowering Minds: The Crucial Link Between Health Literacy and Community Well-Being"* on the Atrómitos Way, Yasmin Tomkinson helped us understand barriers in health literacy and how they impact health outcomes.

We wanted to share you this quick resource guide to learn more about Cape Fear Literacy Council and about adult literacy.

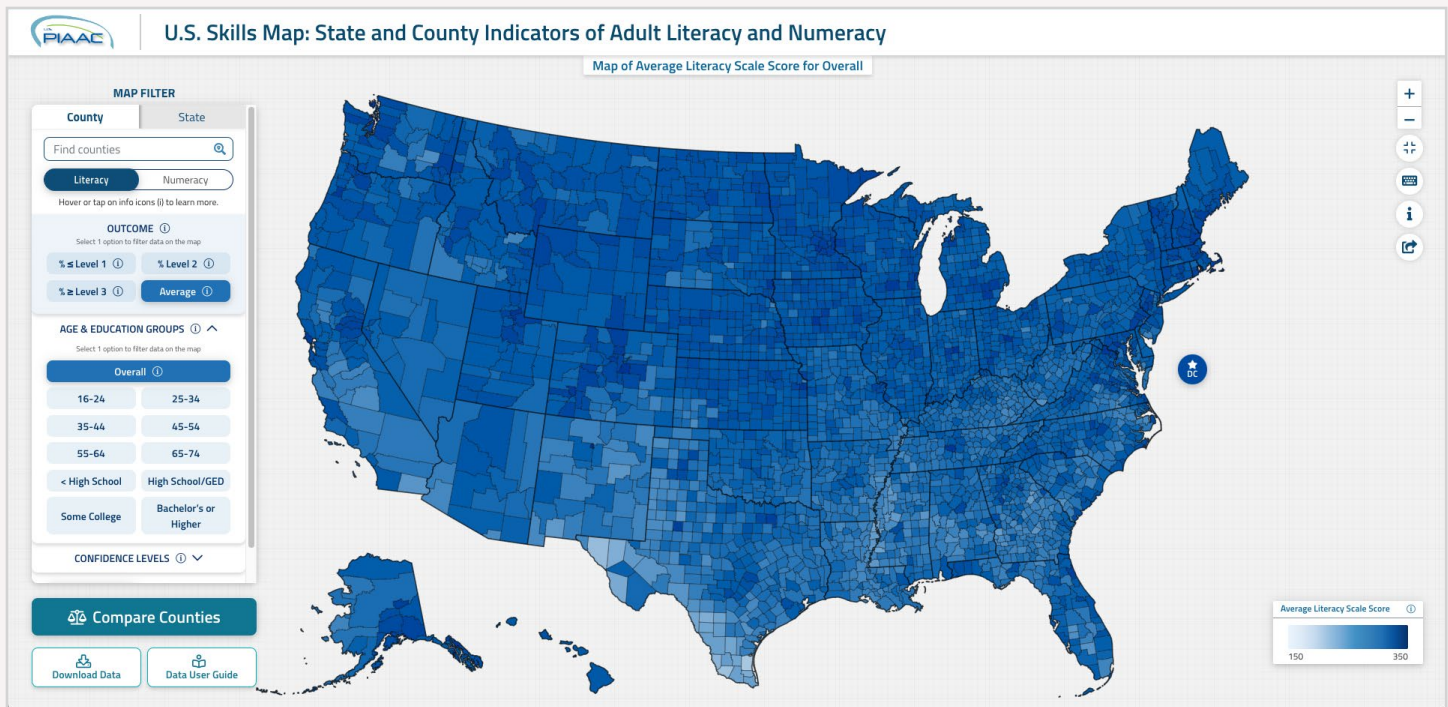


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Listen to *"Empowering Minds: The Crucial Link Between Health Literacy and Community Well-Being"* [here](#).

Low adult literacy and educational disparities serve as foundational challenges perpetuating various societal issues, including health disparities, poverty, unemployment, and housing insecurity. These issues play a crucial role in hindering individual, familial, and community well-being. Addressing larger societal challenges necessitates a proactive approach to resolving these underlying educational issues.

