

Literacy is defined as *“a continuum of learning that enables individuals to develop their knowledge and potential, pursue and achieve their goals, and participate fully in society”*.¹

Literacy is much more than reading and writing; it is an **essential skill** that is the foundation for future learning. It is about people’s ability to participate in every day activities like banking, reading a safety manual, reviewing a child’s report card and acquiring new skills to keep or to change jobs.

Did you know...

40% of adult Albertans and 35% of working age Albertans do not have the literacy skills they need to reach their own potential in our increasingly knowledge-based economy. (International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey 2005, Statistics Canada).

Literacy is connected to many pressing social-economic conditions that influence health, poverty, justice, social status, early childhood development, community engagement and more.

Health and safety

People with higher literacy skills are more likely to eat a healthy diet, have good mental health and have ways to prevent illness. Lower literacy skills may lead to increased risk of accidents, higher rates of chronic disease and lower life expectancy.

Poverty

People with lower literacy skills may earn significantly lower incomes, experience higher unemployment and rely to a greater degree on Employment Insurance and social assistance than those with higher levels of literacy. People must work together to end poverty.

Justice

There is a link between literacy skills and crime. Many people in trouble with the law, particularly repeat offenders, often have lower literacy skills than the general population. Early prevention plans that include literacy can help reduce the risks of criminal actions that are associated with poverty, unemployment and isolation.

Employment and Economic Growth

Good literacy skills are important to finding and keeping a rewarding job. People with higher literacy skills earn higher wages and are less likely to be unemployed. People without strong literacy skills may have trouble improving their work skills to meet the technological demands of new jobs. Skills are important to economic growth for our province.

¹ National Literacy Trust, 2006 <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk>

Family Life

Less educated families often have many rich literacy practices and strong family supports. However, adults with low literacy skills in these families may have less economic security. This affects the environment that children need for learning. Literacy and healthy family development go hand in hand.

Community Involvement

Literacy is a key to creating citizens who are interested and want to take part in society. Governments now often look for input from citizens before they develop new public policies. When governments ask for feedback on issues, people with higher literacy and skills to understand information are more likely to be heard.

Empowering citizens with higher literacy skills allows greater opportunity for participation in civic decision-making resulting safer, healthier and more vibrant communities in which we can equally thrive.

We are all part of the literacy solution!

- People who do not maintain their literacy skills regularly at work, home, or through continued education, risk losing their skills over time. Keep your skills up!
- Give the gift of literacy. Volunteer to tutor a child, youth or adult in your community.
- Donate money, goods or services to your literacy program.
- Recognize the links between low literacy and health, democratic engagement, safety, employment success, poverty and more. Literacy is connected to many things.
- We all benefit from a literate society in which all citizens have the opportunity to develop the skills they need to be active and successful members of our community.

For more information about literacy and how you can help, contact:

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