

# HEALTH LITERACY TEXAS

## Declaration of Health Literacy Texas

We, the charter member organizations, corporations, groups, and individuals identified within this document have organized this coalition in order to pledge to enhance and further the current status of Texan health and health care through the improvement of health communication, health literacy, and cultural competency. For the purposes of this document and coalition, health literacy will be defined as: Health literacy includes a wide range of skills that allow the public and personnel working in all health-related contexts to find, understand, evaluate, communicate, and use information appropriately and correctly<sup>1</sup>. Cultural competency will be defined as communicating effectively and correctly across varying cultures. Clear health communication will be defined as encompassing all aspects, verbal, nonverbal, written, electronic, and other forms of communication within the health system, including patient care, medications, insurance, and other health arenas. Within the Texas medical system, there is an unknown epidemic plaguing Texan health. That epidemic is health literacy, and it impacts millions of Texans. It is the vision of Health Literacy Texas to both help our health care system communicate more effectively while also empowering patients to take charge of understanding their health and health care. This coalition will be formed based on several guiding principles. We, the charter members, believe health care should be patient centered, with the patient's personal background, culture, and lifestyle taken into account and honored during the medical process. We believe it is absolutely necessary to communicate effectively in order to improve health. We believe a patient's culture, literacy level, or other social factors should not limit or affect their ability to receive the best possible medical care or information. We believe our health care system needs to be navigable by people of various cultures and literacy levels. We believe it is possible to communicate better, live healthier, increase efficiency, and lower health costs by clear health communication. Health Literacy Texas is dedicated to the belief that the issues of clear health communication, health literacy, and cultural competency are comprehensive in nature, and we will strive to remember that in practice. Our purpose will be to fulfill our mission in order to one day see a Texan health care system that communicates clearly and a Texan population that is living longer and healthier because of it. Health care should change for the people; the people should not have to change for their health care.

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from the Calgary Charter

## Mission Statement:

Health Literacy Texas' (HLT) mission is to enhance the health of Texas residents and the delivery of health care in Texas by improving health literacy, health communication, and cultural competency in the medical field.

## Vision:

Health Literacy Texas has a vision that Texas will offer clearly communicated, culturally competent medical care and information, while patients become informed and empowered, and this clear health communication environment will improve the health of Texas citizens and encourage healthier behaviors.

## Health Literacy Texas Goals:

Develop and disseminate health information that is audience appropriate, accessible, accurate, and action-oriented, while keeping the culture, education, and social factors impacting the audience in mind.

Encourage systematic changes in health care that enhance health information, communication, informed decision making, and access to health related services for patients and the public.

Increase the availability of accurate, evidence based, and developmentally appropriate health and science information and curricula in child care and education throughout the education system on all levels.

Support and expand local and statewide efforts for adult education and English language instruction, while also encouraging more organizations in this field to offer students access to a health literacy curriculum and culturally appropriate health information.

Expand community partnerships, develop leadership, and advocate successfully within the health literacy field in Texas and on a national level.

Increase research efforts concerning the development, implementation, and evaluation of practices and interventions to improve health literacy and communication.

Expand the usage of the evidence based and best practices concerning health literacy, health communication, and cultural competency within Texas.

## Organizational Structure:

Health Literacy Texas will exist as a statewide coalition. HLT will attempt to involve as many organizations as possible from a comprehensive set of fields. Any organization, group, or governmental unit wishing to participate in HLT will be able to do so as long as they have a health literacy plan in place or a desire to create such a plan. HLT will have quarterly meetings to discuss efforts from across the state. Based on member interests and needs, these meetings may be in-person, on-line, or over the telephone.

## Expectations:

Member organizations will be expected to routinely report health literacy efforts. Members will also be expected to have at least one staff or volunteer who specifically manages the health literacy efforts of the organization. Whenever possible, health literacy related materials, contacts, research, or information will be shared freely or at a reduced cost to other members of the coalition.

Health Literacy Texas as a whole will be expected to update members through a monthly newsletter. HLT will keep track of all statewide efforts of member organizations. HLT will conduct state legislature advocacy efforts, and help coordinate local efforts. Advocacy will include policies that are supportive of clear health communication. HLT will manage a website to better disseminate resources and inform the public. HLT will provide member organizations with requested contacts, materials, research, and information relative to clear health communication, health literacy, and cultural competency as much as possible.

## Why Health Literacy Texas?

HLT was created, as our Declaration states, to enhance and further the efforts of individuals and organizations in the state of Texas as they pursue improved health communication, including better health literacy and cultural competency. Health literacy is a comprehensive issue requiring many partners from many fields to come together if we hope to really achieve change within the field. The effects of health literacy issues range from purely medical, to social, economic, and overall, societal. Health literacy may affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, education, or wealth. For example, studies have shown an individual's health literacy, or ability to understand complex health information, decreases during times of stress. Therefore, truly anyone can be impacted by this issue, and it is exactly why it is so vital we communicate clearly to all patients and the public as a whole about medical issues and public health concerns.

