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## Talking Plainly to Enhance Communication

by Alberta Becenti



Every day we communicate health information to our patients, families, and communities with the anticipation that they will follow a prescribed plan and adopt healthy behaviors. In some situations, the patient may not understand routine health information. To support wellness and informed decisions, we must provide and communicate clear information that is useful and beneficial to our patients.

### What is health literacy?

Health literacy is not only the ability to read, understand and act upon health information, but also the ability to use basic math concepts (i.e., adding, subtracting, dividing, multiplying) and cultural background that all interplay on how we process health information. Each day, the clinics/hospitals share health information, provide lab results, prescribe medications, make dietary recommendations, and handout written materials with the assumption that our patients will understand the information. The reality is that many patients may not understand the information. According to the [National Assessment of Adult Literacy](#), nearly nine of 10 patients have difficulty understanding routine health information.

Low literacy contributes to poor health outcomes, increased use of emergency rooms, missed appointments, decreased use of preventive services, and poor self-management of chronic conditions/diseases. People with lower level of education, older adults, minorities, and those who are medically underserved are at higher risk for low literacy.

In 2020, the [Healthy People 2030](#) initiative included organizational health literacy. Organizational health literacy is the degree to which organizations equitably enable individuals to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others. There are several ways to enhance communication with the patient by practicing universal precaution with every patient. Since, we do not know the literacy skills of our patients, it is best to use universal precaution with all patients by using every day words,

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## Talking Plainly to Enhance Communication (continued)

Using pictures, or illustration to enhance patient understanding, and providing culturally appropriate written materials they understand.

### What you can do to support Health Literacy

- Practice [universal precautions](#)
- Learn about the [teach-back technique](#) to enhance patients' understanding
- Take [Indian Health Service Introduction to Health Literacy training](#)
- Use the health factor tab in the Electronic Health Record to assess and document patient level of understanding
- Access [Plain Language](#) resources
- Post [Let's TALK](#) poster in the clinic
- Learn about how to [test messages and materials](#)
- Browse through the [National Institute of Health Highlights of Health Literacy Programs and Activities](#) website to generate ideas
- Review the [National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy](#)



## Share Your Health Literacy Story: Let's Inspire Each

### Other

We would like to hear about how your clinic or program is doing to improve communication with patients, families, and communities. We will post submissions on the Indian Health Service (IHS) Health Communication website to share promising practices and strategies to learn from each other and inspire each other.

Format to follow:


- Title
- Name of Program or Clinic
- Name, contact, and title of person submitting
- Summary of health literacy effort including accomplishments/highlights (300 words maximum)

Please submit to [IHSHealthLiteracy@ihs.gov](mailto:IHSHealthLiteracy@ihs.gov)

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# A Cost-effective Way to Increase Cancer Screening? Target Social Determinants of Health

Interventions that address social determinants of health to increase cancer-screening rates among underserved populations in the United States are cost-effective, according to an article in *JAMA Oncology*. Researchers reviewed all available evidence to answer questions raised during the Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) reviews of economic evidence for multicomponent interventions and interventions that engage community health workers to increase cancer screening. Findings from this review may be useful to decision makers interested in leveraging social determinants of health to increase breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer screening rates and to promote health equity.

Mohan G, Chattopadhyay S. [Cost-effectiveness of leveraging social determinants of health to improve breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer screening: a systematic review](#) 

## What are Social Determinants of Health?

Social determinants of health are conditions in the environments where people live, learn, work, and play that affect health risks and outcomes. [Healthy People 2030](#) defines five key domains for social determinants: economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context.

## Why is this important?

- Health disparities in the United States (U.S.) have contributed to approximately \$93 billion in excess medical care costs and \$42 billion in productivity losses from related premature deaths per year in 2018.<sup>1</sup>
- For breast, cervical, and colorectal cancers, persistent screening disparities exist in the U.S., especially for individuals who are uninsured or with no usual source of health care.<sup>2</sup>

## Learn more:

- The Community Guide
  - Multicomponent Interventions to Increase [Breast](#), [Cervical](#), and [Colorectal](#) Cancer Screening
  - Interventions Engaging Community Health Workers [Breast](#), [Cervical](#), and [Colorectal](#) Cancer Screening

## References

<sup>1</sup> Turner A. The Business Case for Racial Equity. W.K. Kellogg Foundation; 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Hall IJ, Tangka FKL, Sabatino SA, Thompson TD, Graubard BI, Breen N. Patterns and Trends in Cancer Screening in the United States. *Preventing Chronic Disease*. 2018;15:E97.

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# Supporting Commercial Tobacco-Free Living

by Alberta Becenti

It is encouraging that thousands of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) people are not using commercial tobacco products and are not being exposed to secondhand smoke or aerosols. A lifestyle of remaining tobacco-free reaps many benefits to the individual, family, and community. We respect that many tribal communities use tobacco for ceremonies, prayers, and medicinal purposes. Consequently, throughout this document, we are referring to “commercial” tobacco products.

