

The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS 2005, Statistics Canada) measured how well adults use information to function in society and the economy. In Canada, 23,000 people were tested on their skills proficiency in four areas:

1. **Prose Literacy:** understanding text, such as newspaper stories, poems and fiction
2. **Document Literacy:** understanding informational text, such as maps, charts, job applications and bus schedules
3. **Numeracy:** working with numbers
4. **Problem Solving:** the ability to clarify the nature of a problem and develop and apply solution strategies

## **Fast Facts about Literacy in Canada**

- 4 in 10 Canadians don't have the literacy skills they need to meet the ever-increasing demands of our knowledge-based society.
- Today's new jobs require highly literate workers. Even though people are often better educated and environments are more literate than ever before, a large and increasing number of adults find their skills are deficient in everyday situations. Employers tend to improve skills of their most literate workers while ignoring people who struggle with reading and writing.
- Higher levels of literacy decrease unemployment rates. Workers with low literacy skills are particularly vulnerable to layoff and displacement, and once unemployed, they may find it more difficult to find new jobs.
- There has been a decline in literacy scores among Canadian youth. A parent's level of education has a significant impact on the literacy scores of their children. Canadian youth aged 16-25 who had parents with little or no education scored lower on average in 2003 than similar youth surveyed in 1994.
- In the international ranking, Canada ranks fourth, behind Norway, Switzerland, and Bermuda, but ahead of the United States and Italy.
- Most immigrants to Canada (regardless of skill level) are disadvantaged in terms of employment, even compared to low skilled Canadian-born adults.
- Literacy skills erode if not used regularly. Canadians who don't exercise their literacy skills at work, at home, or through continued education, will experience a deterioration of their skills over time.
- A high school education is no guarantee that a person has the literacy skills he or she needs to succeed.
- Lifelong learning is important in acquiring new competencies and qualifications. Literate adults and senior citizens are far better equipped to maintain their independence and quality of life, thus lessening the need for social services.
- Canada's literacy challenges are undermining our economic potential. Literacy is strongly connected to productivity and position in the global economy. In 2004, another study showed that a 1% increase in average literacy rates would yield a 1.5% permanent increase in the GDP (Coulombe, Tremblay and Marchand, 2004).

## **Fast Facts about Literacy in Alberta**

- 40% of adult Albertans, 35% of working age Albertans and 36% of those aged 16 to 25 do not have the literacy skills they need to reach their own potential in our increasingly knowledge-based economy
- 44% of adult Albertans do not have the basic math skills needed and almost 50% have lower-level problem-solving skills.
- Alberta is amongst the top provinces in Canada, but not in the lead.
- The majority of callers to literacy programs in Alberta was born in Canada and speaks English as their first language (ABC Canada-LEARN Campaign National Research Study (1996).
- In Alberta, there are over 600 literacy programs offered by over 200 organizations. These programs include family, youth, senior, Aboriginal, academic upgrading, English as a Second Language, and workplace literacy (Literacy Alberta, 2007).
- Thousands of Albertans train to become volunteer adult literacy tutors. A great deal of literacy work is dependent upon charitable efforts and volunteers.
- There are waiting lists for programs that can help people improve their skills. No one should have to wait to enroll in a program, yet people are turned away every day.

## **Increased literacy rates have a positive impact for everyone...**

- Increased health and wellness in our citizens
- Lower health care costs
- Reduced rates of criminal activity and imprisonment
- More opportunities for children and families to enjoy lifelong learning
- Lower rates of absenteeism and workplace injuries
- Skilled workers for the future
- Enhanced social inclusion and community participation for all
- A society that is educated, competitive and well-equipped for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

## **You are part of the literacy solution!**

- Canadians must become aware of the literacy barriers facing so many people.
- Literacy programs need solid, long-term funding.
- Literacy programs need to be supportive of learners' different strengths and needs.
- Capacity for increasing the number of literacy programs offered in Alberta must be built and sustained through ongoing support from government and business and industry.

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

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