According to the [Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies \(PIAAC\)](#), more than 87,000 adults in [New Hanover County](#) lack sufficient literacy skills to thrive, with 29,000 at or below Level 1 literacy. This represents 49.38% of the county's adult population. The implications are profound, as a significant portion of the community lacks the necessary skills to understand directions, let alone navigate complex medical-related issues.



Providing educational services to historically underserved adults is paramount for enhancing health, self-agency, and family care capabilities. Proficiency in reading, understanding information, effective English communication, and navigating online resources are foundational for all adults, influencing their ability to access and navigate healthcare systems.

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At [Cape Fear Literacy Council](#), we address the diverse educational needs of native English speakers and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. [Our organization offers](#) free, confidential one-on-one tutoring, small classes, and computer-based instruction tailored to each student's unique learning requirements.

Through the dedication of volunteer tutors and small-class teachers, we provide research-based instruction that facilitates real-world educational progress.

Our [volunteers](#) not only instruct but also mentor adult learners, focusing on individualized education and understanding the specific needs of each student. As a community-based, independent nonprofit organization, Cape Fear Literacy Council leverages the commitment and expertise of volunteers to empower learners. While various communities offer adult education programs through libraries, public schools, counties, and community colleges, Cape Fear Literacy Council stands as a dedicated, community-focused, and independent nonprofit organization.



"The strongest predictor of someone's health status is not age, income, employment, education, or ethnicity; it is literacy skill level."

Partnership for Clear Health Communication

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Barriers Individuals May Face

Diverse backgrounds present varying challenges for individuals, ranging from difficulties in reading and understanding information to language barriers and unfamiliarity with American customs.

Those grappling with limited English proficiency often experience a lack of confidence and comfort in daily activities, including making crucial health-related decisions. The uncertainty surrounding medical information is a common experience for individuals across all education levels.

Access to accurate information is pivotal, especially in the context of heightened health awareness during the pandemic.

Cape Fear Literacy Council is committed to providing Health Literacy instruction, recognizing its significance in empowering individuals.

In response to the evolving landscape, the importance of Digital Literacy has become increasingly evident. Telehealth options and online platforms like My Chart have transformed healthcare access, necessitating enhanced digital skills.

Even those with strong educational backgrounds may face digital skill gaps, requiring computer-related training.



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"Nearly half of American adults have difficulty understanding and using health information. Lack of understanding impedes adults' abilities to make appropriate health decisions and increases the likelihood that they'll incur higher health costs."

