

Results of the 2014 Nebraska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (NE-BRFSS) Health Literacy Screener Items

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ABSTRACT

A Health Literacy Nebraska workgroup had created a poster presentation on the idea of adding health literacy screening questions to the NE-BRFSS for the Spring 2013 Institute for Healthcare Advancement (IHA) national health literacy conference in Irvine, California. It was learned there that Kansas had included three (3) health literacy screener questions on the 2012 KS-BRFSS. The HLNE workgroup then proceeded to submit the necessary application to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NE-DHHS) and used grant funds from the National Cancer Coalition (NC2) to cover the costs associated with state added instrument items. The application was approved and three health literacy screener questions were added for the Nebraska BRFSS survey Pass A & B for 2014 and 2015. (2015 results pending). The wording on the questions was changed from the Kansas items. The CDC dataset of Nebraska state-wide responses was released to the NE-DHHS in August of 2015. The data analysis was performed. This project and those similar in other states have served as a precursor for the current CDC's 2016 health literacy screening optional module for the national BRFSS.

STATE ADDED QUESTIONS

Description of state added instrument items for 2014 NE-BRFSS: The following text was taken directly from the BRFSS survey documentation and includes the verbiage used by BRFSS telephone interviewers during the data collection phone calls.

State Added 3: Health Literacy - Path A & B

Now I would like to ask you some questions about health forms that you fill out and health information that you read.

SA.3.1 Health forms include insurance forms, questionnaires, doctor's office forms, and other forms related to health and healthcare. In general, how confident are you in your ability to fill out health forms yourself? Would you say...

Please read:

- 1 Extremely Confident
- 2 Somewhat Confident
- 3 Not at all Confident

Do not read:

- 7 Don't know / Not sure
- 8 Do not fill out health forms
- 9 Refused

SA.3.2 You can find written health information on the internet, in newspapers and magazines, on medications, at the doctor's office, in clinics, and many other places. How often is health information written in a way that is easy for you to understand? Would you say...

Please read:

- 1 Always
- 2 Nearly Always
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Seldom

Do not read:

- 5 Never
- 7 Don't know / Not sure
- 8 Have not gotten or read health information
- 9 Refused

SA.3.3 People who might help you read health information include family members, friends, caregivers, doctors, nurses, or other health professionals. How often do you have someone help you read health information? Would you say...

Please read:

- 1 Always
- 2 Nearly Always
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Seldom

Do not read:

- 5 Never
- 7 Don't know / Not sure
- 8 Have not gotten or read health information
- 9 Refused

RESULTS

The following results were determined from the data analyses:

- When asked the question, "How confident are you in your ability to fill out health forms yourself?", 34% of the Nebraska respondents lacked confidence and 66% responded that they did not lack confidence in their ability to fill out health forms overall (N=20,778).
- When asked the question, "How often is health information written in a way that is easy for you to understand?", 27% of the respondents disagreed that written health information is always or nearly always easy to understand and 73% stated that it is easy to understand (N=20,755).
- When asked the question, "How often do you have someone help you read health information?", 11% of the respondents stated that they always or nearly always get help reading health information and 89% do not get help reading health information (N=21,042).

Conclusion and Future Directions

This was the first time that Nebraska polled respondents about understanding health information. Although the majority of Nebraska BRFSS respondents in 2014 stated that they did not lack confidence in their ability to fill out health forms overall, stated that it is easy to understand written health information, and do not get help reading health information, there are those identified that do need assistance. This has ramifications for both clinical health care providers and public health professionals going forward.

This project, and similar ones in other states, have served as a precursor for the current 2016 CDC's health literacy screening optional module for the national BRFSS. Kansas and Nebraska were instrumental in raising the CDC's awareness of the need to include health literacy screening questions in the BRFSS to learn baseline data across the United States.