



## 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.)<sup>20</sup>
- 45% of British Columbians aged 16 to 65 may have difficulty understanding newspapers, following instruction manuals, reading health information and other daily living tasks.<sup>20</sup>
- 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.<sup>20</sup>

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

- Canadians with fewer years of schooling<sup>20</sup>
- Immigrants<sup>8, 20</sup>
- Indigenous peoples<sup>2, 20</sup>
- Older Canadians<sup>4, 20</sup>

### At home:

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

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

### At work:

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

### In the community:

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

*“...it is hard to identify any other single issue that can have such a large payoff to individuals, the economy and society” – Craig Alexander<sup>1</sup>*

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