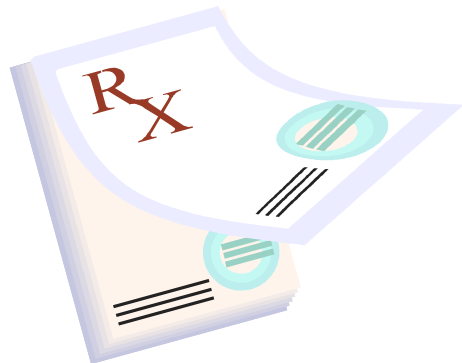


Health Literacy

Clear Language:

Writing the prescription to
improve the health of everyone



Prepared for Niagara Public Health Summit

October 26-29, 2008

By Sandra Romagnoli Reg. N., BScN.

A common belief...

Canada does **not** have a
literacy problem.

The reality...

- Almost half of all Canadian adults (48%) have low literacy skills.

General Literacy

Ability to **use** printed and written information to:

- function in society
- reach objectives
- broaden knowledge
- increase potential



Literacy Levels

Level 1 – very low skills

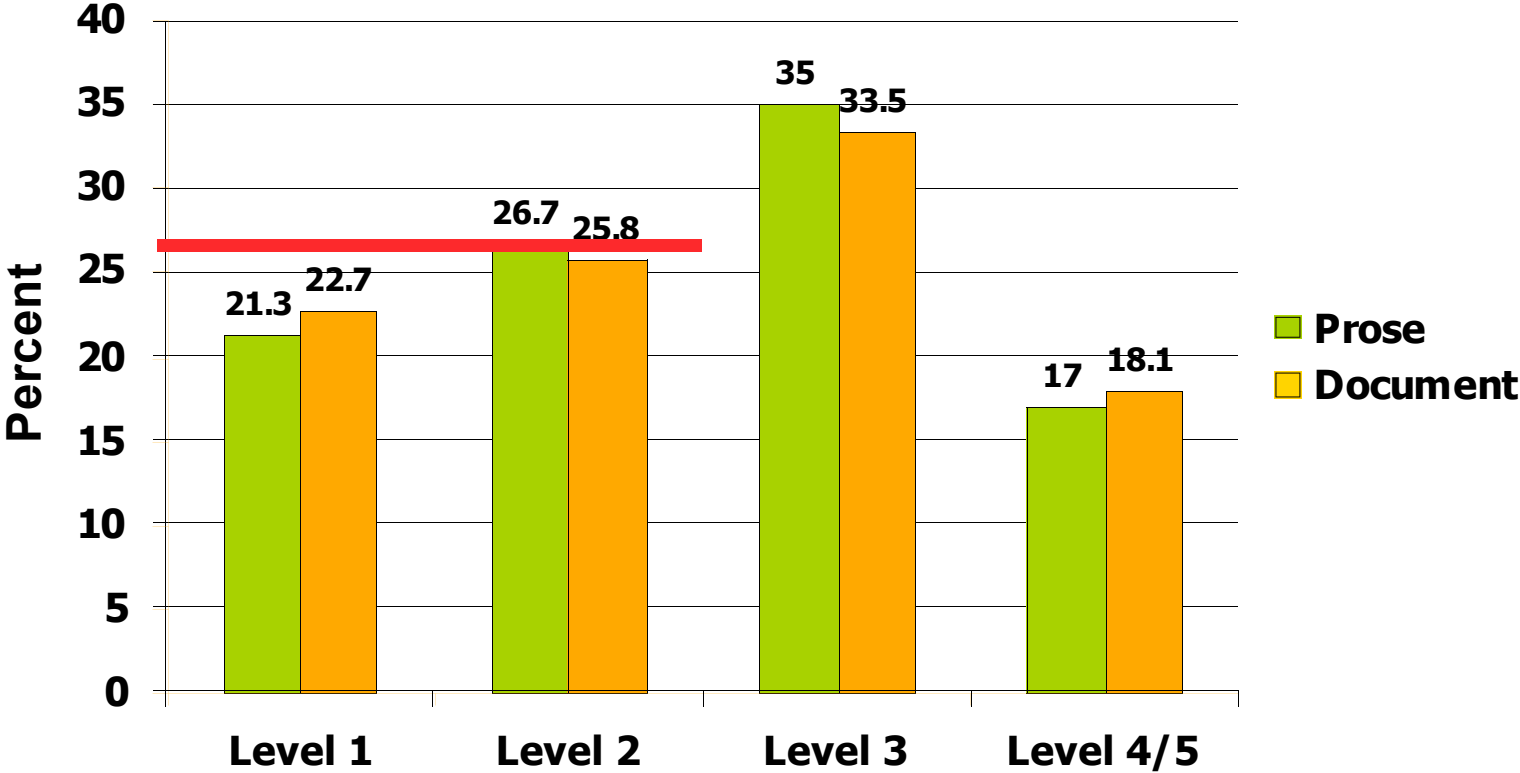
Level 2 - read but not well

Level 3 - basic skill level

Level 4/5 - high levels of literacy

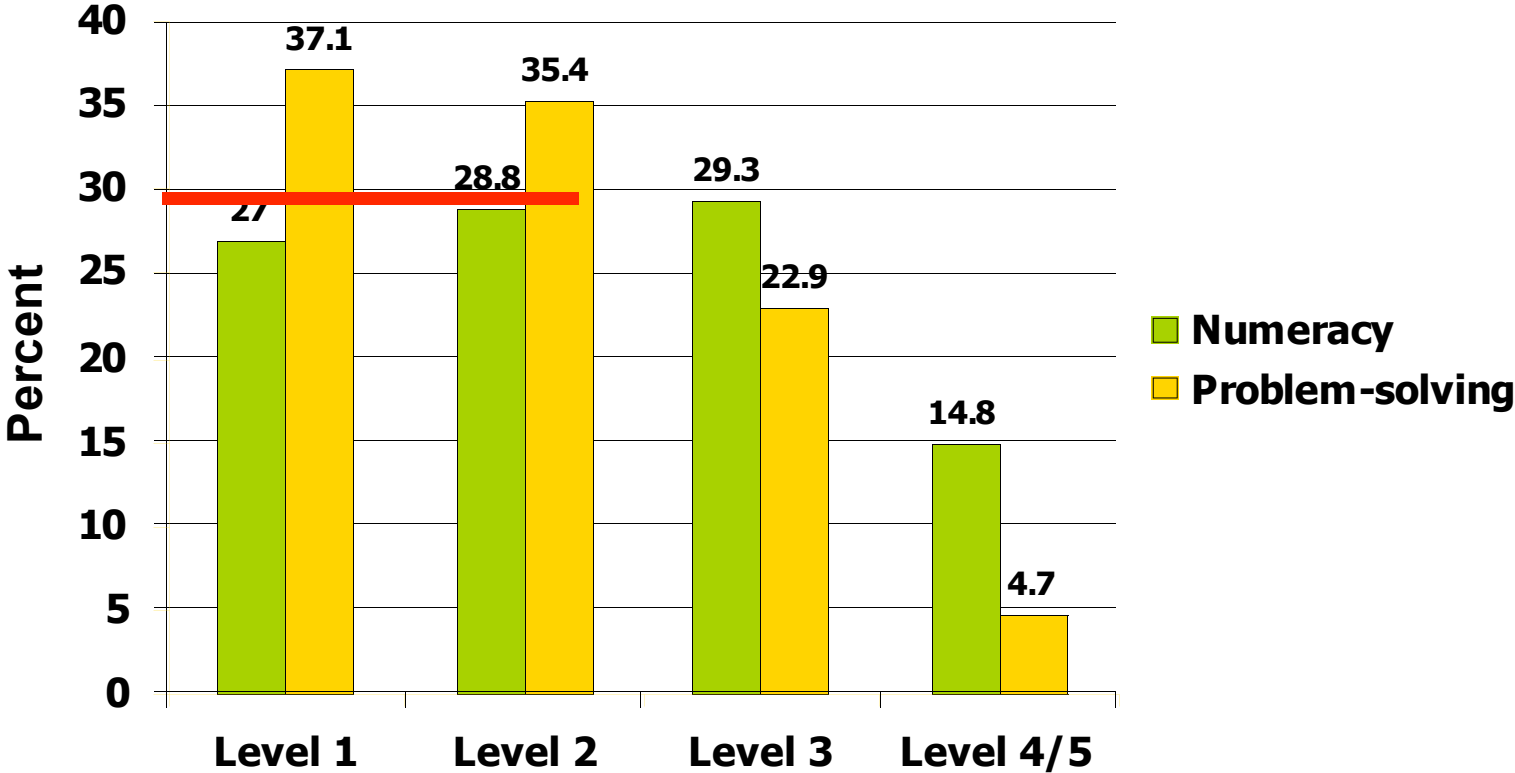
(Literacy Risk in the Niagara Region 2000)

