

April 13, 2023

**HB 1578: Relating to the health literacy advisory committee and health literacy in the state health plan.**

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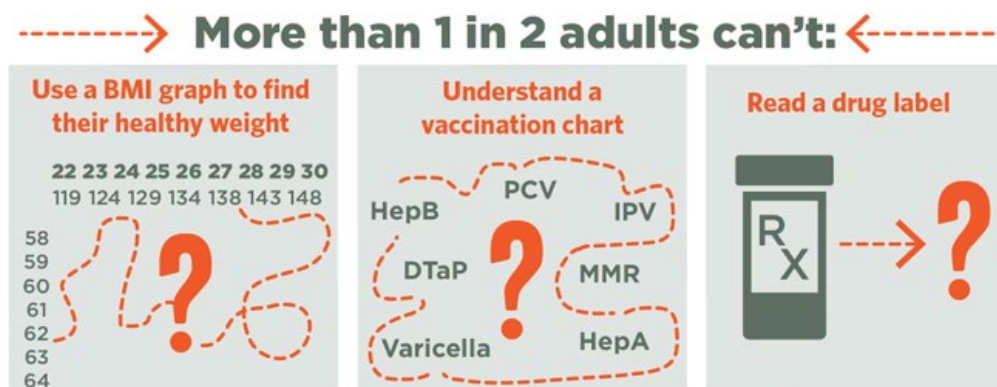
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Chair Harless, Vice-Chair Howard and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input today in support of HB 1578 by Representative Allison, directing the Health and Human Services Commission to create a comprehensive, long-term plan for improving health literacy across the state of Texas. By investing in efforts to develop well-coordinated and targeted strategies, passage of HB 1578 will foster collaboration among healthcare providers, empower individuals to advocate for their health, and facilitate better decision-making in medical settings. In the long run, these efforts will contribute to reducing healthcare costs and enhancing outcomes for all Texans. We respectfully offer the following points for the Committee’s consideration:

**1. Empower Texans to be actively engaged in their own health care decisions:**

For an individual to take control in overseeing his or her own care, they must first be able to obtain, process and understand health care information. When individuals acquire this knowledge, it is called health literacy. Low health literacy has a direct and negative impact on health outcomes and healthcare costs. Uninformed patients are more likely to make poor health decisions - or take no action - that will ultimately worsen their health, while health literate patients are you likely to utilize health care services proactively and obtain better outcomes at a lower cost.



Source: The College for Behavioral Health Leadership. *Health Literacy Definition*.

**2. Address low health literacy affecting four out of five Texans struggling to manage their health and prevent disease:**

Low health literacy is associated with poor health outcomes, infrequent use of preventive services, and higher rates of hospitalization. A 2020 study by UnitedHealth Group finds that in counties with high health literacy 31% of Medicare beneficiaries receive more flu shots and 26% experience fewer emergency room visits.<sup>i</sup> Those with low health literacy are also less likely to access critical preventive services like mammograms, Pap smears and immunizations.<sup>ii</sup> Additionally, individuals with limited health literacy skills often face challenges managing their chronic conditions such as diabetes,

asthma, high blood pressure, and HIV effectively.<sup>iii</sup> To empower Texans to seek medical care and utilized preventive services, it requires a strong foundation in understanding health information to make well-informed decisions.

### **3. Enhance patient-provider communication to prevent adverse patient outcomes:**

Low health literacy disproportionately affects older adults, low-income Texans, racial and ethnic minorities, and individuals with low educational attainment. These vulnerable populations are at higher risk of poor health outcomes. In fact, communication problems are responsible for 68 percent of adverse patient outcomes, which can lead to patient deaths, or severe physical or psychological harm unrelated to a patient's disease.<sup>iv</sup> Addressing communication challenges between patients and providers can help prevent dosing errors and improve patient adherence to medication or treatment regimens. Non-adherence alone results in \$1.5 billion in lost patient earnings and \$300 billion in excess health care spending annually.<sup>v</sup> Health literacy can promote better patient adherence and enhance a patient's ability to manage medications effectively.

### **4. Reduce costs through data-informed initiatives:**

To achieve substantial state savings, it is critical to address the underlying factors, such as limited health literacy skills, that contribute to preventable emergency departments visits driving the excessive costs and inefficiencies in the healthcare system. Merely increasing copayments or charging upfront fees is not an effective strategy to reduce these visits if patients do not have the necessary understanding and resources to seek appropriate care.<sup>vi</sup> Still, research suggests that even reducing Medicare and uninsured patient readmissions by 1% could result in nearly \$440 million annually in savings.<sup>vii</sup> This underscores the critical role of investing in health literacy initiatives as a cost-effective strategy to improve health outcomes and reduce health care costs.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**We urge the Committee to support HB 1578, as it will significantly improve the physical and mental health of Texans. By developing a long-term plan, the state will be able to effectively disseminate health and safety information, encourage access to preventive health care services and reduce health care costs.**

For additional information, please contact Christine Yanas, Vice President of Policy & Advocacy at (210) 253-3253 or via email at [cyanas@mhm.org](mailto:cyanas@mhm.org).

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<sup>i</sup> Lagasse, J. 2020. *Improving healthcare literacy could save billions, improve outcomes*. Health Care Finance

<sup>ii</sup> Scott TL, Gazmararian JA, Williams MV, Baker DW. 2002. Health literacy and preventive health care use among Medicare enrollees in a managed care organization. *Medical Care*.

<sup>iii</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. *Quick Guide to Health Literacy*.

<sup>iv</sup> Department of State Health Services: Statewide Health Coordinating Council. Nov. 2018. *2019-2020 Update to the Texas State Health Plan*.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> Balakrishnan, M., Herndon, J., Zhang, J., Payton, T., Shuster, J., Carden, D. 2017, Academic Emergency Medicine. *The Association of Health Literacy with Preventable Emergency Department Visits: A Cross-sectional Study*.

<sup>vii</sup> Statistical Brief, 2007 Dept. of State Health Services; Texas Hospital Inpatient Discharge Public Use Data File