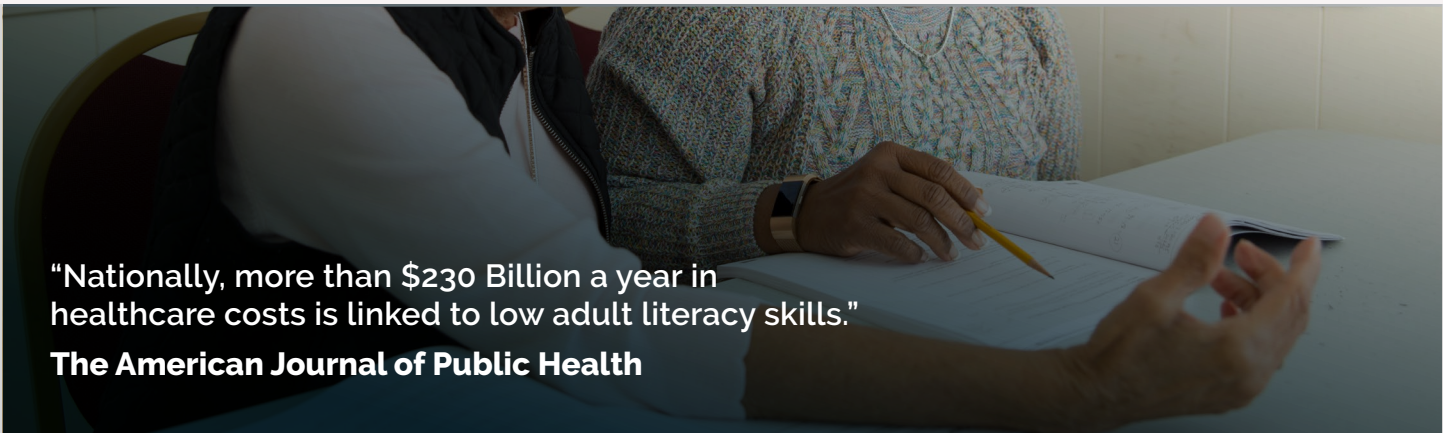
ProLiteracy

"Low health literacy is a major source of economic inefficiency in the U.S. healthcare system. An initial approximation places the order of magnitude of the cost of low health literacy...between 7 – 17% of all personal healthcare expenditures."

Low Health Literacy: Implications for National Health Policy

The impact of COVID-19 prompted the Cape Fear Literacy Council to actively support students and volunteers in bolstering their digital literacy skills. This facilitated increased participation in our digital-centric world and empowered individuals to navigate remote education, access information, and maintain connections with loved ones.

Cape Fear Literacy Council utilizes the Northstar Digital Literacy platform to acknowledge this shift towards a more tech-dependent society. This platform has adapted to the changing landscape by developing assessments and curricula to address the evolving digital challenges. As a result, Cape Fear Literacy Council can now offer tailored learning modules, such as "Accessing Telehealth Appointments" and "Information Literacy and Safety," equipping individuals with the skills needed to navigate the complexities of an increasingly digital healthcare and information environment.



"Nationally, more than \$230 Billion a year in healthcare costs is linked to low adult literacy skills."

The American Journal of Public Health

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Strategies to Use

Cape Fear Literacy Council has crafted a specialized workshop designed to cater specifically to the unique needs of adults who are English language learners. However, the insights and strategies offered in this workshop extend beyond this specific demographic, proving beneficial for a diverse range of individuals.

"If a patient's health literacy isn't adequate, they are less likely to understand the "usual care and education" that medical providers share. Any additional educational intervention has been shown to be helpful and make the patients more self-reliant."

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

By tailoring our approach to address the challenges English language learners face, we inadvertently create a comprehensive and adaptable framework that holds relevance and value for a broader audience. The workshop's recommendations encompass a spectrum of language proficiency levels, making it an inclusive resource for anyone seeking to enhance their language skills and understanding.

1. Have an awareness of how you speak, minding your facial expression, tone, and body language. These actions all affect the listener, who is probably already under duress. Try to make them feel comfortable.
2. Speak clearly, slowly, and to the point, avoiding unnecessary jargon or complicated additional information.
3. Restate what you have said, repeating the same words AND saying the same thing differently.
4. Check for comprehension. It's not enough to ask, "Okay?" or "Do you understand?" Many people want to be agreeable or nod "yes" when they don't know what else to do. Instead, ask them to repeat back to you/tell you what they are supposed to do. Also, show them what you and they are saying on the paper version.
5. Follow up. If you have given them instructions to come back in, don't just say, "Do you know when we'll meet again?" Instead, ask, "Tell me again what day we are meeting next week. What time?" Get a confirmation that they know the next steps.

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If someone's reading skills are stronger than speaking, send an email. If they are better at speaking English, call. Ensure you get someone in person, maybe a relative or friend, who can help confirm their understanding and follow through.

Finally, to ensure that printed materials are accessible, understandable, and supportive for individuals with low adult literacy, we recommend creating a more inclusive and effective communication strategy in medical contexts by utilizing the following:

Readability

- » Aim for a 4th to 6th-grade reading level.
- » Recognize that children might interpret for their parents, emphasizing the need for simplicity.

Formatting

- » Incorporate ample white space to enhance readability.
- » Integrate illustrations to complement and clarify textual information.
- » Ensure that printed materials are not copies of copies to maintain visual clarity.
- » Opt for a simple font that is easy to read.

