



Literacy Assistance Center

**MEDIA ADVISORY**  
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**The Intersection of Health and Literacy**

Elyse Barbell Rudolph, executive director of the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC) in New York City, will lead a session entitled "Building Literacy: Collaboration among Health and Literacy Professionals" at the American Public Health Association 132<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting and Exposition in Washington, DC, on November 10. The session describes the New York City Health Literacy Initiative, a collaboration led by the LAC in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Social Policy and several corporations and foundations.

The U.S. government report *Healthy People 2010* defines "health literacy" as "the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions." These are the skills all people need to, for instance, find their way around a hospital or communicate with health care providers. According to the National Academy on an Aging Society, the cost of low health literacy in the form of more emergency room visits, longer hospital stays, increased doctor visits, and increased medication is estimated at \$73 million annually.

The Journal of the American Medical Association reported in 1999 that 46% of American adults were functionally illiterate in dealing with the health care system. In New York, with its struggling public school system and large immigrant population, the problem is undoubtedly much worse.

The LAC's Health Literacy Initiative, the subject of Rudolph's APHA presentation, addresses the health literacy needs of low-income and immigrant New Yorkers in two ways: by establishing partnerships between adult literacy programs and hospitals and by providing professional development to the teaching staff of literacy programs to help them integrate health literacy skills into their curriculum. Part of the presentation is a video of a visit to Harlem Hospital by adult students from the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center. One immigrant student exclaims after the tour, "Now I feel more comfortable to go to the hospital."

The LAC is in its third decade of supporting the work of over 500 New York City programs in adult literacy, family literacy, English for Speakers of Other Languages, and GED preparation. The LAC also operates New York State's only Literacy Referral Hotline, which each year refers 30,000 individuals to local adult education and employment training programs. For more information on the LAC and the Health Literacy Initiative, visit [www.lacnyc.org](http://www.lacnyc.org).

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