

Understanding the Role of Health Literacy in Eliminating Health Disparities among Vulnerable Populations

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Health Literacy

is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to *obtain, process, and understand* basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

Poor health literacy

is a stronger predictor of an individual's health than age, income, employment status, education level, and race.

(American Medical Association)

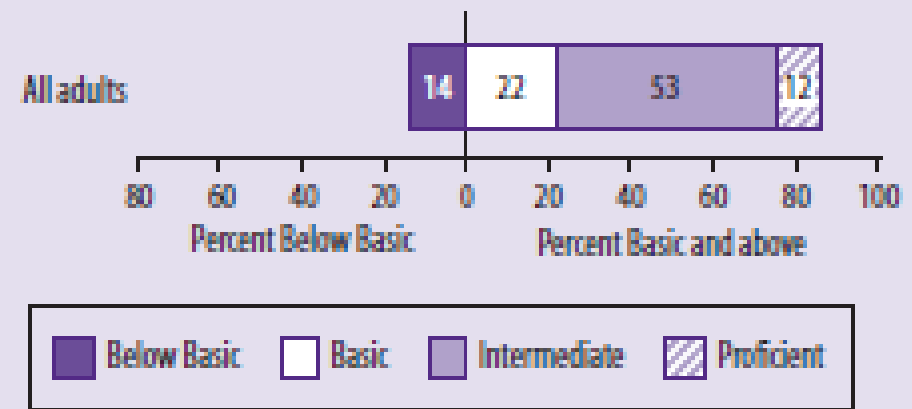
Health Literacy is dependent on both individual and systemic factors

1. Communication skills of lay people and professionals
2. Knowledge of lay people and professionals of health topics
3. Culture
4. Demands of the healthcare and public health systems
5. Demands of the situation/context

Background

- 36%, or approximately 1 in 3 American adults report basic or below basic health literacy

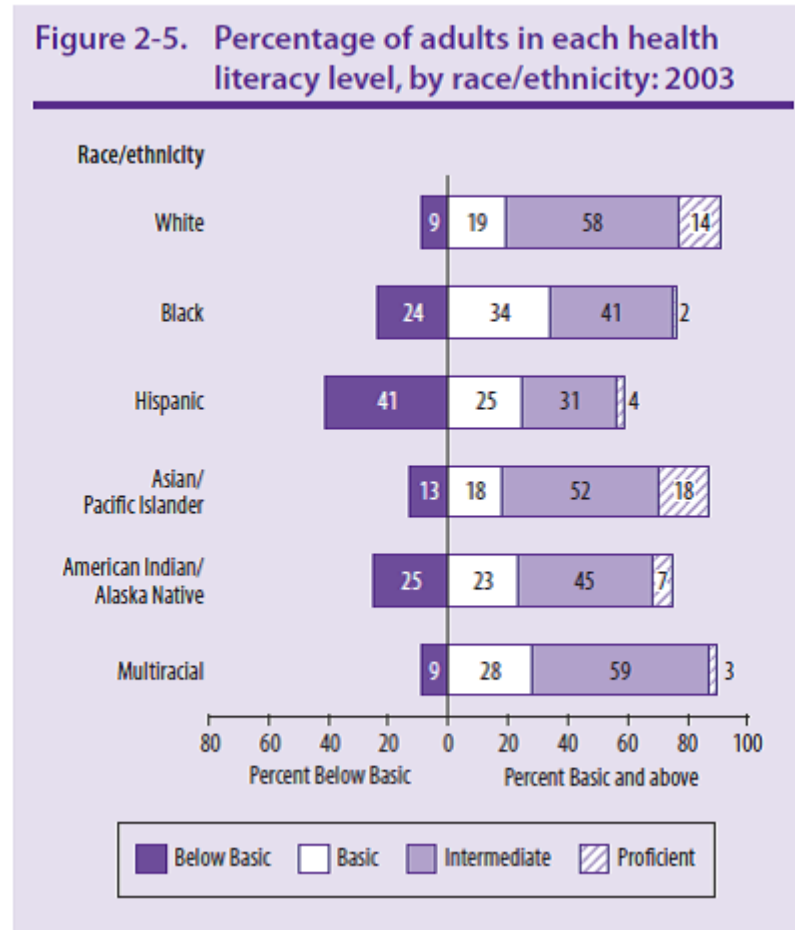
Figure 2-1. Percentage of adults in each health literacy level: 2003



