



# October – Health Literacy Month

## Message for Health Educators

Health literacy is the ability to access and comprehend basic health information that empowers individuals to make educated health decisions.<sup>1</sup> People with accurate knowledge about the body and disease will have a better understanding of the relationship between lifestyle choices and their health, such as the impact of exercise and nutrition on overall health and wellness. Health literacy also affects a person’s ability to take appropriate action in response to health-related news and announcements. For our Sailors and Marines, health literacy is critical because a lack of proficiency not only limits their ability to make appropriate health decisions, it detracts from their military readiness and resilience.

The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) reports that only 11 percent<sup>1</sup> of the military insured are proficient in health literacy. While this statistic is comparable to the U.S. adult civilian population (12 percent<sup>1</sup>), it is no less alarming. Limited literacy skills can have real life consequences. For example, Sailors and Marines who lack proficiency could struggle with tasks that potentially impact their health, such as accurately following dosing instructions on a prescription drug bottle to help quit tobacco or understanding a standardized chart to determine childhood immunization schedules.<sup>1</sup>

## What Can Health Educators Do?

- Make health literacy tools and resources available to Sailors and Marines
  - [Cut Through the Clutter: Find Health Info on the Web](#) fact sheet
  - [Four Tips on Talking to your Doctor for Better Health](#) fact sheet
- Help Sailors and Marines in your care understand health information and instructions
  - [Easy Ways to Improve Patients’ Health Literacy](#) fact sheet

## References

<sup>1</sup>U.S Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. America’s Health Literacy: Why We Need Accessible Health Information. <http://www.health.gov/communication/literacy/issuebrief/>. Published 2008. Accessed September 12, 2014.