

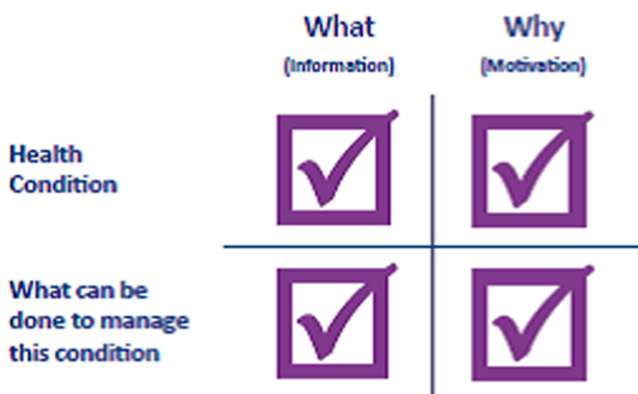


A Focus on Health Literacy: The *What* and the *Why*

Building motivation to make change can be difficult. As providers, it is our job to focus on helping patients uncover their own personal motivation. The information we provide and the way we deliver these messages can greatly impact a patient's decision to change or take action.

In Canada, **health literacy** is defined as the "ability to access, understand, evaluate and communicate information as a way to promote, maintain and improve health in a variety of settings across the life-course".¹ Evidence shows that "60% of adults and 88% of seniors in Canada are not health literate".² Poor health literacy is "a stronger predictor of a person's health than age, income, employment status, education level and race".³

The HealthChange® Methodology identifies the essential ingredients for promoting health literacy, the what and the why. Patients not only need to understand what their health conditions are and what can be done to manage them, but also understand why taking specific actions will help improve their health and their ability to do the things that are personally important to them.



If we sequence our messaging and questions, to highlight the four components of the *What* and the *Why*, as outlined below, we can help build our patient's motivation and health literacy.

Health Condition

1. The What:

Ask: *What's your understanding of (your condition(s))?* Fill in any gaps in knowledge, such as:

- Typical course of the condition over time
- Clinical indicators for health
- Common misconceptions

2. The Why:

Ask: *How does having (the condition) impact you personally? How does (the condition) impact the things that are personally important to you (ie: family, friends, work, social life)?*

Condition Management

3. What:

Ask: *I don't want to cover information you're already aware of. So could you tell me what you already know about the things a person with (condition) can do over time to have better health?* Fill in any gaps in knowledge of the general treatment, lifestyle and referral categories and correct any misinformation.

4. Why

Ask: *If you work on these things, how could it have a positive impact on the people in your life or the things you really value? Would there be any benefit to you in the long term?*

¹ A Vision for a Health Literate Canada :Report of the Expert Panel on Health Literacy. Rootman & Gordon-El-Bihbety (2008). Canadian Public Health Association.

² <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/chronic-diseases/health-literacy.html>

³ Report on the Council of Scientific Affairs, Ad Hoc Committee on Health Literacy for the Council on Scientific Affairs, AMA, JAMA, Feb 10, 1999.