Literacy skills of Ontario adults



Statistics Canada, 2005

Literacy skills of Ontario adults



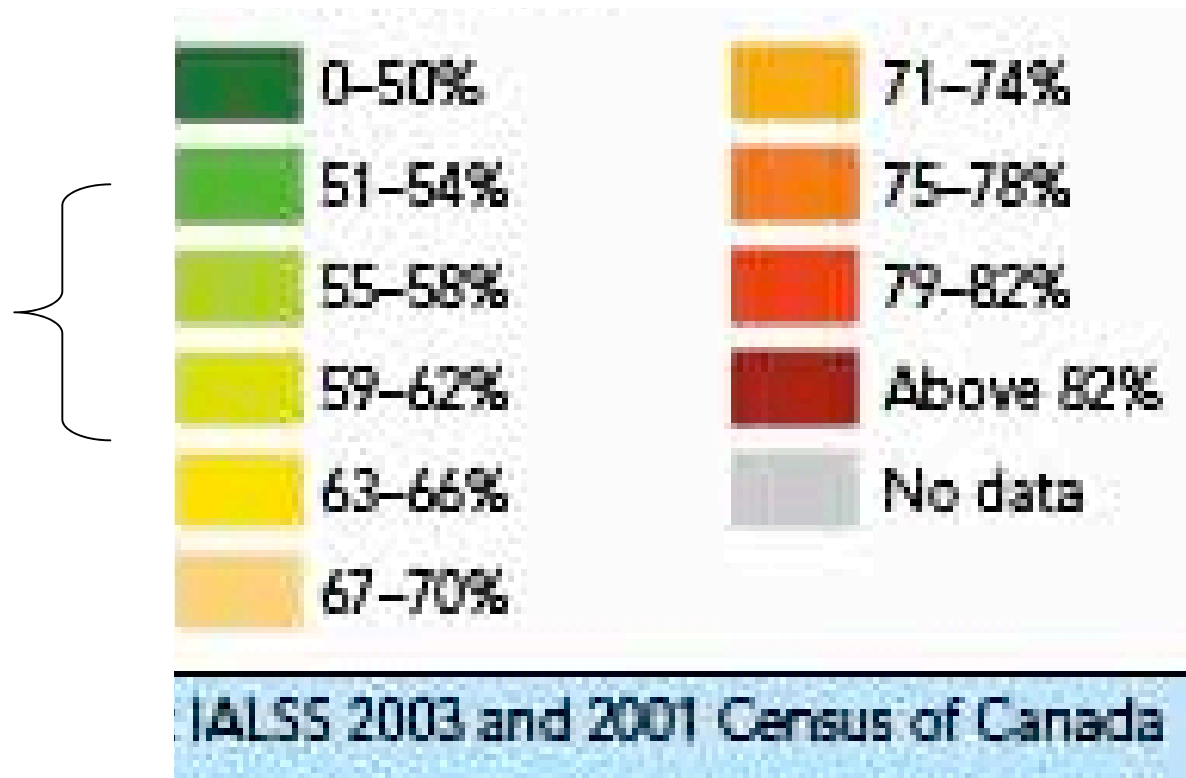
Statistics Canada, 2005

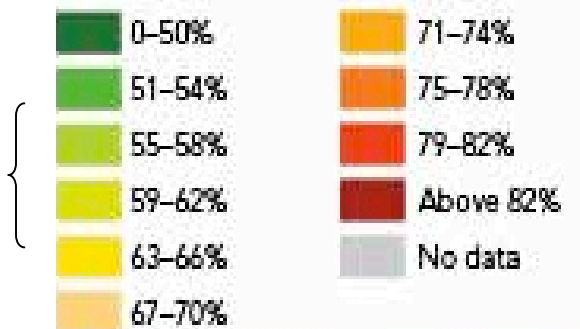
What is health literacy?

