

THE SASKATCHEWAN BLUE CROSS

# 2025 Health Literacy Report



# Land Acknowledgment

Saskatchewan Blue Cross proudly operates on Treaty 2, Treaty 4, Treaty 5, Treaty 6, Treaty 7, Treaty 8 and Treaty 10 territories and the Homeland of the Métis. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place and honour Elders and Survivors as we bring awareness to Indian Residential and Day Schools, The Sixties Scoop, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirited. We acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past and we are committed to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous Nations in the spirit of reconciliation and collaboration. To acknowledge this territory and its keepers on their traditional terms is to act in reciprocity so that truth may be understood and reconciliation is made possible.



*As we aspire to a future of lifelong health and wellbeing for every person in Saskatchewan, I'm excited to introduce our*  
**Health Literacy Report.**

This report is a vital milestone in our work to empower communities on their journey to whole health and wellness. At Saskatchewan Blue Cross, we envision a future where there is equitable access to health and wellness information for everyone and each person in the province understands how to navigate their healthcare effectively to live happy, healthy lives.

We're committed to acting as a catalyst for positive change, supporting education and programs advancing Health Literacy with Newcomers, Indigenous populations, the actively aging, and our youth and educators – communities where Health Literacy gaps are more prevalent in our province.

Saskatchewan Blue Cross conducted a recent study to gain insight into Saskatchewan residents' understanding of Health Literacy by measuring individuals' confidence in navigating the healthcare system and understanding medical information, among other key areas. This research was augmented by community listening roundtable discussions held across our province throughout 2023–2024.

We embarked on this journey with a clear purpose:

- Measure Health Literacy among Saskatchewan residents;
- Identify how Health Literacy affects individuals' everyday lives;
- Understand barriers to Health Literacy and explore opportunities to provide education and support to individuals and groups with lower Health Literacy; and,
- Contribute to the positive and progressive advancement of Health Literacy in Saskatchewan.

This report outlines the Health Literacy gap in Saskatchewan and identifies key areas that can be addressed to improve Health Literacy in our province.

The findings show that two in three Saskatchewan residents struggle with their Health Literacy but most are not fully aware of the challenges they face, with 76 per cent overestimating their level of Health Literacy. Among those who face barriers to Health Literacy, one in three indicated they have delayed treatment (34 per cent) or been treated incorrectly (32 per cent) and one in four did not seek help, ask questions or follow through with their care when dealing with a health situation due to Health Literacy barriers.

Lower Health Literacy is linked to increased challenges in managing one's health, a less positive health outlook, reduced confidence in medication safety, and a lower likelihood of accessing necessary care.

This report is a collective call to action, aiming to catalyze positive change and make Health Literacy resources that offer information, guidance and support widespread and accessible.

Thank you for your interest in this journey. Together, we can make a positive, lasting impact.



Kelly Wilson  
President and CEO  
Saskatchewan Blue Cross



# Methodology

## Methodology

Saskatchewan Blue Cross commissioned an online survey conducted by Edelman Data & Intelligence, that fielded Aug. 30 to Sept. 11, 2023.

## Audience

527

Saskatchewan Residents 18+

52

Newcomers to Canada (Immigrated in the past 5 years)

83

Indigenous Canadians

## Considerations

1. This survey was conducted in English online. It is important to consider that certain communities may be under-represented in the sample due to barriers towards participation. This includes factors such as lack of access to technology and proficiency in the English Language. These communities are likely to include rural residents, Indigenous peoples, Newcomers to Canada and seniors. Uncovering deeper insights within these communities may require alternative methods such as focus groups or one-on-one interviews conducted via telephone or in person, conducted in the participants' language of choice.
2. The research provided is not necessarily predictive of future outcomes and captures opinions for a period of time. The sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error including, but not limited to, coverage error and measurement error. Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online nonprobability sampling polls.
3. Not all percentages may add to 100 per cent due to rounding and may be skewed by plus or minus one per cent.

