

## Older Adults & Literacy

### Fact Sheet



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On average, seniors have lower literacy skills and less prior education than other Canadians.<sup>(1)</sup>

Over 80% of Canadian adults over age 66 have low prose literacy skills that do not enable them to cope well in today's complex knowledge society. This is also the case with numeracy skills—with 88% of seniors lacking skills needed to manage effectively the mathematical requirements of a range of situations. The same pattern occurs for document literacy, the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information in a variety of format, e.g. maps, transportation schedules, tables and charts.<sup>(11)</sup>

In BC, 70% of adults over 65 score in the lowest two prose reading proficiency level; 78% score in the lowest two numeracy proficiency levels.<sup>(8)</sup>

In 2011, 38% of Canadian seniors did not have a high school diploma or equivalent.<sup>(6)</sup>

Over 80% of Canadian seniors have low health literacy.<sup>(2)</sup>

Seniors within the lowest two levels literacy perceive themselves as being able to cope with daily living and not having literacy problems.<sup>(7)</sup>

There is a general tendency for literacy skills to decrease with age, but the effect differs with different levels of schooling. There is a suggestion that there is little loss of very basic literacy skills.<sup>(9)</sup>

By 2031, it is forecasted that the number of Canadians over the age of 65 with low literacy skills will double (from about 3 million to more than 6.2 million).<sup>(3)</sup>

The literacy profile of seniors may change in the future through a 'generational effect' in that individuals in the baby boom generation may have stronger literacy skills than the generation preceding them.<sup>(11)</sup>

### Older adults & learning

Older adults continue to learn well into "extreme old age".<sup>(5)</sup>

Older adults spend considerable time learning and most of that learning is of the informal variety.<sup>(1)</sup>

"Active learning carries benefits that go beyond alleviating age-related loss of brain function. Engaging in active learning also provides a means for remaining actively involved in the community, for developing new interests and for keeping up with younger generations. In short, people feel healthier, happier, more respected and more independent when they pursue active learning in their senior years."<sup>(1, p. 3)</sup>

Physical activity has been shown to help prevent cognitive decline in older adults.<sup>(4)</sup>

"Among seniors, about one-half (51%) of those aged 65 to 74 used the Internet, compared with 27% of those aged 75 years and older."<sup>(10)</sup>

## References

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