



# American Academy of Nursing

*transforming health care policy and practice through nursing knowledge*

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## American Academy of Nursing Releases Policy Brief on Health Literacy

### *Academy Supports Efforts to Increase Health Literacy for Patients*

**Washington, D.C. (March 19, 2018)** — The American Academy of Nursing released its policy brief urging nurses to have an increased role in enhancing health literacy for patient populations.

Health literacy is a precursor to health, and is broadly defined as an individual's ability to have control over their health. It also includes a patient's ability to access, comprehend and understand, and use health information for this purpose. Patients that have low health literacy are more likely to experience poorer overall health status, and health literacy is acknowledged as one of the social determinants of health. Lower health literacy is prevalent among the elderly, poor, chronically sick, as well as ethnic minorities. Despite the linkages between low health literacy and poorer health outcomes, promoting health literacy for patients has not been a priority.

"The Academy publishes this timely policy brief to call on nurses to engage in health literacy activities for patient empowerment," said Academy President Karen Cox, PhD, RN, FAAN. "Health literacy activities are well-aligned with the Academy's mission and strategic plan, and aids in our work with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and others on creating a Culture of Health".

The Academy's policy brief, "Call for Action: Nurses Must Play a Critical Role to Enhance Health Literacy," was published in the January/February 2018 issue of the Academy's journal, *Nursing Outlook*.

"Research into consequences of, and solutions to mitigate, low health literacy are widely available, but seriously underutilized," said Lori A. Loan, PhD, RN, FAAN, a member of the Academy's Expert Panel on Quality Health Care. "Nurses as leaders are uniquely positioned to minimize the gap that often exists between patient skills and abilities and the increasingly complex demands of health care systems by implementing a health literacy universal precautions approach with every patient, every time and in every health care encounter."

The Academy recommends focusing on three major domains to reduce health literacy disparities, and to increase empowerment of patients: practice (communications between provider and patient to increase the patient's health literacy, including using tools such as the Health Literacy Universal Precaution Toolkit); systems of care (having health care systems provide information for their patients to better navigate, understand, and use health information); and partnerships (increase collaboration with other organizations, including other health specialties).

Read the full policy brief at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2017.11.003>

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**The American Academy of Nursing ([www.AANnet.org](http://www.AANnet.org))** serves the public and the nursing profession by advancing health policy and practice through the generation, synthesis, and dissemination of nursing knowledge. The Academy's more than 2,500 fellows are nursing's most accomplished leaders in education, management, practice, and research. They have been recognized for their extraordinary contributions to nursing and healthcare.

**CONTACT:**

Barry Eisenberg

202-777-1174

[Barry\\_Eisenberg@aanet.org](mailto:Barry_Eisenberg@aanet.org)