## Measuring Health Literacy

The Health Literacy Questionnaire (HLQ) is one of the most widely used multi-dimensional Health Literacy assessment tools. It collects information on how people find, understand and use health information as well as how they manage their health and interact with the health system and healthcare providers.

The HLQ consists of nine domains evaluated across 44 questions total. This framework and the associated domains were leveraged as the foundation for this research to provide a validated and robust analysis of Health Literacy in Saskatchewan.

For this streamlined study, 18 questions in total were used to represent the nine domains of Health Literacy. Participants indicated agreement to each statement using a 4-point scale. The average (mean) scores for each statement were then used to calculate an index for each domain, as well as an overall Health Literacy Index.

## 9 Domains of Health Literacy

1. Feeling understood and supported by healthcare providers
2. Having sufficient information to manage my health
3. Actively managing my health
4. Social support for health
5. Appraisal of health information
6. Ability to actively engage with healthcare providers
7. Navigating the healthcare system
8. Ability to find good healthcare information
9. Understand health information well enough to know what to do

Throughout the survey, respondents have been provided with the following definitions of health and Health Literacy:

When we speak about **health**, it can include any or all of the following:

- Physical health (such as how well your body functions)
- Mental health (for example, how good you feel emotionally and psychologically)
- Spiritual health (such as the fulfillment of your spiritual needs)
- Social health (for example, feeling a sense of belonging or connection to others)

The definition of

## Health Literacy

means your general knowledge about your health as well as your ability to find, understand and use information and services to help manage your health or the health of people you support.



# Summary



## Insight #1

Saskatchewan residents indicate a strong focus on health. Differences in how health is perceived and experienced highlight a range of needs and touchpoints across communities. **Page 10**

## Insight #2

Health Literacy is often overstated. Moreover, lower Health Literacy impacts individuals' abilities to manage their own health, understand their medications and receive appropriate care. **Page 12**

## Insight #3

Many Saskatchewan residents face barriers towards navigating and accessing services and resources, resulting in challenges receiving appropriate care. **Page 14**

## Insight #4

Communities in heightened need of support towards Health Literacy include Newcomers to Canada, Indigenous communities, young adults and seniors, as well as those with lower socioeconomic status. **Page 16**

## Insight #5

Conflicting information and prevalence of questionable sources create gaps in access to trustworthy information. **Page 18**

## Insight #6

Key opportunities identified by Saskatchewan residents involve access to virtual and community resources that offer information, resources, guidance and support. **Page 20**

## Advancing Health Literacy: A shared responsibility, a collective opportunity

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# Insight #1

Saskatchewan residents indicate a strong focus on health. Differences in how health is perceived and experienced highlight a range of needs and touchpoints across communities.



More than 8 in 10 Saskatchewan residents indicate a strong focus on their health.

However, while a majority feel they are in good health, 3 in 4 deal with ongoing health conditions or have faced health concerns in the past year.

