

Health Literacy: An Exploration

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Robert Aucoin, Health and Learning Knowledge Centre

Ellen Szita, Adult Learner

Helen Simson, Expert Panel on Health Literacy

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Objective of Session

- Provide an overview of the issue of health literacy from a variety of perspectives and highlight progress to date

Agenda

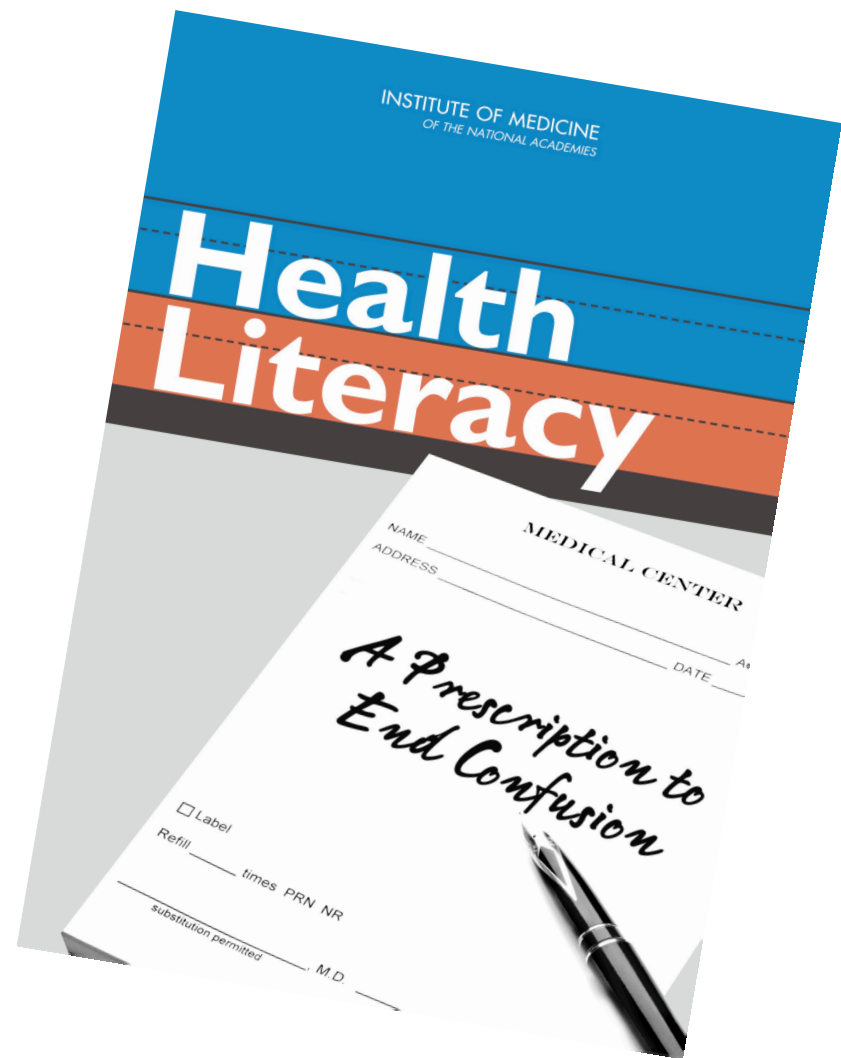
- An historical and research perspective (Irving Rootman)
- A Knowledge Centre Perspective (Robert Aucoin)
- An adult learner perspective (Ellen Szita)
- A CPHA and Expert Panel Perspective (Helen Simson)

What do we know about health literacy?

