
Health Literacy and Older Adults

Workshop at National Seniors' Assembly, Calgary

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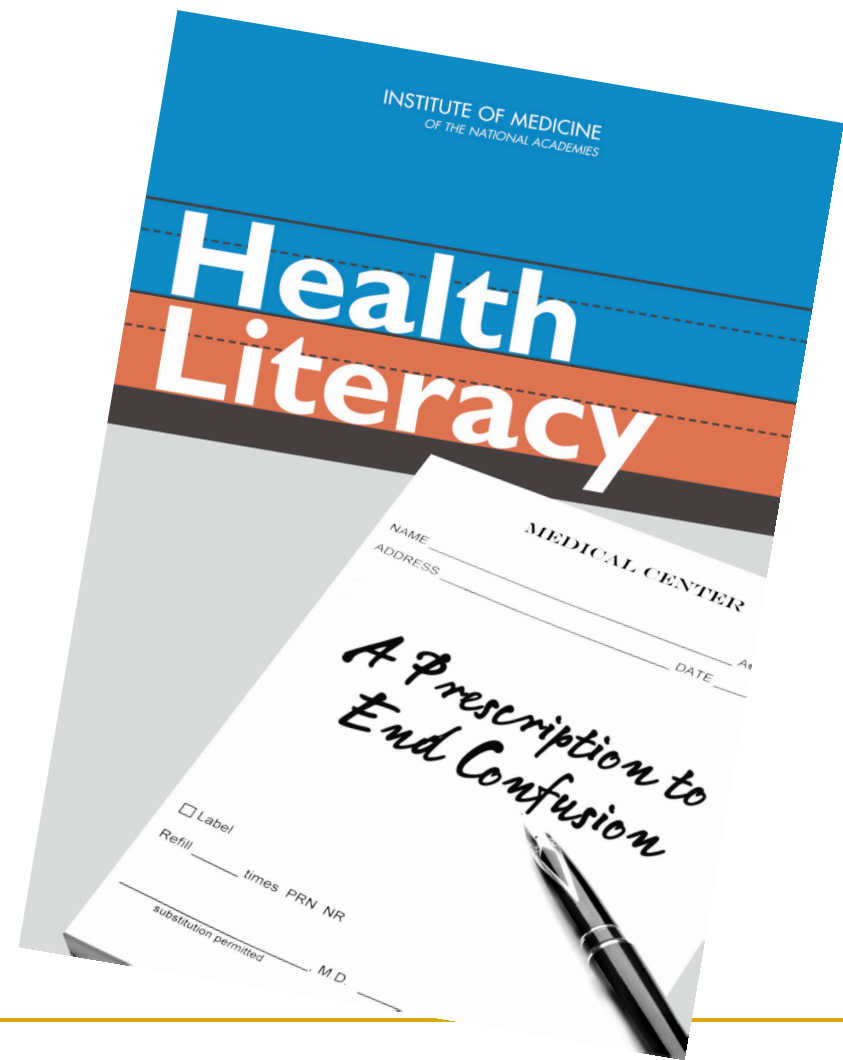
University of Victoria

Outline

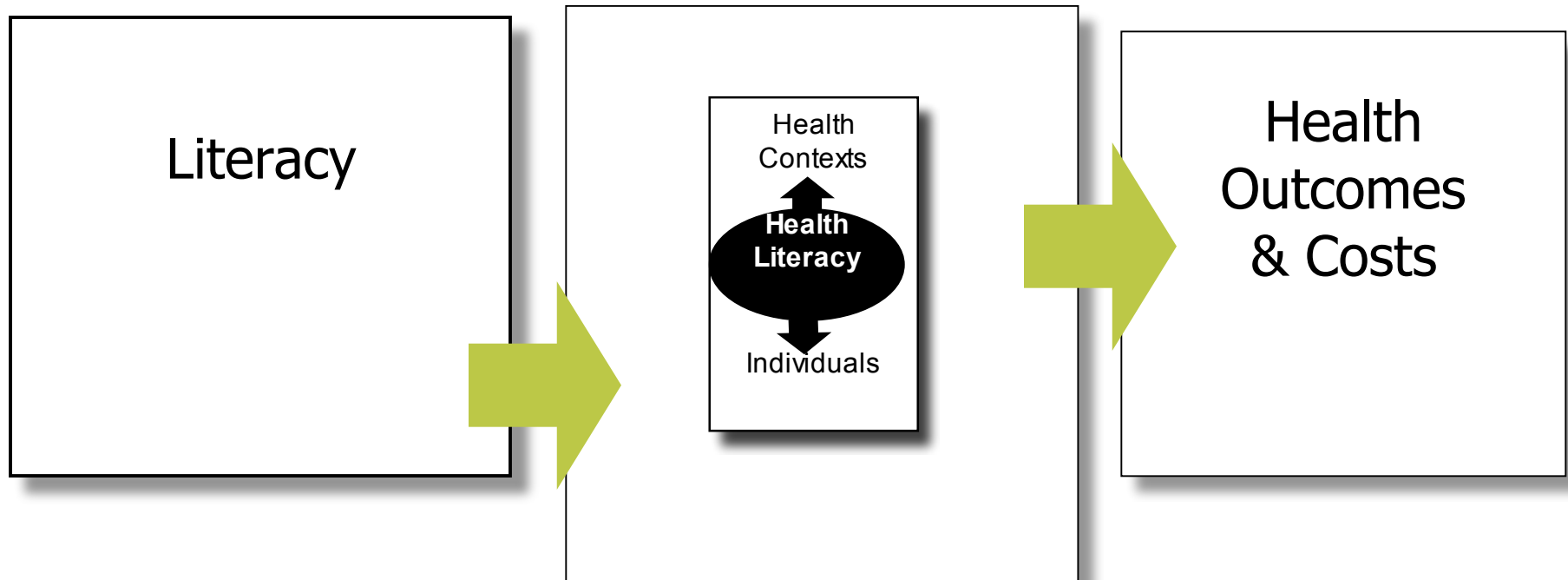
- What is health literacy?
 - What is the extent of low health literacy among older adults in Canada?
 - What is the relationship between low health literacy and health?
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Health Literacy is...

