



Health & Learning Knowledge Centre
Centre du Savoir sur la Santé et l'Apprentissage

CANADIAN COUNCIL ON LEARNING
CONSEIL CANADIEN SUR L'APPRENTISSAGE

The Development of Leadership in Literacy and Health in Canada

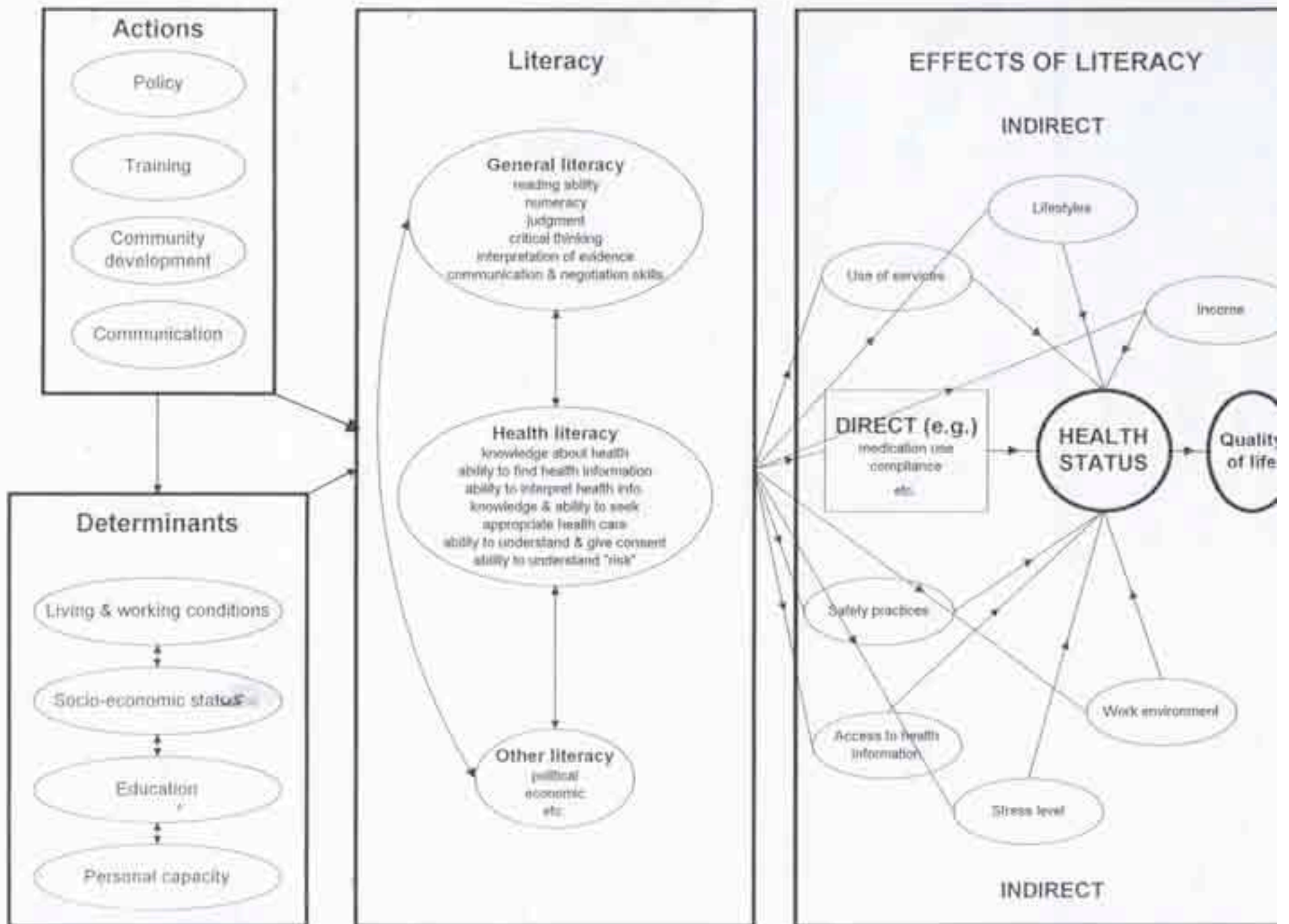
Irving Rootman, Chair, Health and Learning Knowledge Centre

Literacy BC Summer Institute
Workshop on Health and Learning
July 24, 2007



The Development of Leadership in Literacy and Health in Canada

- Growing interest in literacy in the late 1980's
- OPHA/Frontier College Literacy and Health project (1989-1993)
- National Literacy and Health Program (1994-present)
- CPHA Clear Language Service (1997-present)
- National Conferences on Literacy and Health (2000, 2004)
- National Literacy and Health Research Project (2002-2006)
- Health Literacy in Rural Nova Scotia (2002-2006)
- BC Health Literacy Research Team (2002-present)
- CPHA Expert Panel on Health Literacy (2006-2007)