**86%** say they make plans towards proactively taking care of their health.

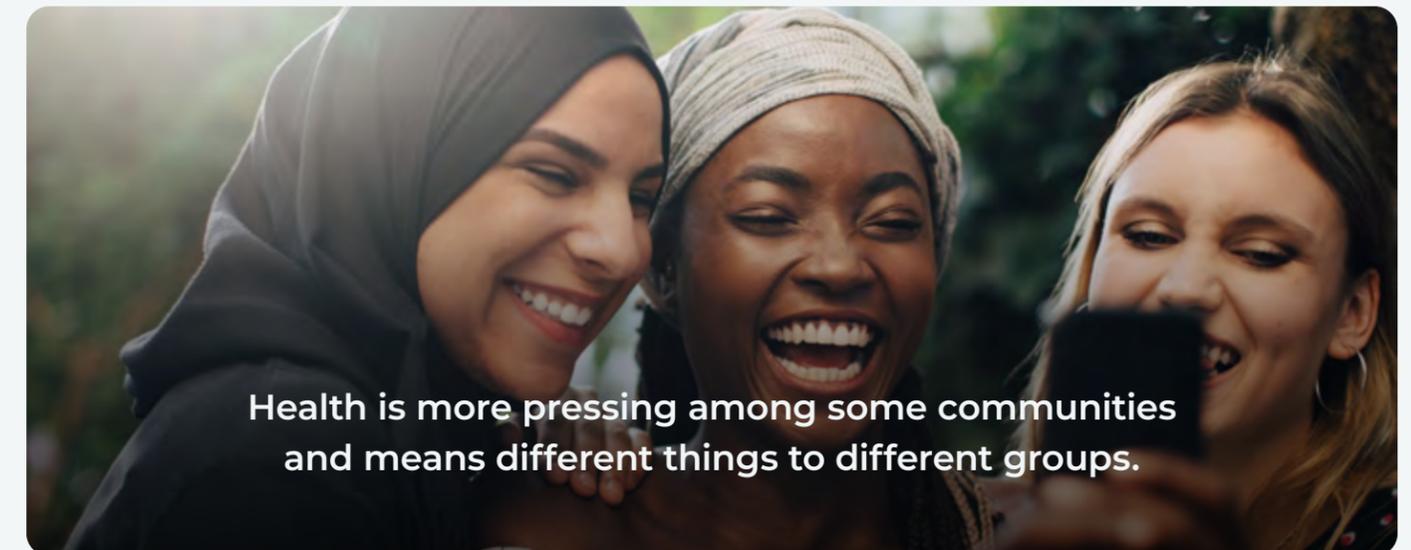
**53%** believe themselves to be healthy.

**85%** say their health is one of their top priorities.

*However* **75%** have experienced health concerns in the past 12 months.

**82%** say they regularly do things to maintain and support their health.

**71%** experience ongoing physical, mental or neurological health conditions.



Health is more pressing among some communities and means different things to different groups.

Health is more top-of-mind among those with recent or ongoing concerns, as well as parents and caregivers.

Younger generations, women, Indigenous communities and Newcomers to Canada all demonstrate more holistic views of health.



## Insight #2

Health Literacy is often overstated. Moreover, lower Health Literacy impacts individuals' abilities to manage their own health, understand their medications and receive appropriate care.



Most feel confident that they have the knowledge and information they need to maintain their health.

**88%** feel confident in their ability to maintain and support their health and the health of those in their care.

**93%** say they know what to do to maintain and support their health and the health of those in their care.

**97%** say they are familiar with things that might compromise their health.

However, Saskatchewan residents' Health Literacy is lower than they think it is. Most are not fully aware of the challenges they face.

**67%** of Saskatchewan residents struggle with Health Literacy.

**75%** overestimate their own Health Literacy.

Lower Health Literacy is linked with greater challenges managing one's health.

Those with below average Health Literacy demonstrate:

- A less positive outlook regarding their health.
- Less confidence in the safe use of medications.
- Less confidence in their ability to identify when they need to seek help for their health.
- Less likelihood of accessing the type of care they need.



# Insight #3

Many Saskatchewan residents face barriers towards navigating and accessing services and resources, resulting in challenges receiving appropriate care.



More than two in three Saskatchewan residents (68 per cent) say they face barriers to their Health Literacy.

As a result of barriers to Health Literacy, many claim to have dealt with insufficient care or have not sought adequate help.

**40%** have difficulty interacting with healthcare providers.

**34%** delayed a medical treatment.

**37%** indicate a lack of familiarity with the healthcare system and resources.

**32%** say they were misdiagnosed or have been treated incorrectly.

**35%** perceive a lack of access to health information and services.

**28%** did not seek help from a health professional or service.

**24%** have difficulty appraising health-related information.

**26%** did not ask questions to health professionals that they wanted to ask.

**23%** face communication barriers.

**23%** did not go through with testing, referrals or follow-up appointments.

Factors with the most impact towards feeling understood and supported by healthcare providers are **navigating the system** and **having social support**.

**33%** do not understand or know how to navigate the Saskatchewan healthcare system well.

**27%** do not have people in their lives who help them access information and services for their health needs or the needs of others they support.



## Insight #4

Communities in heightened need of support towards Health Literacy include Newcomers to Canada, Indigenous communities, young adults and seniors, as well as those with lower socioeconomic status.