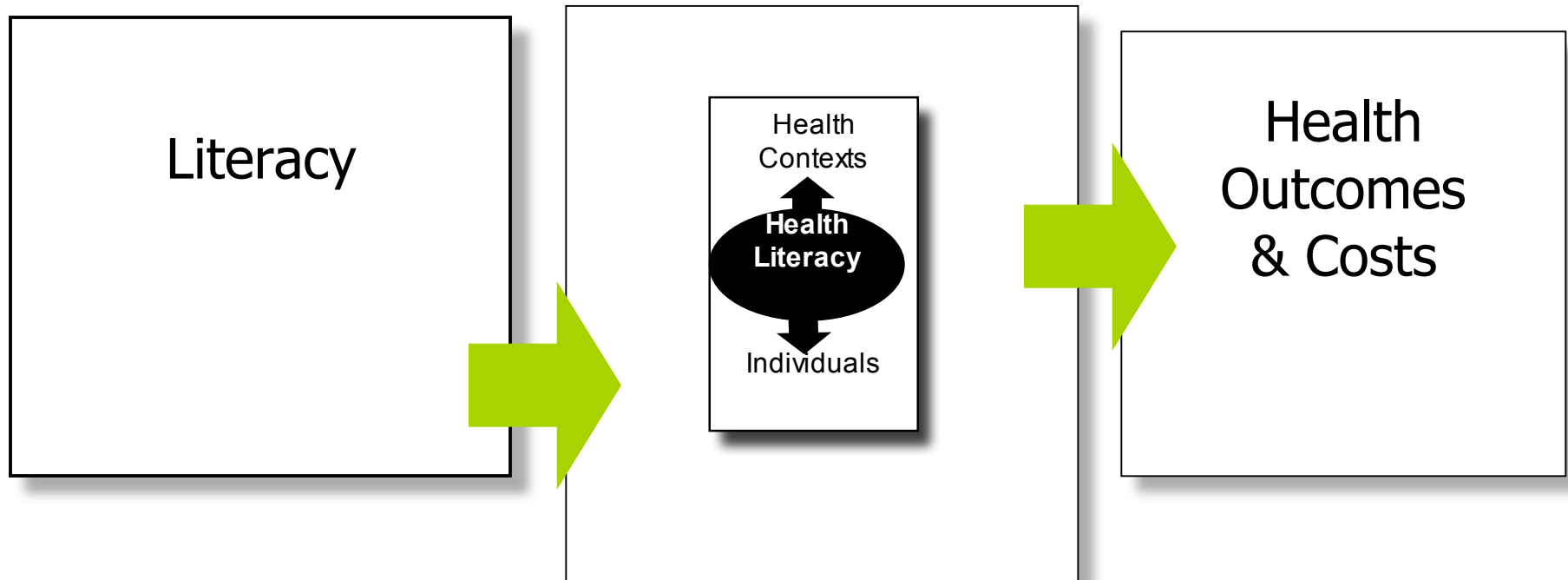
- Many definitions
- Inadequate measures
- Has health consequences
- Could be a large problem
- Affected by many factors
- Can be improved

Health Literacy is...

- The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions (I.O.M., 2004)



Health Literacy Framework (I.O.M., 2004)



A Revised Definition

- *The degree to which people are able to access, understand, appraise and communicate information to engage with the demands of different health contexts in order to promote and maintain good health across the life-course*

(B.C. Health Literacy Research Team, 2006)

Likely Direct Effects of low health literacy on health

- Poorer health status
- Inappropriate medication use and compliance with physician orders
- Poor glycemic control and increased prevalence of self-reported complications due to poor control

Likely Direct effects of low health literacy on health (Cont.)

- Less health knowledge
- Less sharing in decision-making about treatment
- Less expression of health concerns
- Worse communication with practitioners

Likely Indirect effects of Low Health Literacy

- Less use of preventive services
- Less care-seeking
- More difficulties using the health care system
- More and longer hospitalizations

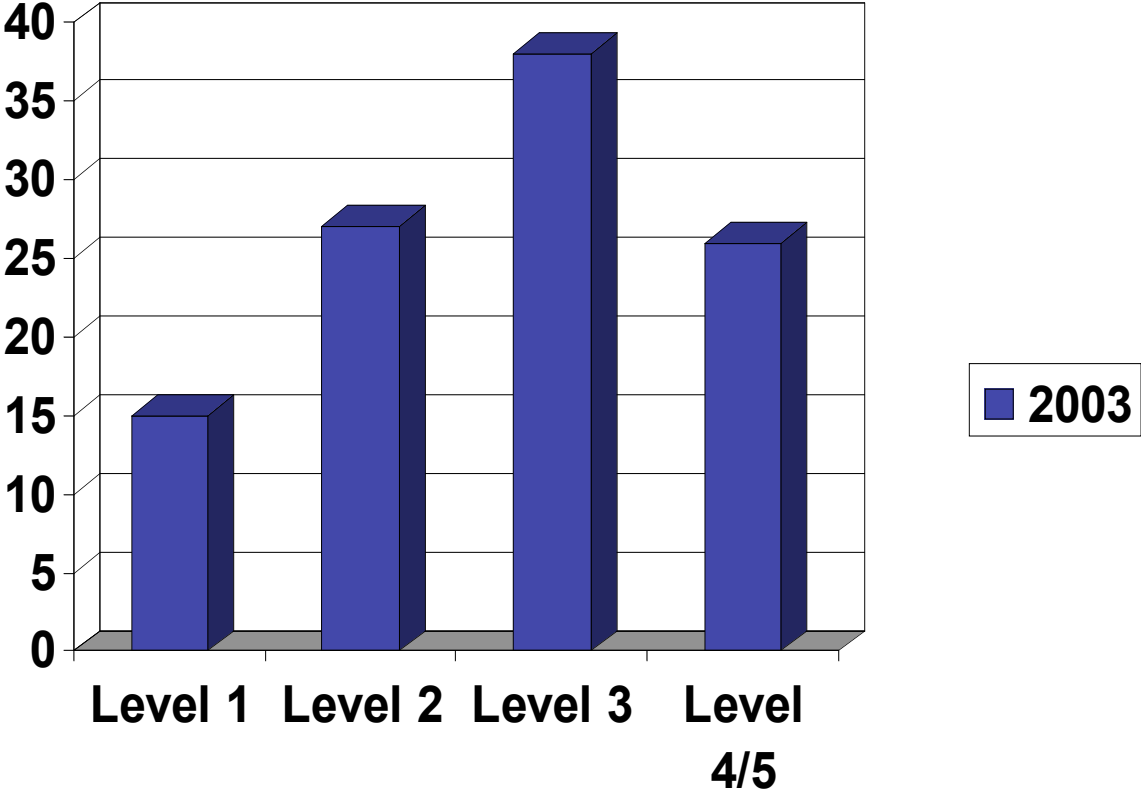
Likely High Level Effects of Health Literacy on Health