Each year, on the third Thursday of November, the American Cancer Society observes the *Great American Smoke Out* to encourage smokers to make plans to start their journey toward a smoke-free life. This year the event falls on November 18, and the IHS is encouraging smokers to join thousands who are making an important step in quitting to protect their health and family.

There are many benefits of remaining tobacco-free to reduce one’s risk to chronic conditions and diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. While cigarette smoking has been steadily declining among the general U.S. adults to 14%, AI/AN adults continue to experience a high prevalence of smoking at 22.6%. An estimated 55.65% of AI/AN adult smokers reported that they want to quit smoking.

Quitting tobacco may be challenging for many, while others are able to stop cold turkey. The nicotine in tobacco is an addictive substance that makes it very difficult for people who want to quit. Many tobacco users would like to quit and may have tried several times to quit. Some are successful in quitting, while others return to smoking. Studies indicate that using Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) cessation aids such as nicotine gum, nicotine patch, nicotine nasal spray, nicotine inhaler, and nicotine lozenges can increase a person’s smoking cessation success, especially with counseling support.

The [Community Preventive Services Task Force](#) recommends mobile phone text messaging interventions for tobacco cessation to help adults quit. It is important to promote and provide cessation services to smokers who are ready to quit. If local cessation services are not available, please refer to the IHS Smokefree.txt messaging program for AI/AN. A smoker can access it by texting “**NATIVE**” to 47848. This program provides encouragement, advice, and tips to help quit smoking. Another resource is referral to 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669).



When you quit smoking, the [health benefits](#) begin almost immediately.

- 20 minutes after quitting: Your heart rate and blood pressure drop.
- 12 hours after quitting: The carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.
- 2 weeks to 3 months after quitting: Your circulation improves and lung function increases.
- 1 to 9 months after quitting: Coughing and shortness of breath decrease.
- 1 year after quitting: Your increased risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker's.
- 5 to 15 years after quitting: Your stroke risk is reduced to that of a nonsmoker.
- 10 years after quitting: The lung cancer death rate is about half that of a continuing smoker's. The risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, cervix, and pancreas decrease.
- 15 years after quitting: Your risk of coronary heart disease is the same as that of a non-smoker,

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## Supporting Commercial Tobacco-Free Living (continued)

We must work together to prevent a new generation of commercial tobacco users. One of the strategies is to tap into our community assets by engaging and supporting youth as allies to advance and improve community health. The [Sacred Circle of Tobacco](#) engages youth and their adult mentors to learn about the history of traditional tobacco use, and to develop leadership, decision-making and advocacy skills to promote health through cultural values and teachings.

Below are resources to support commercial tobacco-free lifestyle:

- Print and display [Keeping Tobacco Sacred poster](#) in the clinic and community
- Refer tobacco users to cessation services or the IHS Smokefree.TXT messaging program
- Screen for and document tobacco use of patients in the Electronic Health Record
- Access the [Sacred Circle of Tobacco](#) to engage youth to take led roles to increase tobacco awareness
- Request for Basic Tobacco Intervention Skills Certification training by contacting [Area Health Promotion/Disease Prevention Coordinators](#)
- Access [Be Vape Free](#) poster
- View archived [tobacco prevention webinars](#)

## Tips for Holiday Eating

Eating healthy during the holidays may be challenging. It can be easy to overindulge during the holidays, but it is still possible to eat healthy during the season.

Below are a few healthy tips for the holidays:

- Make room for vegetables.
- Wait for 10 minutes before taking a second serving. It takes a few minutes for your stomach to get a full signal to your brain.
- Slow down during meals.
- Eat mindfully. Focus on the flavor and enjoy what you are eating.
- Do not skip any meals to have a feast later. You may find yourself so hungry and more likely to overeat.
- Make a shopping list to avoid impulsive buying.
- Do not go shopping on an empty stomach.
- Avoid or drink alcohol in moderation.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Avoid or limit sugared beverages.
- Lighten up your recipes by reducing fat with healthy substitutions such as fat-free and low fat.
- Take a walk or find activities that get your mind off food.

### Healthy Food

**Bell Pepper Orange Cherry Tomatoes Almonds Buffalo  
Cucumber Pomegranate Banana Turkey Fat-free Milk  
Salmon Raspberries Walnuts Avocado Lean Ground Beef  
Green Beans Blue Berries Pumpkin Chicken Carrots Peas**

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# Moving Daily for Health and Wellness

Getting daily physical activity has many benefits for your health, mind, and spirit. It is a good idea to take a break from the screen (video games, TV, computer) to go for a walk with your children, family, co-worker, or neighbor while maintaining a safe distance (6 feet). Physical activity keeps your thinking and learning sharp and helps you sleep better.

To get the maximum benefits, below are the [recommended physical activity guidelines](#) for children, adolescents, adults, and older adults.