An issue this diverse spanning this many fields and requiring so many resources and inputs cannot be handled by any sole organization. It takes an organized and committed coalition to come together to really create the necessary change and the new thinking required to solve these problems. As stated elsewhere, the idea of a statewide health literacy coalition is nothing new, and Texas is following the example of many other successful states thus far.



## Why Texas?

There are a lot of reasons Texas specifically needs the focus and progress that can be offered by a statewide coalition. Texas has a diverse population, thus creating issues with cultural competency. When we say this, it is easy to immediately think of simply the diversity amongst our Hispanic, African-American, and Caucasian populations. This though is simply the beginning of the story. Many major Texan cities, especially Dallas, serve as a home for international refugees from across the world. Often the refugees come with families and children, and will need medical care and attention. It is important that we are prepared to communicate effectively in order to best serve these individuals in need. Our issues with diverse cultures does not stop there however. Consider our diversity between rural and urban populations. These populations look at issues, including health, drastically differently from each other, and this is important to consider when formulating strategies for clear health communication in a culturally competent manner. The list goes on, but it becomes obvious quickly that Texas is a diverse state with several different cultures and populations requiring culturally competent communication in a health literate fashion.

In addition to the cultural diversity throughout our state, we also struggle with the simple size of Texas. The large area, as well as population, of Texas creates issues for coordinated efforts and information sharing. Often projects going on in Houston for example may never be discussed or brought to the attention of organizations in Dallas or Austin, let alone rural West Texas. This lack of communication is detrimental as it forces each organization or small geographic area to work in isolation, not allowing the benefits that come from effective information and resource sharing.

Finally, Texas needs a focused effort on health literacy and clear health communication because it is long overdue. Our state faces issues of cultural diversity, limited education/reading levels in our population, limited access to health care professionals, and other pressing concerns for our populations. While there are many organizations doing great work within health care, non-profits, adult education, policy making, and corporate, we need a concentrated effort to get the movement moving forward toward clearer health communication for all Texans.

## What Other States Have Created Coalitions?

Texas is following the example of several other successful coalitions, and is demonstrating our commitment to evidence based best practices from the field. These other states are as follows:

- Missouri
- Iowa
- Wisconsin
- Minnesota
- Arkansas
- New Jersey

This is not a comprehensive list as others are forming on a regular basis. The ultimate goal is the creation of a national health literacy cooperative. HLT will not only serve as a leader to our own state, but also to our region and nation as we move forward.

HLT aspires to truly be an innovative leader, building on the examples and practices of other similar coalitions in order to create a better health literacy environment for Texas in the future.

HLT is also being formed with the principles and goals of the National Action Plan for Health Literacy in mind. In this way, we are serving as a model for other states to follow as well.

## What Does Being a Member of HLT Really Look Like?

Membership in HLT will look slightly different for every individual member based on their needs and field of work. Examples include:

- There is a hospital in Dallas that wants to start an ESL community course on Saturdays focused on health related issues. This hospital informs HLT of their plan. HLT then puts them in contact with a clinic doing a similar project in El Paso. From this, the Dallas hospital is able to use the plans and guidance from the El Paso clinic to create a program efficiently here. This also allows an evidence base to be established for the program as both move forward, thus creating a possible best practice in the future.
- There is an adult education provider in Lubbock who recently developed a new health literacy component to their curriculum. They want to have more providers use it to develop an evidence base for it, and also to help improve the program with suggestions. The Lubbock provider contacts HLT and HLT sends the information to all members in the relevant field. This will lead to the small project growing, and creating a new possible best practice in the future.

HLT will allow members to improve access to the resources and information they need. In return, member of HLT will commit to updating the state coalition on their own efforts, successes, and trials.

Organizations or individuals have the opportunity to join as members, Regional Council members, or State Council members. Regional Council members will help to organize each region in Texas, whereas State Council members will help to organize the state effort as well as to ensure proper communication and information sharing is occurring. Regional Council members will set up the regional meetings for the members within that area. The Regional Councils will also prepare simple reports to be given to the statewide organization in order to better disseminate information and stay up to date on efforts statewide. The State Council members will help coordinate the regions. Also, the State Council will continue to manage the website, perform membership reviews, promote state advocacy, and provide connections with organizations outside of the state of Texas. The State Council will also reach out to neighboring states moving forward as we attempt to increase the visibility and productivity of HLT.

Membership is easy, and no cost. The only requirement is that member organizations make an effort to provide whatever information they can to help other member organizations moving forward. As is often the case, as HLT grows and demands upon also change, so will the nature of the coalition. It is our goal that HLT be a dynamic coalition responding to the needs and wants of its members and the Texan population as a whole. Together, member organizations of HLT will constitute the first ever statewide effort to comprehensively improve health communication, health literacy, and cultural competency, in the state of Texas.