

# Health Literacy & End-Stage Renal Disease

**What Is Health Literacy?** Personal health literacy refers to an individual’s capacity to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others<sup>(1)</sup>.

**About 25% chronic kidney disease patients experience limited health literacy<sup>(2)</sup>**

## What Does That Mean for ESRD Patients?

Examples of health literacy include understanding instructions (e.g., how to wash vascular access) and dialysis procedures (e.g., cannulation), reading educational materials, understanding disease processes and laboratory values, filling out forms, and the ability to navigate the complex healthcare system that is required for chronic kidney disease care. ESRD patients need to know where to get reliable information (e.g., [ESRD NCC](#)) and be able to understand it. Yet, patients often don’t recognize that they lack the skills, complicated by stigma associated with it and may ask fewer questions<sup>(3)</sup>.

**Vulnerable populations include elderly patients, people with lower socioeconomic status or education, people with limited English proficiency**

**Who Is Affected by Limited Health Literacy Skills?** Nearly 90 million adults in the U.S. struggle with health literacy. Even people with high literacy skills may have low health literacy skills in certain situations.

**About 44% of End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) patients age 65 or above\***

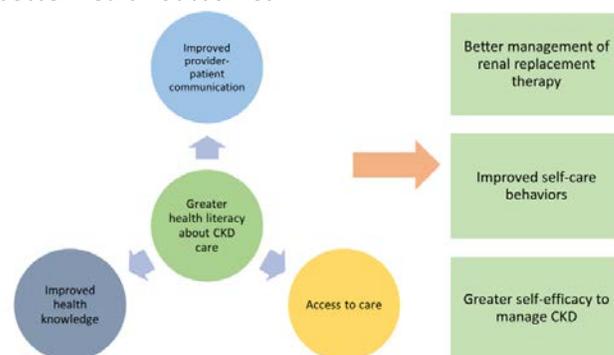
**Around 65,000 ESRD patients (14%) currently live in the top 10% of socioeconomic disadvantaged areas\***

## Why Is Health Literacy Important in Kidney Disease Care?

People with limited health literacy skills are more likely to have worse health outcomes in a variety of chronic conditions<sup>(4)</sup>, including increased mortality in ESRD<sup>(5)</sup>. Low health literacy could lead to:

-  • Mismanaging medication
-  • Needing emergency and hospital services more often, and longer stay

Greater health literacy about kidney disease (e.g., understanding of terminology) could lead to better access to care, thus often resulting in better health outcomes.



*Note.* Concept adapted from Devraj & Gordon<sup>(6)</sup>; CKD, chronic kidney disease

## Strategies to Improve Health Literacy

There is a need to assess and enhance organizational health literacy within care settings and share health literacy best practices. Examples include: Avoiding jargon, encouraging questions-asking, providing materials in other languages, using teach-back, and tailoring patient information to the individual’s experience and cultural background.

### References

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5. Cavanaugh et al. Low health literacy associates with increased mortality in ESRD. DOI:10.1681/asn.2009111163.
6. Devraj & Gordon. Health literacy and kidney disease: toward a new line of research. DOI:10.1053/j.ajkd.2008.12.028

Data Source: The End Stage Renal Disease Quality Reporting (EQRS) accessed in July 2022

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