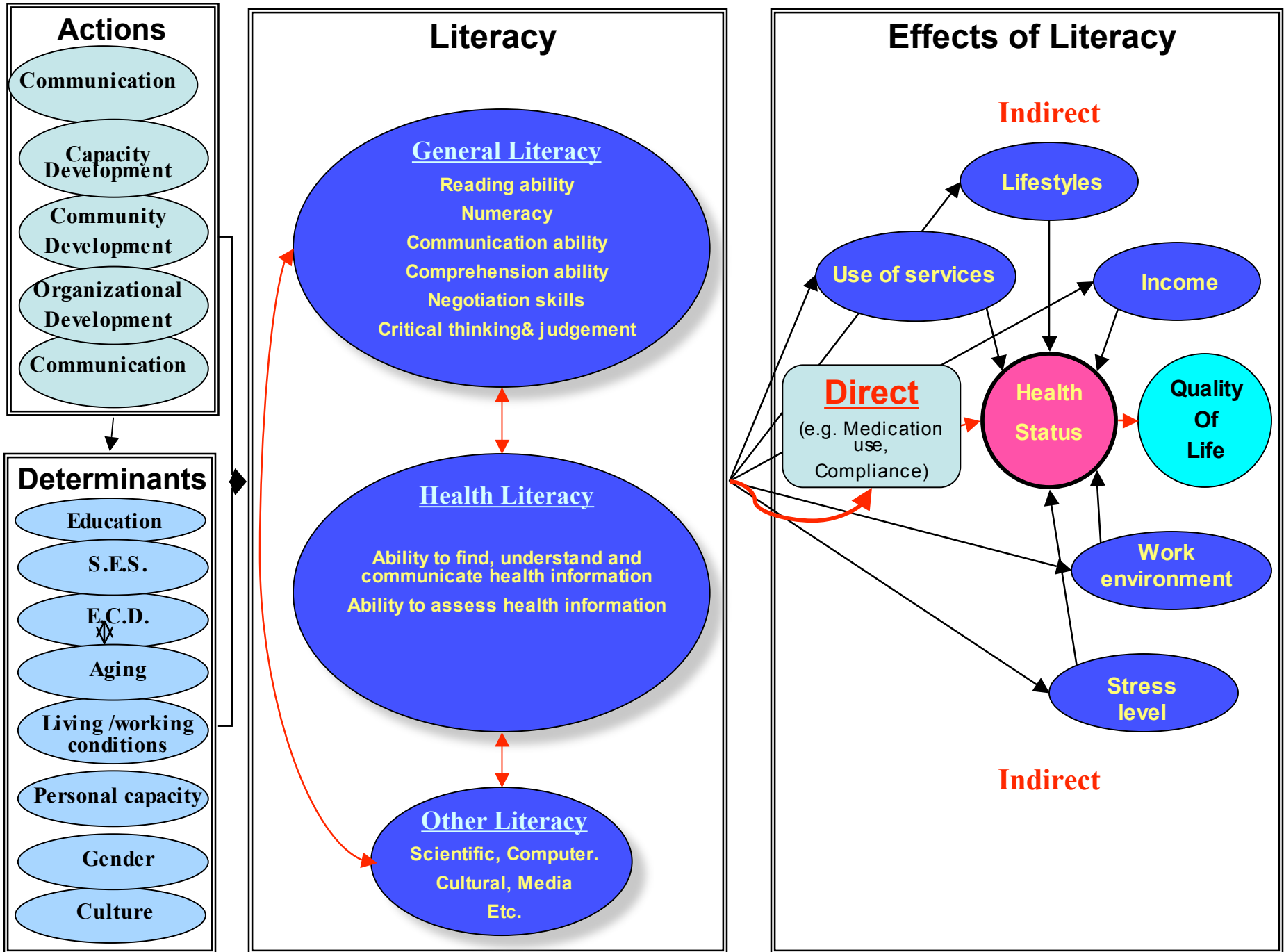
- Escalation of Health Care Costs
- Reductions in Quality of Life

Health Literacy Proficiency in Canada

- Very little information; a report based on the 2003 survey may be released soon
- One published Canadian study on levels of health literacy found low HL of 7-9% of Clinic population

Scores on Prose Scale of Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey





Types of Intervention to Improve Health Literacy

- Health Communication
- Health Education and Training
- Community Development
- Organizational Development
- Policy Development
- Combined Approaches

Research Priorities

- Effectiveness of interventions
- Health costs of low literacy and health literacy
- Literacy and health and health literacy in high risk groups
- The relationship between literacy life-long learning and health