WHAT IS HEALTH LITERACY?

HEALTH LITERACY is the ability to get health information, understand it, and use it to lower risk and better health. Health care providers, culture and media affect how people understand health information. Health literacy can be improved through the use of clear, culturally sensitive messages.

WHY IS HEALTH LITERACY IMPORTANT?

Nearly half of all American adults, including those who are well-educated, have difficulty understanding basic health information. Only 12% of Americans have adequate health literacy skills. People who have poor health literacy are more likely to use hospitals and emergency services. There are significant disparities in health literacy levels among different racial and ethnic groups.

HERSCHEL S. HOROWITZ CENTER FOR HEALTH LITERACY

The Herschel S. Horowitz Center for Health Literacy was endowed and named in 2007 to honor the legacy of Dr. Herschel S. Horowitz, internationally known dental epidemiologist, educator, and public health advocate whose work focused on prevention of the most common childhood disease: tooth decay. Dr. Horowitz believed researchers have a responsibility to communicate risks to health, promote methods of maintaining health, generate healthy policies, educate communities, and serve as expert witnesses where necessary.

MISSION

To advance health literacy and health communication research and education that
• empowers people to better navigate health environments and decisions,
• assists health care providers, the public sector, and media in using clear, evidence based, culturally competent messages
• improves health outcomes for Maryland and beyond.

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We seek to improve health literacy for all through:

**RESEARCH**
Our pilot projects have explored social media and e-health technologies' roles in improving health communication, health literacy outcomes and health disparities. One major focus has been conducting a statewide oral health literacy needs assessment in Maryland to determine what health care providers and the public understand and do about preventing tooth decay.

**EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS**
Center faculty have taught courses in health literacy, developed health literacy curriculum for public health education, created a continuing education course on preventing dental caries for health and social service providers and facilitated state legislation that requires health literacy and cultural competency curriculum in all public health education programs in Maryland.

**PARTNERSHIPS**
The Center has successfully sustained and created several partnerships and "collaboratories" with faculty, academic units, other schools and colleges, community-based organizations, government agencies, health care systems and research firms. 
Center partners include: National Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition; Prince George's County, MD; The Primary Care Coalition of Montgomery County; Atlantic Healthcare System; Rural Maryland Council; Md. Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Office of Oral Health; Children's Dental Health Project; American Dental Association; Md. State Dental Association; UMD School of Dentistry; and Md. Dental Action Coalition.

**CURRENT CENTER PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES**

- **Center for Health Literacy Seed Grant Program**
  Encourages innovative, evidence-based research projects that address health literacy and health communication.

- **Md. Statewide Oral Health Literacy Needs Assessment**
  Assessed what medical, dental, and social service providers and the public know and do to prevent tooth decay, especially in young children. Information gathered through surveys and focus groups was used to create dental caries educational posters, pamphlets and DVDs in English and Spanish, which are used in US safety net dental clinics.

- **Multi-State Oral Health Literacy Project**
  Surveyed patients of dental clinics on their oral health literacy, using different scales, to assess oral health literacy in relationship with oral health practices and knowledge.

- **Moving to Healthy Futures**
  To create, with parents’ input, a campaign to promote physical activity in families using research from focus groups and workshops. Center partners will apply theory and best practices in health literacy and health communication.

**Health Literacy Maryland**
A statewide coalition of individuals and organizations working together to improve health literacy in our communities. Email healthliteracy@umd.edu to join.

**Creating Health Literate Kids:**
Integrating Health Literacy Curriculum into K-8 Worcester County Public Schools
An innovative approach to integrating health literacy into the existing Maryland core curriculum, in order to increase student capacity as informed, empowered health consumers.

**Reducing Health Disparities and Improving Health Literacy:**
A Pilot Community Health Empowerment Campaign in Capitol Heights, MD for Prince George’s County Health Enterprize Zones (HEZ)
The goal of the campaign will be to create an empowered health consumer base that can effectively utilize the health care services provided through other HEZ endeavors and initiatives in progress in Prince George’s County, MD.

**FACULTY OPPORTUNITIES**
Become a partner or collaborator of the Center. Center research grants are interdisciplinary and collaborative and include faculty and researchers from different universities and fields. Contact laldoory@umd.edu if you have partnership or expertise needs in health literacy or health communication for your grant.

**STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES**
Graduate students who work with the Center get involved in quantitative and qualitative research projects that impact community health and health literacy. Email laldoory@umd.edu for more information.

The Center offers undergraduate internships for students to gain a learning experience in health literacy as a public health issue, and participate in the Center’s community health projects, communication efforts, and/or research studies. Email kgarcia@umd.edu for more information.

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