- 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)



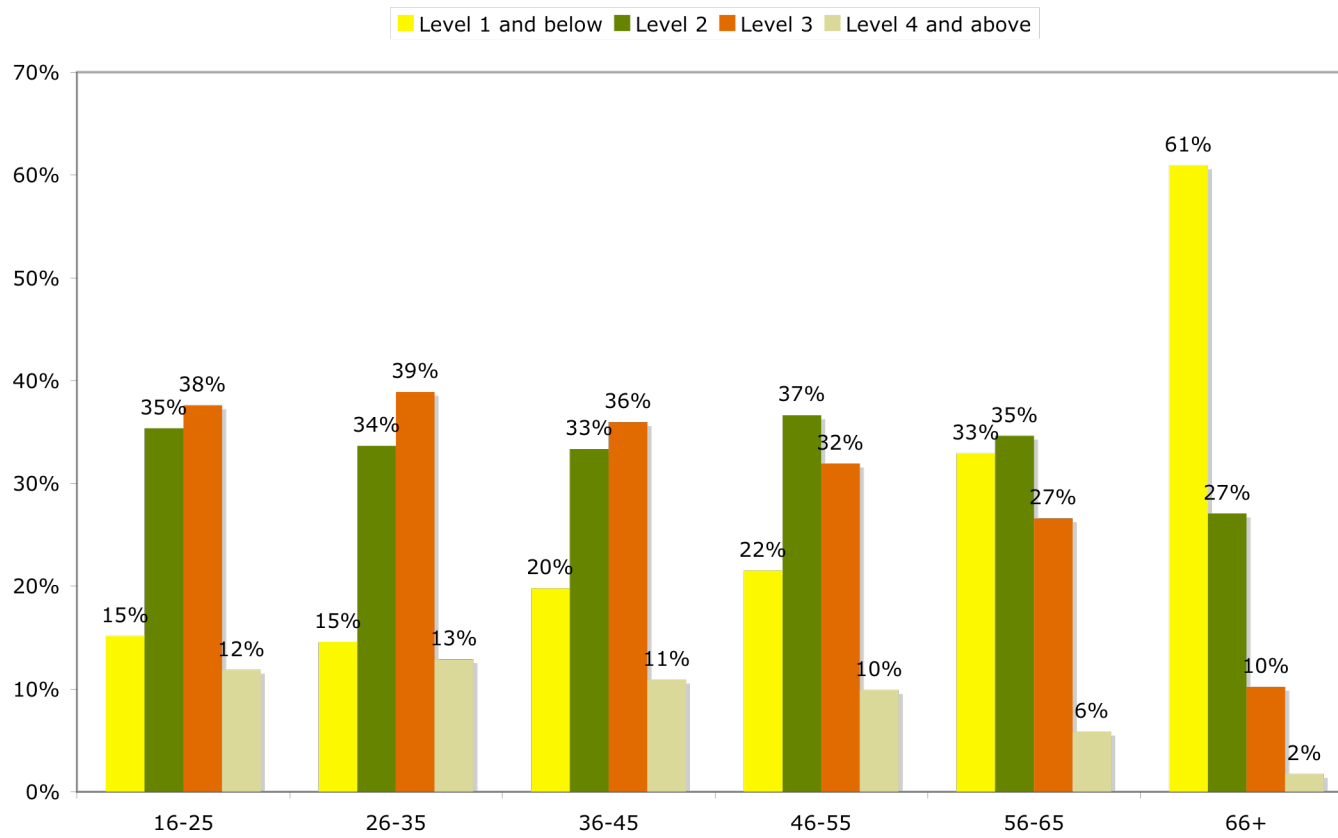
Health Literacy Framework (I.O.M., 2004)



