

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Secretary of Health Encourages Pennsylvanians to Prepare, Ask Questions to Ensure They Receive the Proper Care Amidst COVID-19

Harrisburg, PA – Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine today shared critical questions for Pennsylvanians to ask their health care providers so they improve their health literacy, or understanding health information, to make appropriate health decisions, especially as COVID-19 and the flu remain a threat to Pennsylvanians.

“Many patients feel embarrassed about their health literacy level, causing them to not speak up to their provider when they don’t understand something,” Dr. Levine said. “One tool that helps patients take a more active role in their health care is the [Ask Me 3 Questions](#) tool: what is my main problem; what do I need to do; and why is it important for me to do this. These three questions can help you better understand your health and what you need to do to stay healthy.”

Many Pennsylvanians are at greater risk for poor health outcomes because they don’t know what questions to ask or understand the answer. Pennsylvania is one of only 20 states that has made health literacy, or understanding health information, a priority to ensure residents receive the best care for their needs and understand how to live the healthiest life in order to reach their full potential.

[Pennsylvania Health Literacy Coalition \(PAHLC\)](#) is a statewide coalition funded by the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant through the Department of Health and led by the Health Care Improvement Foundation. Major PAHLC priorities to date include establishing strong cross-sector partnerships, empowering patients to access the health information they need to thrive and influencing provider and system-level change to create a culture of health literacy. The goal of these activities is to improve health communication and ensure good health.

The PAHLC also partners with Thomas Jefferson University to provide trainings across the commonwealth for health care providers and patient peer educators. To date, it has:

- Trained over 17,000 health care professionals in 26 counties including rural, suburban, and urban regions of the Commonwealth;
- Trained more than 100 patient peer educators who have reached more than 1,500 members of their communities;
- Collected data to better understand the health literacy needs of immigrants and refugees and the role of community-based organizations in meeting these needs; and
- Assisted participating healthcare organizations make changes to staff and patient education practices, their websites, signage, and internal policies to better address health literacy. This year alone they assisted with 179 activities.

Low health literacy leads to increased use of health care services, greater risk for hospitalization, and higher utilization of expensive services, such as emergency care and inpatient admissions. Vulnerable populations have a lower likelihood of getting their flu shots, are less likely to use preventative care, and are less likely to take and understand how to use their medicine correctly.

Low health literacy bears significant economic consequences, upwards of \$238 billion annually, according to a [study as residents from across the country do not receive or understand the proper care.](#)

For more information regarding Pennsylvania's health literacy program, please visit www.health.pa.gov.