Newcomers to Canada are less confident in knowing when and how to seek help for their health needs and where to access information.

*“It is difficult to find available family doctors, there’s no easy access of information.”*

– Female, 40, Newcomer to Canada



Barriers with heightened impact among vulnerable communities include:

### AFFORDABILITY

including lack of familiarity with free healthcare resources and uncertainty about healthcare coverage.

### COMMUNICATION

difficulty interacting with health professionals, impacted by communication barriers, discomfort and lack of trust.

### INFORMATION

not familiar with services available and overwhelmed by the amount of health information available.



Barriers identified as specific to Indigenous populations mirror those identified in academic research and include:

- **Lack of access** for Indigenous health. The lack of safe and affordable access to services is an overarching barrier to improving Health Literacy.
- **Western approaches** to healthcare knowledge, paradigms and practices limit the promotion of Indigenous-specific health knowledge and approaches.
- **Social and economic priorities** compete with health issues for attention.



## Insight #5

### Conflicting information and prevalence of questionable sources create gaps in access to trustworthy information.



While healthcare professionals act as the primary gatekeeper for health information, many Saskatchewan residents consult other sources for health information.

**61%** have done online searches for their health needs.

**57%** use health information websites.

**35%** consult social networks, such as family and friends.

The most important factors impacting one's ability to feel understood and supported by healthcare providers are navigating the healthcare system and having social support for one's health.

**33%** indicate they don't know how to navigate the healthcare system well.

**27%** don't have people in their life to help them access the information and services they need or need to support others.

**21%** didn't know what paid healthcare resources were available to them.

**20%** didn't know what free healthcare resources were available to them.

We have an opportunity to contribute as a community to provide more information to help individuals navigate the Saskatchewan healthcare system, including knowing when to get help, how to get started and where to go for different needs and touchpoints in their journey.

Use of social networks for health information is higher among:

**49%** Indigenous populations

**59%** Gen Z and Millennials

**69%** Newcomers to Canada

Trust gaps across resources highlight the need to provide guidance on valid, relevant and accessible health resources.

- Despite its widespread use, only 20 per cent trust online search for health information.
- In contrast, 48 per cent trust health information phone lines, but only 21 per cent report consulting one for their health needs.

Difficulty finding relevant and credible information is among the top barriers to Health Literacy.

- Those with below average Health Literacy are less likely to consult credible health resources (such as health information phone lines or community organizations).
- These individuals have a harder time knowing what to believe, due to receiving conflicting information about their health concerns.



# Insight #6

Key opportunities identified by Saskatchewan residents involve access to virtual and community resources that offer information, resources, guidance and support.



Saskatchewan residents see the most value in virtual access to experts and resources to aid in their health journey.

(Top three themes shown in rank order)



Enablers considered most helpful among participants highlight the need for more channels to access health information and services.

Solutions identified as most helpful in seeking help for health needs (shown in rank order)

1. Access to **virtual health options or telephone appointments** with health professionals.
2. Ability to ask questions and voice concerns outside of appointments, **on my own time** (such as electronically or by phone).
3. Access to **online health tools**, resources and health supports (either self-directed or supported by health professionals).
4. Access to an expert or resource that can **direct me where to go or who to contact** when I need to seek help for health needs.
5. Information on **trustworthy sources** that I can access should I want more information.
6. Ability to get guidance and support on **how to navigate the healthcare system** and identify resources available to me to meet my health needs.
7. Access to health resources and information within my **local community**.
8. Access to **community-based** support people and services when seeking help for my health needs.



# Advancing Health Literacy: A shared responsibility, a collective opportunity



## Insights from Saskatchewan communities

Take a moment to consider:

1. How well do you understand our healthcare system?
2. Would you know where to go for help if you or a loved one was having a mental health crisis?
3. Have you ever struggled to understand a medical diagnosis or prescribed recovery process?
4. Put yourself in the shoes of a new Canadian citizen, who may not speak fluent English or a senior citizen who may not have the tools to research online.
5. Imagine living in a remote location without access to a family physician, where doctors from outside the community are only available on a sporadic fly-in basis.
6. How do you separate fact from fiction when researching health information online?

