



Literacy Matters | Fact Sheet

“Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.

Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.” - UNESCO 21

Literacy in British Columbia

The latest large scale literacy survey, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), found that:

- More than 700,000 British Columbians have significant challenges with literacy. (16% of British Columbians were at Level 1 literacy or below in 2012.)²⁰
- 45% of British Columbians aged 16 to 65 may have difficulty understanding newspapers, following instruction manuals, reading health information and other daily living tasks.²⁰
- 52% of British Columbians aged 16 to 65 may have difficulty calculating interest on a car loan, using information on a graph, calculating medicine dosage and other daily living tasks.²⁰

In Canada, some groups are more likely to experience literacy challenges. They include:

- Canadians with fewer years of schooling²⁰
- Immigrants^{8, 20}
- Indigenous peoples^{2, 20}
- Older Canadians^{4, 20}

At home:

- Literacy matters for health. Canadians with stronger literacy skills enjoy better health.⁹ Literacy skills help people find, understand and use health information.⁶
- Literacy matters for managing personal finances. Numeracy is a key factor in financial literacy.^{14, 19}
- Literacy matters for understanding rights and responsibilities. It helps people understand what to do in legal proceedings.⁷

- A literacy-rich home environment matters for developing young children’s literacy skills.⁵ Having books and reading aloud at home are significant ways to support children’s long term literacy skills.^{12, 16}

At work:

- Literacy matters for employment. Strong literacy skills are connected to being employed.^{18, 20}
- Literacy matters for earnings. Stronger literacy skills are associated with earning higher wages.^{11, 13}
- Literacy matters for health and safety. Understanding and following health and safety instructions can be critical for personal safety.³
- Literacy matters for success at work. Improving literacy skills can increase efficiency and accuracy at work, and can decrease work-related stress.¹⁰
- Literacy matters for adult education. People with stronger literacy skills are more likely to participate in adult education and job related training.^{15, 17}

In the community:

- Literacy matters for community participation. Canadians with stronger literacy skills are more likely to volunteer.⁹
- Literacy matters for political involvement. Canadians with higher skills are more likely to feel they can influence government.⁹
- Research indicates that literacy skills may be an important factor in interpersonal communication, community participation and inclusion.⁹

“...it is hard to identify any other single issue that can have such a large payoff to individuals, the economy and society” – Craig Alexander¹

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