

## Understanding Health Information Seeking Behaviors of Adults with Low Literacy, Numeracy, and Problem Solving Skills

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Patient-centered care (PCC), in which patients and their providers work together to make decisions about health care and disease management, is considered one of the key components of high-quality healthcare (IOM, 2013). For patients to be able to participate in their own care, they must have adequate functional health literacy, which enables them to use health information in this dyadic communication framework. A critical first step to having functional health literacy is the ability to access and identify information that can be used for the more complex and situational demands of health care. This analysis of PIAAC data looks at how adults with low level skills seek health information. What sources do individuals use when seeking health information? Do different demographics, health behaviors, and facilities in English predict different health information sources for people with low skills in literacy, numeracy, and problem solving?

Our key findings are as follows:

- Health information seeking behaviors are both complex and subtle, and depend on a multitude of factors. One size doesn't fit all as evidenced by varying combinations of background, health behaviors, and facilities in English. People with low level literacy, numeracy, and problem solving skills who seek health information report having better health status than those who do not seek health information.
- People with low level literacy, numeracy, and problem solving skills report that oral sources of communication (Radio/TV, Friends/Family/Co-Workers, Health Professionals) are used more often than written sources (Print Media/Internet). Those with low literacy and numeracy skills seek health information from Radio/TV most often while those with low problem solving skills use the Internet and Health Professionals.
- Having a high facility in writing English is a significant predictor of using the Internet and Health Professionals as a source of health information for those with low level literacy, numeracy, and problem solving skills.
- For people with low levels of literacy, numeracy, and problem solving skills, having a high school diploma is significant when compared to not having a high school diploma only when seeking health information through the Internet or Print Media.

Overall, we learned from the PIAAC data that adults with low skill levels practice varying kinds of health information seeking behaviors from multiple sources. We suggest that different stakeholders have unique roles to play in increasing health information seeking behaviors. Health professionals could develop more focus and skills in oral participatory care with patients and caregivers; the health care industry (pharmaceutical, hospital systems, insurance companies) could simplify and standardize forms and written materials; policy makers could include health literacy at appropriate funding levels for K-12 and Adult Basic Education curricula; and health educators and researchers must develop interventions to address health information seeking behaviors through differing skill levels in multiple modalities.