Why Health Literacy Texas?

HLT was created, as our Declaration states, to enhance and further the efforts of individual 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 make real 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 equally 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 the many fields and so many resources and inputs cannot be handled by any sole organization. It takes an organized and connected coalition to come together to really make 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 that have.

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 are the states that we have had the honor of visiting and being inspired by.

- 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 aims to 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.

H.L.T 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 is designed to be as easy and different for each 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. The hospital informs HLT of their plan. HLT then puts them in contact with a clinic doing a similar project in Dallas. From there, the hospital is able to take the plans and guidance of the DS project clinic to create a program efficiently.
- This also allows an evidence base to be established for the program as both move forward.

In short, HLT will be a valuable resource as an evidence base to be established for the program as both move forward.

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 is simply the beginning of the story. Minority major Texan cities, especially Dallas, serve as a home for international refugees from across the world. Often these 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 do 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 their health communication. It is culturally competent medicine. This 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 literacy fashion.

Furthermore, the access has not only to resources and the information, but to health literacy services and organizations providing evidence based and best practices concerning health literacy, health communication, and culturally competent health information.

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