Alignment with Verbal Communication

- » Pay attention to aligning printed materials with verbal descriptions, minimizing potential mismatches.

Contact Information

- » Clearly display a contact number for further assistance or inquiries.

Language Assistance

- » Encourage the use of Healthline or interpreters for effective communication.
- » Remind communicators to pause, allowing sufficient time to convey and understand information.

Consideration for Stress

- » Acknowledge that individuals, even those with higher education levels, may experience heightened stress in medical situations.
- » Tailor language and presentation to ease comprehension during stressful moments.

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SUCCESS STORIES

"We spent a lot of time talking about the healthcare system in America today. My student's husband had a medical scare – some heart palpitations and dizziness. They weren't sure what to do and spent hours waiting for a call back from their doctor before someone told them to go to a hospital. I had no idea how different the system is in Russia. I can't imagine how scary it must be to try to deal with a medical emergency when you don't speak the language and don't know how the system works!"

- ESL Tutor

"My student received a package of Covid test kits in the mail, which he brought to our session. We went through the directions and process, and he feels confident that he can now utilize the test effectively. The things we take for granted!"

- Adult Literacy Tutor

"I asked my doctor questions when my baby girl went for shots. I know what I want to ask, and I know what he says back. This is so much better than last time. Thank you for teaching me."

- ESL Student

"[My client] has gained a huge amount of confidence this year at CFLC. He is talking more; he is giving more thought to something before he says it and is choosing his words more carefully to make sure they are correct. He is providing more detail and communicating more clearly about his symptoms – using real medical terminology! You are really making a big difference in his life."

- Physician Alliance for Mental Health Caseworker

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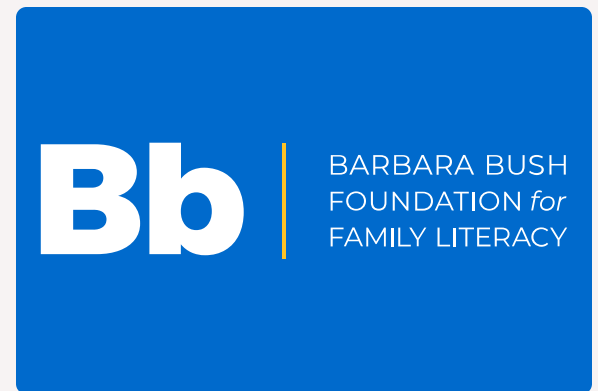
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Extra Resources

For those seeking educational programs and services, the [National Literacy Directory](http://www.nld.org) serves as a valuable resource. Accessible through their website: www.nld.org or by phone (877-389-6874), the directory aids in locating nearby programs and services for potential students and volunteers.



The [Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy](http://www.barbarabush.org/literacy-resources) is dedicated to expanding access to literacy services for adults nationwide, believing in the uniquely transformative power of literacy. The ability to read, write, and comprehend brings dignity to daily life and equal opportunity to fulfill one's greatest potential. They provide a few resources that help support educators, employers and volunteers who seek to aid adult learners improve their literacy skills. These resources can be found at: www.barbarabush.org/literacy-resources.



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Empowering Individuals

In catering to the unique needs of diverse communities and individuals within our sphere of influence, the Cape Fear Literacy Council employs targeted instruction to assist those likely to face challenges with medical information. Our focus extends beyond fundamental reading and English language skills, including practical applications with real-life materials. For instance, we guide adults in comprehending prescriptions, insurance details, and doctor's notes and forms.

Our commitment extends to mentoring and supporting adult learners as they navigate the complexities of the healthcare system for themselves and their families. We empower them with essential computer skills to research preventive measures for maintaining good health. Additionally, we support immigrants in understanding American customs and cultural nuances related to healthcare and accessibility. We facilitate connections with health-focused agencies when necessary, ensuring a holistic and comprehensive approach to healthcare literacy.



**"Thank you, Atrómitos, for the opportunity to speak on
the podcast and highlight our good work!"**

Yasmin Tomkinson, *Executive Director*

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WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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Become a Volunteer

Make a Donation

Learn more at
www.cfliteracy.org



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