Projects of BC Health Literacy Research Team:

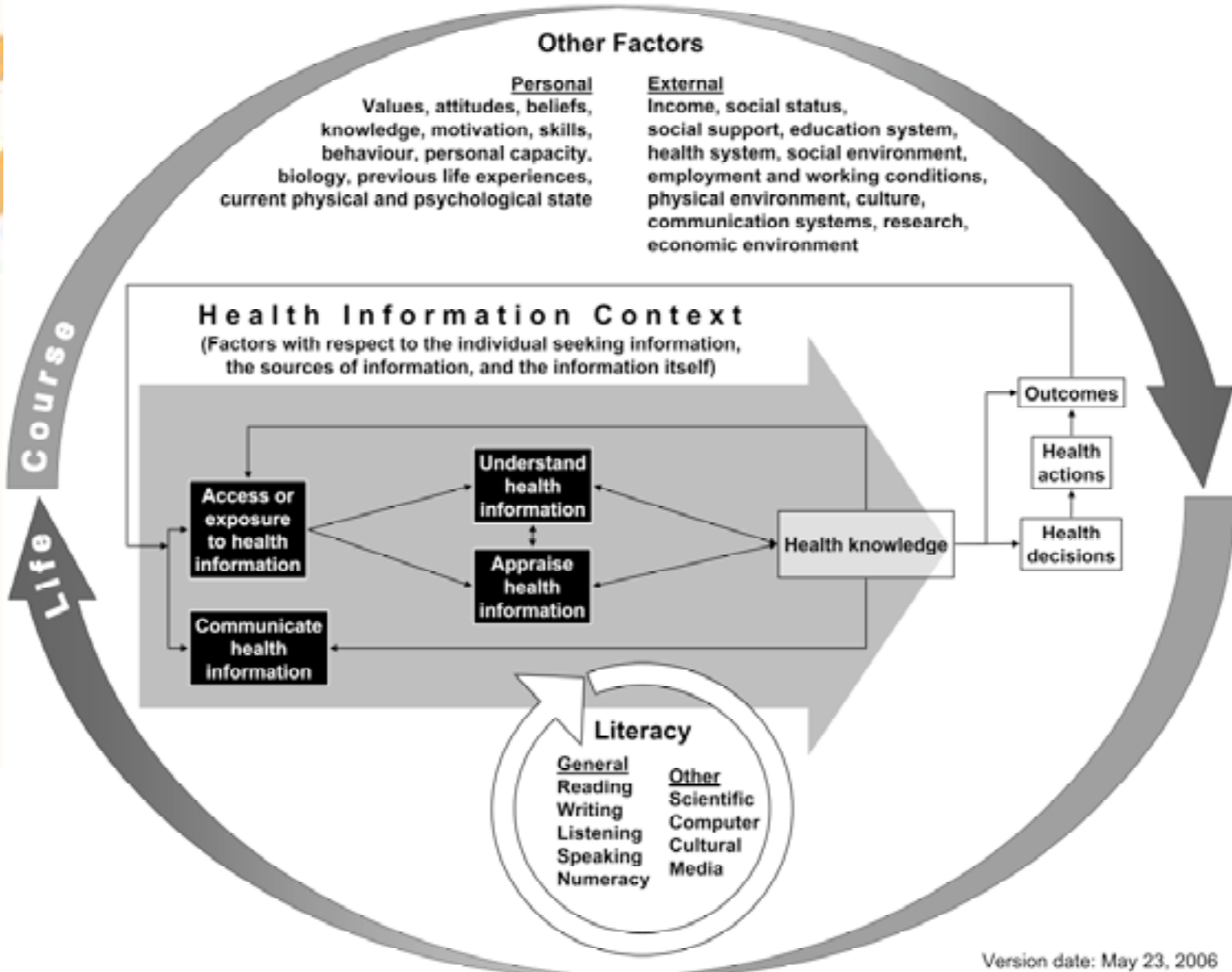
- Measuring Health Literacy (Older Adults; High Schools Students; Ethno-cultural Communities)
- Evaluating health literacy interventions (BC Health Curriculum; BC Health Guide Program; Health videos for Farsi-speaking community)



Operational Definition of Health Literacy

- *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)





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Mandate of Expert Panel

- Define the **scope of the problem** of health literacy in the context of literacy and health
- Identify **barriers** to creating a health literate public reflective of Canada's unique cultural makeup
- Assess the **effectiveness** of existing interventions to improve health literacy
- Assess the implications of the evidence for policies and programs to improve health literacy through the development of **recommendations** for health literacy efforts



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Actions of Expert Panel to date:

- Committee meetings
- Definitions
- Vision
- Conceptual Framework
- Literature review
- Scan of existing initiatives
- Key informant interviews
- Survey of practitioners
- Focus Groups with Learners
- Partnership with PHAC Collaborating Centre on Determinants of Health
- Consultations
- Report



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Definition of Health:

Health is more than the absence of disease or infirmity. It is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being.