- Preschool-aged children (ages 3 through 5 years) should be physically active throughout the day to enhance growth and development.
- Children and adolescents ages 6 through 17 years should do 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily:
- Adults should do at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) to 300 minutes (5 hours) a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) to 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity. Preferably, aerobic activity should be spread throughout the week.
- When older adults cannot do 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week because of chronic conditions, they should be as physically active as their abilities and conditions allow.



There are many benefits of regular physical activity:

- Increases energy
- Strengthens bones and muscles
- Improves sleep
- Decreases stress
- Reduces anxiety
- Improves coordination and balance
- Reduces weight gain
- Reduces blood pressure
- Lowers risk of heart disease
- Lowers risk of diabetes
- Lowers risk for certain cancer

The Community Guide has updated and streamlined the [What Works Fact Sheet for physical activity](#). This two-page summary features an easy-to-read table that shows Community Preventive Services Task Force recommendations and findings for evaluated intervention approaches.

Remember to take a wellness break by walking, hiking, working in the yard, or doing safe indoor activities such as yoga, dancing, jingle dancing, walking, or jogging in place.

Nicotine Dependence Treatment Continuing Education & Certification Program  
 Earn Certification to *utilize* evidence-based nicotine dependence interventions to help save a life!



*Be A Lifesaver!*

Evidence-based interventions that encourage *quitting* and prevent youth smoking continue to be underutilized.

~ A report of the Surgeon General, 2014

**Program** **Basic Tobacco Intervention Skills Certification for Native Communities**

**Dates** **Wednesday and Thursday  
December 15-16, 2021**

**Time** **12:00 pm – 5:00 pm (Eastern Daylight Time)**

**Location** **Live, Instructor-led Virtual via ZOOM  
Indian Health Service  
Health Promotion Disease Prevention**

To register: Email [alberta.becenti@ihs.gov](mailto:alberta.becenti@ihs.gov) or call 240.328.5540

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Work Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Program Objectives:**

- Engage commercial tobacco users in a culturally relevant and sensitive manner.
- Assess for commercial tobacco use and exposure to secondhand/thirdhand smoke.
- Conduct a culturally responsive integrated, stage-specific Five A Model brief intervention for health risk behavior change.
- Demonstrate effective use of culturally adapted patient self-management resources to evoke confidence in a health risk behavior change.
- Describe pharmacotherapy options for commercial tobacco dependence treatment.
- Document details of interventions for treatment of commercial tobacco dependence.
- Follow-along and follow-up with individuals using a disease management approach.
- Refer patients/clients who use commercial tobacco to relevant intensive treatment services.
- Connect Native people who are dependent on commercial tobacco with supportive resources.
- Establish protocols to systematically prevent/treat commercial tobacco use and dependence.



This program has been approved for up to 7.5 contact hours (0.75 CEU) pharmacy continuing education credit by the Arizona Pharmacy Alliance, an ACPE approved provider. ACPE UAN# 0100-9999-15-001-L04-P (knowledge-based activity).  
 The Arizona Pharmacy Alliance is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education as a provider of continuing pharmacy education.



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# Calendar of Events

## November 2021

November 18, 2021 Great American Smokeout

## December 2021

December 1, 2021 *Keeping It Plain and Simple: Clear Communication on Breast Cancer Webinar*  
@ 3:00 pm EDT (CEUs will be provided)  
To attend use link below:  
<https://ihs.gov.zoomgov.com/j/1615912579?pwd=NW4vbkdXVU45YzdnN0NTbU5jaXNXQT09>

December 16-17, 2021 *Basic Tobacco Intervention Skills Certification Training (virtual)* @  
12:00 pm - 5:00 pm EDT  
To register, please email [alberta.becenti@ihs.gov](mailto:alberta.becenti@ihs.gov) or call 240-328-5540

## January 2022

January 11-13, 2022 *Adult Mental Health First Aid Certification Training (virtual)*  
Limited registrations available. Deadline: November 23, 2021  
To register, please email [alberta.becenti@ihs.gov](mailto:alberta.becenti@ihs.gov) or call 240-328-5540

January 26, 2022 Tobacco Prevention webinar @ 3:00 pm EDT

## February 2022

February 4, 2022 **National Wear Red Day**



February 9, 2022 *Colorectal Cancer Screening Pilot Projects: Strategies and Lessons Learned Webinar* @ 3:00 p.m. EDT (CEUs will be provided)

February 22, 2022 *Sacred Circle of Tobacco* virtual training @ 12:00 pm - 4:00 pm EDT  
To register, please email [alberta.becenti@ihs.gov](mailto:alberta.becenti@ihs.gov) or call 240-328-5540

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## Staying Well for the Winter

- ✓ Get your COVID-19 and flu shots
- ✓ Wash your hands often
- ✓ Wear your mask
- ✓ Get preventive screenings and regular check ups
- ✓ Get at least 7 hours of sleep each night
- ✓ Drink water
- ✓ Move more and sit less
- ✓ Eat delicious fruits and vegetables, lean meat, and low fat dairy products
- ✓ Do not use commercial tobacco products
- ✓ Stay connected with family and friends
- ✓ Brush and floss daily
- ✓ Avoid or limit alcohol