

EXAMPLES OF PLAIN LANGUAGE ALTERNATIVES

Common Words	Plain Language Alternative
Annual	Every year
Oral	Mouth
Diet	Food you eat
Hygiene	How you clean
Prevention	Stop from happening
Monitor	Watch or check
Referral	Send you to another doctor



Sharing oral health Messages to Improve Literacy for Everyone

Smile

www.ihs.gov/doh/smile



Sharing oral health Messages to Improve Literacy for Everyone

Smile

A nationwide initiative aimed at giving oral health providers tools to improve oral health literacy among American Indians and Alaska Natives, sponsored by the Indian Health Services Division of Oral Health.

IHS Oral Health Literacy Initiative

For Oral Health Professionals

For additional information please visit:
www.ihs.gov/doh/smile



What is Oral Health Literacy?

“The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic oral health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.”¹

Oral health literacy involves patients, caregivers, providers, and the entire healthcare system. It's a key component of overall health, yet one that is often overlooked. Do you wonder why our patients don't fully engage in conversations/treatment planning about their oral health? Have you noticed our patients break appointments for no apparent reason? We often see our patients not following the instructions we provided to them at the last visit. Some of these things can be explained simply by our patients not understanding what we say. Oral health literacy is all about HOW we talk with patients in hopes they gain understanding and become a partner with us in their oral health care.

Health literacy is the necessary link in creating effective communication and education to increase primary and secondary preventive regimens. Our role as dental health professionals involves much more than simply handing patients a brochure or telling them about their medical or dental condition. There is a wealth of training materials and resources available for you and your staff to improve your understanding of health literacy and your communication skills. Efforts to improve your patients' health literacy has the potential to make a lasting impact

¹ IOM (Institute of Medicine). 2011. Advancing Oral Health in America. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.



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PATIENT EDUCATION MATERIALS

Everyone has a different learning style. Education materials can help many patients to better understand oral health concepts. There are a variety of materials available online through dental organizations, government agencies, as well as dental product companies. Costs range from free –print at your office– to \$1-2 dollars for each handout.

The IHS Oral Health Literacy website (www.ihs.gov/doh/smile) provides links to several of the educational materials available online. Many of these materials use plain language and are designed to be understood by those with limited health literacy.

Making your own brochure? CDC offers a comprehensive guide, entitled *Simply Put: A Guide For Creating Easy-To-Understand Materials*, that reviews basic concepts like reading level, culture, and layout. It is available at https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/pdf/Simply_Put.pdf.

ORAL HEALTH LITERACY TRAINING

Dental teams can help patients better understand their healthcare. This will allow patients to make responsible and sensible decisions based on understanding and navigating the health care system. Oral health literacy is connected to every step of the treatment process – from scheduling the appointment, providing treatment, and home care.

The IHS Oral Health Literacy website (www.ihs.gov/doh/smile) has links to presentations, recorded webinars, and other online training opportunities that teach how to more effectively communicate with your patients.

Goals of Oral Health Literacy Initiative

The IHS Oral Health Literacy Initiative was created in 2019 to give oral health providers tools to improve oral health literacy among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Using the motto of **SMILE**, **Sharing oral health Messages to Improve Literacy for Everyone**, the objectives of this campaign are:

- 1. Identify patient education materials for a variety of oral health topics.**
- 2. Provide oral health literacy training – webinars and in-person meetings.**
- 3. Create an IHS Division of Oral Health website for oral health literacy resources.**

KEY RESOURCES

Online training to increase the dental team's knowledge about health literacy

- ◆ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Health Literacy for Public Health Professionals <https://www.train.org/cdctrain/course/1078759/>
- ◆ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Effective Communication Tools for Healthcare Professionals <https://psnet.ahrq.gov/resources/resource/6442/effective-communication-tools-for-healthcare-professionals-addressing-health-literacy-cultural-competency-and-limited-english-proficiency>

Toolkits

- ◆ AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit, 2nd Edition <https://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/index.html>
- ◆ Always Use Teach-back Training Toolkit <https://www.teachbacktraining.org/>
- ◆ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Toolkit for Making Written Material Clear and Effective <https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Outreach/WrittenMaterialsToolkit/index.html>

Patient Education Materials

- ◆ Albuquerque Dental Support Center – AI/AN Oral Health Education Brochures <https://www.ihs.gov/DOH/index.cfm?fuseaction=centers.albuquerque> (IHS Dental Portal login required)
- ◆ National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research <https://catalog.nidcr.nih.gov/OrderPublications/>
- ◆ National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center <https://www.mchoralhealth.org/materials/brochures-consumer.php>