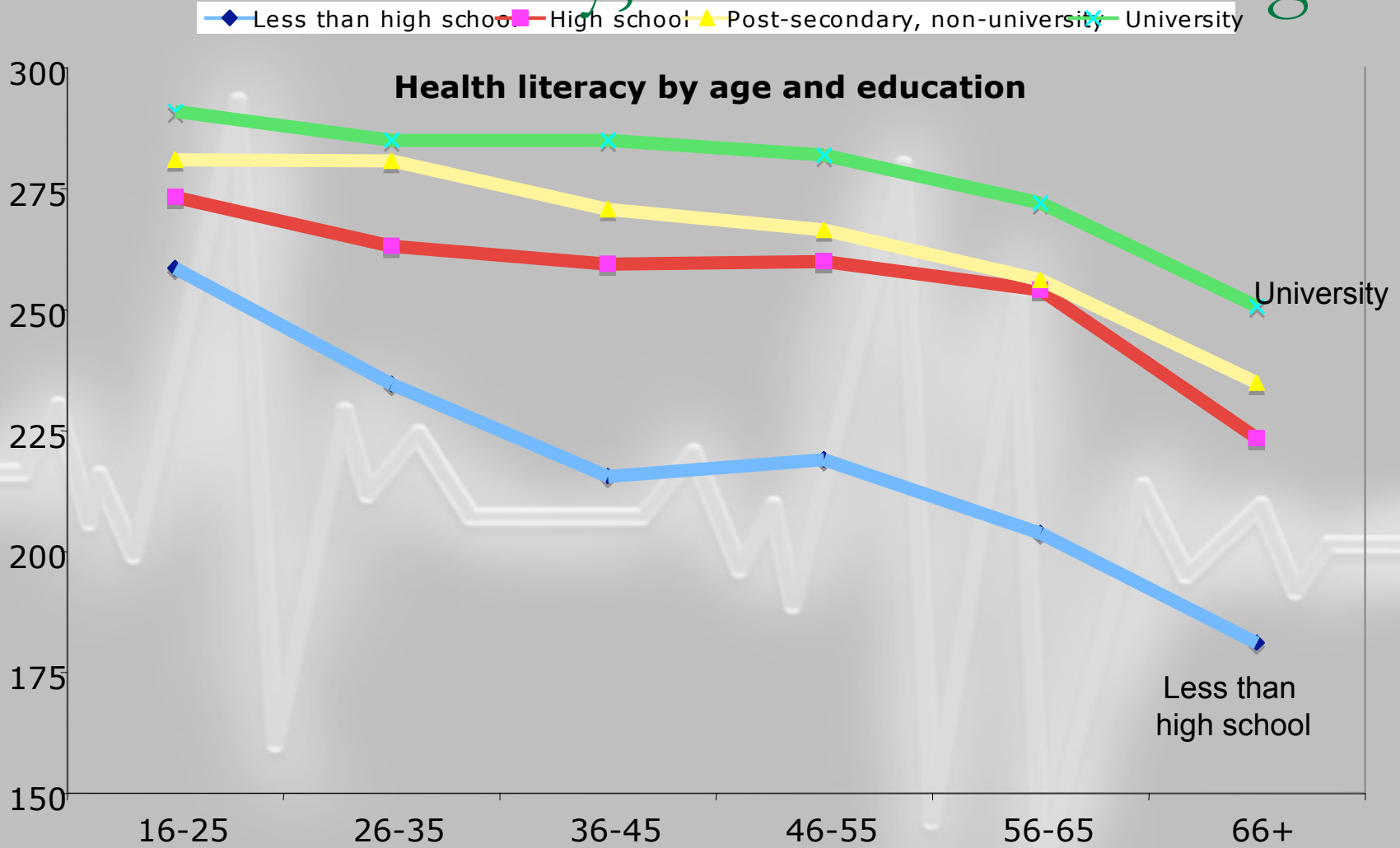
Health literacy is

- 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 (Canadian Expert Panel on Health Literacy).
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Health literacy levels by age, Canada, 2003



Health Literacy, Education and Age



Health Literacy Scores by Self-perceived General Health Status, Canada, 2003



Health Literacy (Reading Proficiency) and Health-Related Outcomes (I.O.M., 2004)

- ❑ More likely hospitalization and negative disease outcomes
 - ❑ Higher rates of diabetes
 - ❑ Diabetes control
 - ❑ Inappropriate medication use and compliance with physician orders
 - ❑ Less use of preventive services and less care seeking
 - ❑ Difficulties using health care system
 - ❑ Less expression of health concerns
 - ❑ Higher mortality
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Is Health Literacy a Silent Killer?

- A recent U.S. study found that older adults with inadequate and marginal health literacy levels had a 50 per cent higher mortality rate over a five-year period than those with adequate skills.
 - Low health literacy was the top predictor of mortality after smoking, and was a more powerful variable than both income and years of education.
 - Another study found that limited literacy was independently associated with a nearly two-fold increase in mortality in the elderly.
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