

WHY ACCESS TO LITERACY IS CRITICAL FOR OLDER ADULTS

AN OPEN DOOR COLLECTIVE FACT SHEET

THE ISSUE

Literacy is a critical tool to navigate our modern world. When adult literacy* is discussed at the policy level, it is often tied closely to objectives related to workforce development. Here we look at important reasons why we must make sure the needs of older adults related to adult literacy are made a priority — including those who may no longer be in the workforce, those taking on important family roles or acting as change agents in their communities as well as for those whom literacy strengthens their ability to advocate for their everyday needs.

**Adult literacy, or adult basic skills education, includes a range from basic literacy, including reading, writing, and numeracy skills, and English language for immigrants up through adult secondary education.*

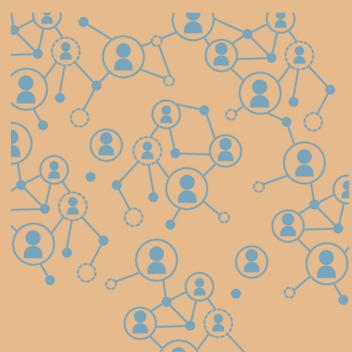
THE RIPPLE EFFECTS

Reading and writing are embedded in virtually all aspects of modern life, and this is even more evident with the spread of coronavirus in 2020. Here are three areas of life that intersect with literacy and are particularly critical to address for older adults.

TECHNOLOGY

There is a large digital divide across the older adult population, and it has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pew Research's Internet/Broadband Fact Sheet cited that only 59% of adults 65 + had home broadband. As well, age is intersectional with other identities. The National Digital Inclusion Alliance released a white paper in June 2020 that explored how rural-focused Broadband initiatives leave many people in large cities, often communities of color, without access. Without access to and regular use of technology that is incorporated into their lives, older adults will especially be limited in how they can engage.



COMMUNITY

There has also been much attention drawn to the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of older adults who may not be able to safely leave their homes for a significant period of time to spend in-person time with their regular support systems.

Many older adults are also facing the opposite dilemma. With the onset of COVID-19, their role as caretaker in families has become even more critical as daycares and schools have closed across the country. Before COVID, over 2 million grandparents in the U.S reported being responsible for raising their grandchildren. Being comfortable with accessing and using Internet technology and supporting grandchildren is the day-to-day reality for many.

DID YOU KNOW?

THE CENSUS BUREAU ESTIMATES THAT BY 2034
THERE WILL BE MORE OLDER ADULTS (AGE 65+)
THAN YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER 18.

HEALTH

As the U.S. population ages, health literacy will be an even more critical area to address.

In an October 2019 University of Michigan study, adults age 50-80 were asked about telehealth hesitations - 47% had concerns around using technology and 39% had concerns about being able to see or hear their doctor. A June 2020 AARP study on telehealth found that lack of access to computers, lack of high speed internet, and lack of knowledge are common barriers cited that especially impact older adults. As telehealth becomes a norm, literacy, digital literacy, and health literacy are all critical for older adult health care.

As well, AARP noted in December 2019 research that 3 out of 4 of adults would like to age at home and cited the numerous ways that technology could be critical for allowing people to do just that.

WHERE DO WE START

- Learn more about strategies to expand Broadband access to older adults and others in “Internet deserts”
- Advocate for adult education and digital literacy programs for older adults in your community
- Raise up the need for community roles such as digital navigators, peer learning programs, and other community supports
- Volunteer as an adult literacy or digital literacy tutor to help older adults



Learn more at www.opendoorcollective.org

about why a robust adult basic education system is good for everyone.

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