(WHO Constitution, 1946)



Definition of Literacy:

Literacy is the ability to understand and use reading, writing, speaking and other forms of communication as ways to participate in society and achieve one's goals and potential.

(Expert Panel on Health Literacy, 2007)



Definition of Health Literacy:

the ability to access, understand, evaluate and communicate information as a way to promote, maintain and improve health in a variety of settings across the life course

(Expert Panel on Health Literacy, 2007)



Vision of a Health Literate Canada:

All people in Canada have the capacity, opportunities and support they need to obtain and use health information effectively, to act as informed partners in the care of themselves, their families and communities, and to manage interactions in a variety of settings that affect health and well-being
(Expert Panel on Health Literacy, 2007)



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Literacy and Health Literacy appear to be related to health outcomes including (Hauser and Edwards, 2006):

- Inappropriate medication use and compliance with physician orders
- Less sharing in decision-making about treatment
- Less health knowledge
- Some health behaviors
- Difficulties using the health care system
- Less use of preventive services and care seeking
- Greater hospitalization
- Some clinical indicators
- Higher health care costs



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Individual Barriers to Creating Health Literate Public:

- Low General Literacy
- Poor English/French Fluency
- Certain Cultural Beliefs
- Limited Personal Capacities
- Lower Educational Level
- Low Income
- Low Social Support
- Low Self-efficacy
- Stigma



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System Barriers to Creating Health Literate Public:

- Low public and professional awareness
- Few policies
- Few programs
- Ineffective provider practices
- Low availability of clear language materials and materials suitable for different language and cultural groups
- Insufficient research
- Low political commitment



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Effectiveness of existing interventions in relation to Health Literacy (Hauser and Edwards, 2006):

- There are few rigorous evaluations of interventions to improve health literacy
- Simplifying reading material using clear language and pictures is the most widespread initiative...there is no evidence that it improves health outcomes
- Although multimedia presentations may improve knowledge of both the literate and the less literate, they do not appear to change health-related behaviours
- Community development is a promising avenue
- Healthcare system change to facilitate its use by the less literate is an important initiative



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Effectiveness of existing interventions (King, 2007):

- Overall, few health literacy interventions evaluated for effectiveness in improving health literacy
- There appears to be some evidence from both American interventions as well as Canadian interventions that using participatory education methods results in improvement in most aspects of health literacy



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Summary of Conclusions

- Rates of low literacy and health literacy in the population are high
- Certain population groups have higher rates of low literacy and health literacy
- There are significant individual and system barriers associated with low literacy and health literacy
- Low literacy and health literacy are related to negative health outcomes
- There is limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of interventions in health literacy
- There are promising initiatives at all levels
- Support, collaborations and sharing between initiatives is limited
- Political commitment to address literacy and literacy and health is uncertain and funding is short-term
- There is a need for a comprehensive, integrated approach



Draft Recommendation of the Expert Panel on Health Literacy

The Expert Panel on Health Literacy recommends that a comprehensive Pan-Canadian Strategy on Health Literacy be developed, funded and implemented in collaboration with other related strategies.



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Goals of Strategy:

- To improve literacy and health literacy in Canada
- To reduce inequities in literacy and health literacy in Canada
- To enhance the capacity of patients, providers, systems, researchers and communities to provide opportunities for Canadians to improve their literacy and health literacy levels.












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Objectives of Strategy:

-  Increase public awareness and understanding about health literacy.
-  Incorporate health literacy into education and training activities for professionals and practitioners.
-  Improve health communications.
-  Improve the capacity of the health and education systems to support health literacy.
-  Adopt an integrated, collaborative and multicultural approach.
-  Provide the necessary resources.
-  Enhance research and share knowledge.
-  Develop mechanisms and tools for setting and monitoring targets for improving literacy and health literacy.
-  Implement the strategy



Where do we go from here?

- Finalize Health Literacy Panel Report
- Release Panel Report (September 19)
- Hold Think Tank (October)
- Disseminate report and other products
- Other suggestions?



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