These are all challenges that affect our ability to make positive health and wellness choices, and some of the questions we have been exploring with local leaders and advocates during roundtable consultations held over the past five years across Saskatchewan.

Through our most recent Community Listening Roundtables held over the past 24 months, Saskatchewan Blue Cross heard directly from residents across the province—urban and rural, Indigenous and Newcomer, youth and elder.

What we heard was clear: Health Literacy is not a luxury—it is a necessity. It is the foundation for equitable access, timely care, and empowered decision-making. Yet, for too many, it remains out of reach and assumed, rather than supported. The following insights and opportunities reflect what we heard and where we believe collective action can make a meaningful difference.



**Champion peer-led mental health and wellness education**

**What we heard:** Mental health challenges are widespread, yet stigma and access barriers persist—especially in rural areas and among youth, Newcomers, and Indigenous communities.

**What we can do together:** Support peer-to-peer education models in workplaces, schools, and community organizations. Encourage trauma-informed training and mental health literacy as part of everyday conversations.



**Strengthen navigation support across the health journey**

**What we heard:** Many residents feel lost in the system—unsure where to go, what to ask, or how to follow up.

**What we can do together:** Collaborate to develop and promote tools, guides, and human supports that help individuals confidently navigate care—from prevention to recovery. This includes digital tools, multilingual resources, and community-based navigators.



**Expand access to trusted, understandable health information**

**What we heard:** Information is everywhere – but trust in it is scarce. Conflicting advice and misinformation are common. Many don't know which sources to trust.

**What we can do together:** Co-create and amplify plain-language, culturally relevant, and multilingual health content. Leverage schools, libraries, workplaces, and digital platforms to make this information accessible where people already are.



**Support community-led solutions for underserved populations**

**What we heard:** Indigenous and Newcomer communities face unique barriers rooted in history, language, and systemic inequities.

**What we can do together:** Invest in and elevate initiatives designed by and for these communities. This includes culturally safe programming, translation services, and partnerships with grassroots organizations.



**Promote equitable access through innovation and collaboration**

**What we heard:** Geography, income, and digital access continue to shape who gets care—and who doesn't.

**What we can do together:** Explore innovative models like mobile health units, virtual care literacy programs, and transportation supports. Encourage cross-sector partnerships that reduce friction and increase reach.

Saskatchewan Blue Cross is committed to being more than a benefits provider. We are a partner in prevention, a platform for community voice, and a funder of local impact. We will continue to:

- Listen deeply to the lived experiences of Saskatchewan residents.**
- Invest strategically in initiatives that close Health Literacy gaps.**
- Collaborate openly with organizations across sectors to build a more informed, empowered, and equitable province.**

Health Literacy is not the responsibility of one organization or individuals alone. It is a shared societal obligation—one that spans healthcare, education, government, business, and community.

We invite you - our partners, peers, and fellow citizens - to join us in this work. Together, we can build a Saskatchewan where everyone has the knowledge, confidence, and support to live a healthy life. Whether you are a policymaker, educator, employer, community leader, or simply someone who cares—you have a role to play in advancing Health Literacy. Together, we can ensure that every person in Saskatchewan has the knowledge, confidence, and support to make informed health decisions.

*Let's move forward—together.*





*Together, we can make a positive impact.  
Advancing Health Literacy requires collaboration  
across numerous sectors and organizations.*

**We encourage you to:**

**Consider the actionable findings in this report and the role that you or your organization can play in helping to close the Health Literacy gap.**



Advocate for Health Literacy and [learn about resources available.](#) →



[Learn more](#) about organizations that are taking steps to advance Health Literacy today. →



[Share this funding application link](#) with not-for-profit organizations seeking to make a positive impact in advancing Health Literacy in the populations they serve through their programs and resources. →



Empowering healthy lives.

## Get in touch

Our business hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., M – F.  
In-person service hours are 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., M – F.

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