Health Literacy and Hunger

NORTH CAROLINA ALLIANCE FOR HEALTH
What is health literacy?

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.
Is health literacy *really* an issue?

• Nine out of 10 adults struggle to understand and use health information when it is unfamiliar, complex or jargon-filled.

• Limited health literacy costs the healthcare system money and results in higher than necessary morbidity and mortality.

• Health numeracy is an issue too!
You can help by helping people identify reliable sources for health information!
Identifying reliable health information sources

**Reliable**
- MedlinePlus
- Most local hospital pages
- Major, reputable non-profits like the American Heart Association or the American Cancer Society
- Government sites like the CDC that are geared toward public consumption

**Not Reliable**
- WebMD
- Wikipedia
- Most personal blogs
- Most mass media publications
- Many commercial sites
- Articles written by an unqualified author
- Social media
Benefits of Medline Plus

- Searchable
- Includes internal articles and vetted, trusted external articles
- Images
- Pharmaceuticals and supplements
You can…

• Post a link to Medline Plus on all publicly available computers.

• Ask people in your community about where they get health information and help direct them to reliable resources.

• Have information about Medline Plus available.

• Regularly share information about health literacy—it’s a common challenge!
What about hunger?

Hunger contributes to...

- Lower productivity
- Worse and more expensive health care costs
- Worse educational outcomes
The State of the State

Particularly vulnerable:
• Children
• Seniors
• College students
• Military members
• African Americans

Image: BCBSNC
The State of the State

- 69% Have to choose between FOOD and UTILITIES
- 67% Have to choose between FOOD and TRANSPORTATION
- 66% Have to choose between FOOD and MEDICAL CARE
- 57% Have to choose between FOOD and HOUSING
- 31% Have to choose between FOOD and EDUCATION

Image: BCBSNC
What are some signs a person is food insecure?

- Fatigue
- Lack of focus
- Changes in weight—gain or loss
- Asking about food often; asking for help looking for SNAP (food stamps), WIC, or emergency aid
- Tooth decay
- Hoarding food
- Asking about any assistance programs
Assessing food security

USDA Short Form 6 Question
Food Security Module
USDA Short Form 6 Question
Food Security Module

Two questions that utilize an “Often, sometimes, or never true” scale:

“The food that (I/we) bought just didn’t last, and (I/we) didn’t have money to get more.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

“(I/we) couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.” Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

NOTE: Often and sometimes are “Yes” answers and get a point.
The remaining questions are Yes/No.

In the last 12 months, since last (name of current month), did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

If the answer was “no”, skip this question:

How often did this happen—almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?
USDA Short Form 6 Question Food Security Module

In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?

In the last 12 months, were you every hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

SCORING: Answering more than 1 question positively means the household is food insecure. Answering 5 or more positively means the household experiences very low food security and are at high risk for hunger.
Feeding the Carolinas Food Banks
Second Harvest Food Bank of NW NC
Second Harvest Food Bank of SE NC

[Map showing counties in SE NC]

Counties:
- Harnett
- Cumberland
- Sampson
- Duplin
- Hoke
- Robeson
- Bladen
Second Harvest - Metrolina
Questions to ask about health and hunger community resources

• Who can you send people to in your community?
• Key factors:
  • Proximity
  • Openness: Do they accept everyone or do they serve certain people?
  • Hours
  • Availability
  • Staffing