The Canadian Public Health Association defines health literacy as:

“Skills to enable access, understanding and **use** of information for health”

Key to health literacy maps...

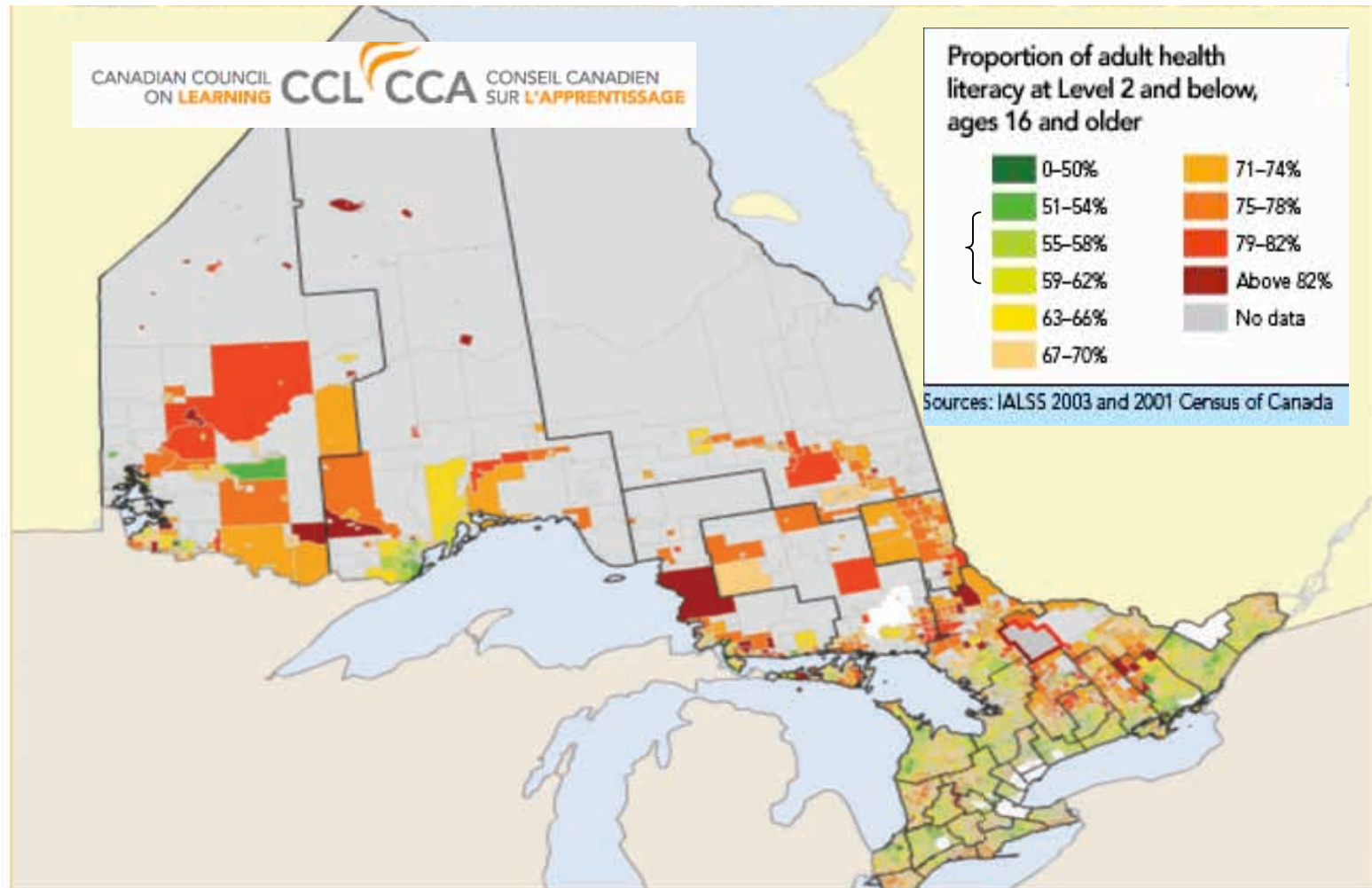




IALSS 2003 and 2001 Census of Canada

The Distribution of Health Literacy in Ontario

Proportion of adult health literacy at level 2 and below, ages 16 and older



Written communication

- Research consistently shows that health information is generally written at a level that most people do not understand.

Over 600 studies!



Outcomes of low health literacy

- less knowledge about health
- less likely to engage in preventive behaviours or take part in screening
- less likely to correctly self-manage chronic conditions or comply with treatment plan
- more likely to have poor health
- more likely to be hospitalized

Schwartzberg et al, 2005. IOM report, 2004. AHRQ, 2004

Literacy domains

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 potato (148g/5.3oz)	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 100	Calories from Fat 0
<hr/>	
	% Daily Value*
Total Fat 0g	0%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 0mg	0%
Potassium 720mg	21%
