

#### WHAT IS HEALTH LITERACY?

Health literacy describes the wide range of skills needed and used to get health information, understand it and to use it to lower risk and better health. Health literacy can be improved through the use of clear, culturally sensitive messages by health care providers and organizations.

#### WHY IS HEALTH LITERACY IMPORTANT?

People with limited health literacy are less likely to follow health-promoting lifestyles, more likely to use and misuse hospitals and emergency services for care, and generally report poorer overall health. Nearly 90 million adults—roughly 30% of the U.S. population—have difficulty understanding and using basic health information and services, and face significant challenges performing basic health-related tasks. Also, the complexities of navigating health systems magnify the challenges experienced by those with low skills, and contribute to preventable costs and poor outcomes.



HERSCHEL S. HOROWITZ

# CENTER FOR HEALTH LITERACY

The Herschel S. Horowitz Center for Health Literacy aims to transform health and health care so that individuals can easily obtain the health information and services they need to live healthy lives and raise healthy families. Founded in 2007, our center was the first academic research center focused on health literacy science.

#### STAFF

**Dina L.G. Borzekowski, Ed.D.**

*Interim Chair and Director*  
Research Professor, Behavioral and Community Health

**Cynthia Baur, Ph.D.**

*Incoming Endowed Chair and Director*, beginning in January 2017

**Alice M. Horowitz, Ph.D.**

Research Associate Professor,  
Behavioral and Community Health

**Catherine Maybury, MPH**

Faculty Research Assistant

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#### THE CENTER'S MAIN GOALS

The mission of the Center is to promote optimum health for all through health literacy science. The Center's main goals are to:

- Expand the health literacy evidence base by incorporating health literacy science and innovation into joint research, education, and public policy endeavors with like-minded professionals
- Foster health literacy skills among the current and emerging health workforce through evidence-based skills training
- Improve Maryland's most vulnerable populations' ability to use accurate, accessible, actionable information through piloting and testing health literacy interventions
- Promote changes in health systems that improve communicating health information, support informed decisionmaking, and strengthen access to health services.



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We seek to improve health literacy for all through:

## RESEARCH

The Center's research focuses on how the dissemination and use of health literate practices can make health systems less intimidating for new users, increase user-friendliness for current users, and improve population health outcomes while reducing health disparities. It is critical to understand how to best reach intended audiences, whether in person or through traditional or new media. Populations of interest include pregnant women and women with young children; health care providers and their support staff and networks; and educators, organizations, public health practitioners, and policy-makers who influence health.

## EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS

Center faculty have taught courses in health literacy, developed health literacy curriculum for public health education, developed 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 the state.

## PARTNERSHIPS

The Center has successfully created and sustained several partnerships and collaborations with faculty, academic units, other schools and colleges, community-based organizations, government agencies, health care systems, and research firms.

*Partners include: Maryland Center for Health Equity; Prevention Research Center; Prince George's County, MD; Dental Trade Alliance Foundation; DentaQuest Foundation; Rural Maryland Council; MD Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, Office of Oral Health; Children's Dental Health Project; the American Dental Association; MD State Dental Association; UM School of Dentistry; and MD Dental Action Coalition.*

## CURRENT CENTER PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

### Center for Health Literacy Seed Grant Program

The goal of the Seed Grant Program is to encourage innovative, evidence-based research projects that address health literacy and its close correlate, health communication.

### Maryland Statewide Oral Health Literacy Needs Assessment

The project 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. These materials are used in safety net dental clinics in the U.S.

## Multi-State Oral Health Literacy Project

A survey of patients of dental clinics on their oral health literacy, using different scales, to assess their oral health literacy in relationship with their oral health practices and knowledge.

## Health Literacy Maryland

A statewide coalition of individuals and organizations working together to improve health literacy in our communities. Join our listserv by emailing [healthliteracy@umd.edu](mailto:healthliteracy@umd.edu).

## Listening to Mom (L2M):

Qualitatively assesses factors supporting or limiting low-income pregnant women and their infants from receiving science-based health messages and comprehensive, coordinated medical and dental services. L2M uses moms' voices to inform user-centered systems change aimed at increasing oral health literacy and encouraging timely oral health services.

## FACULTY OPPORTUNITIES

Become a Center affiliate. Center research is interdisciplinary, collaborative, and often includes team members from diverse fields both within and outside of the University of Maryland academic community.

Email [HealthLiteracy@umd.edu](mailto:HealthLiteracy@umd.edu) for more information about becoming a Center affiliate.

## STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

Undergraduate and graduate students are encouraged to get involved with the Center through internships and graduate assistantships. The Center offers an opportunity for students to gain a broader understanding of the implications of health literacy for their professional career, provides valuable connections to leaders in health literacy research and practice, and allows for exposure to the qualitative and quantitative research processes.

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