Total Carbohydrate 26g	9%
Dietary Fiber 3g	12%
Sugars 3g	
Protein 4g	
<hr/>	
Vitamin A 0%	• Vitamin C 45%
Calcium 2%	• Iron 6%
Thiamin 8%	• Riboflavin 2%
Niacin 8%	• Vitamin B ₆ 10%
Folate 6%	• Phosphorous 6%
Zinc 2%	• Magnesium 6%
<hr/>	
<small>*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.</small>	

- prose – text
- document – charts and forms
- numeracy – basic math
- problem-solving

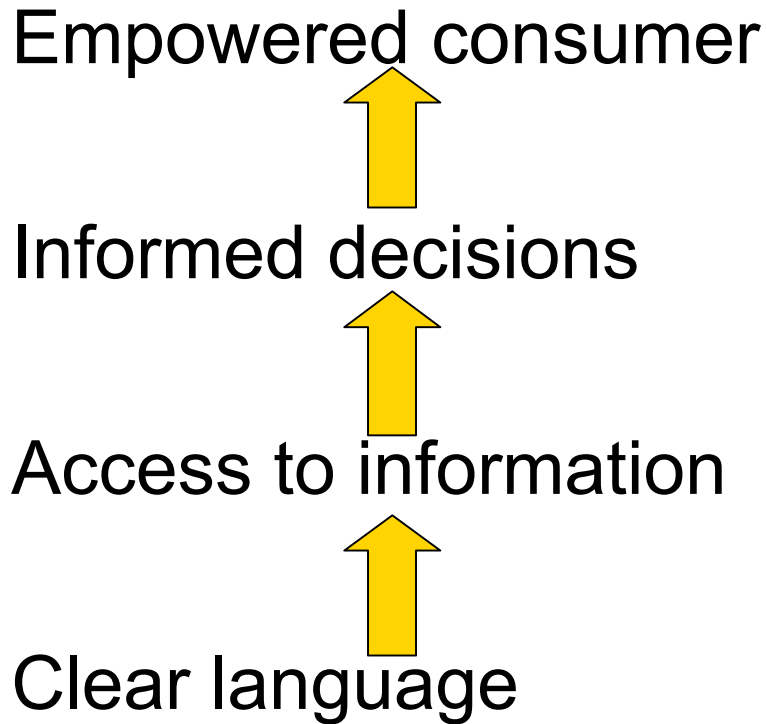
The solution...

Use clear language

What is clear language?

- a way of writing and speaking that presents information so that it is easy to understand and use
- familiar language, positive tone and friendly, conversational style
- focuses on the audience - what they need to know and **do**

How does using clear language help?



Write as you would speak:

- use familiar, everyday words
- explain specialized language
- be personal and sincere

Write as you would speak:

- one idea per sentence
- average sentence length
less than 15 words
- simple punctuation

Take home message

- Many people have trouble understanding health information.
- Clear language makes health information accessible.
- Use clear language when communicating with the public.