Source: NAAL, 2003

Extent of Limited Health Literacy by Race/Ethnicity

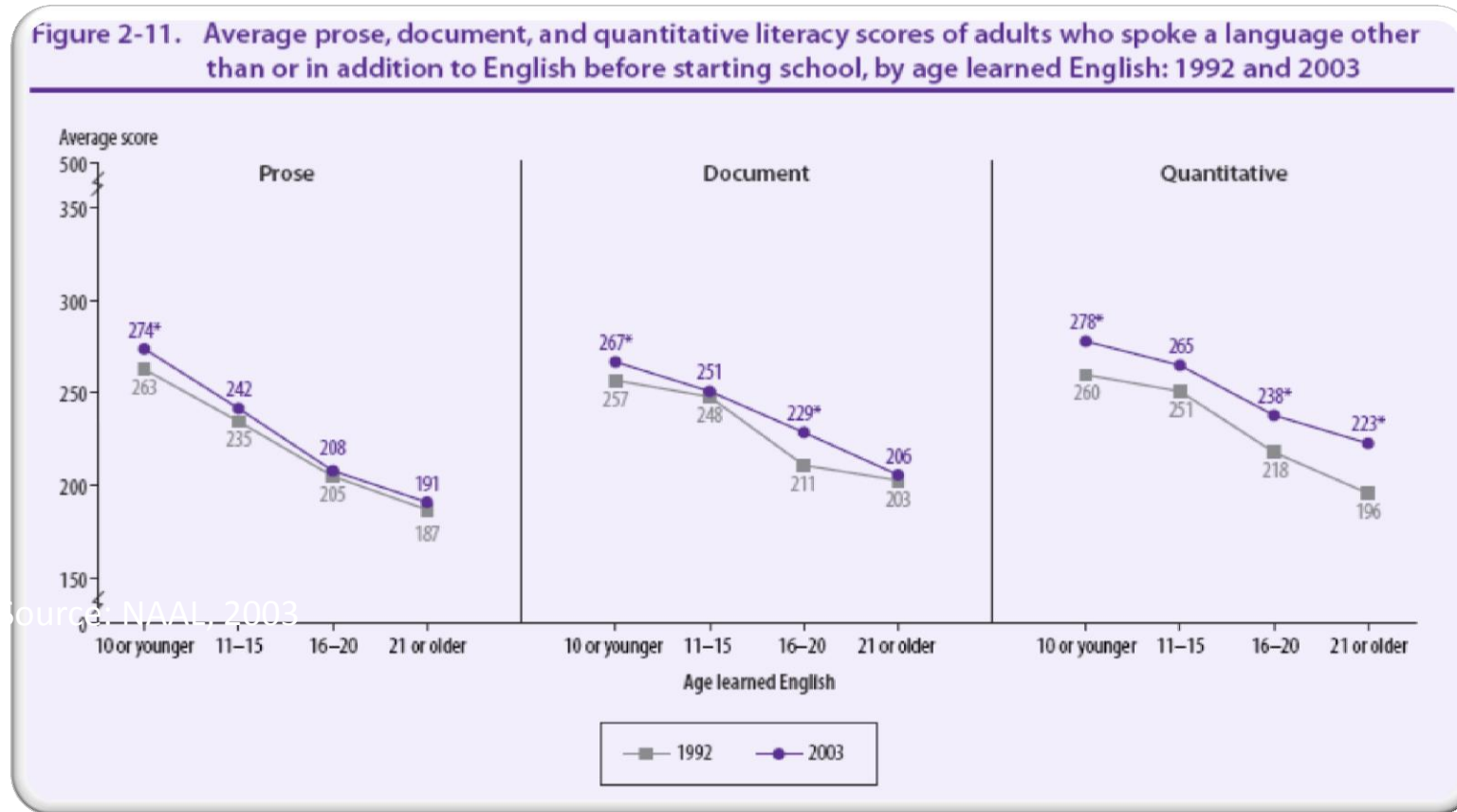
- Ethnic minorities have a higher percentage of **below basic** health literacy than Whites.
- Hispanics, American Indians/Alaskan Natives and Blacks most affected.



Source: NAAL, 2003

Health Literacy in ESL

- Adults who **learn English at a later age**, have lower literacy scores than those who learn English at an earlier age.



Role of Health literacy in ESL populations

- Health literacy is relevant to all aspects of **health promotion**
 - Information
 - Decision
 - Action
- Health literacy is relevant to all aspects of **quality of life**
 - Self-efficacy
 - Health outcomes
 - Productivity

Future concerns: Widening health disparity gaps?

- Linguistic isolation  Less research



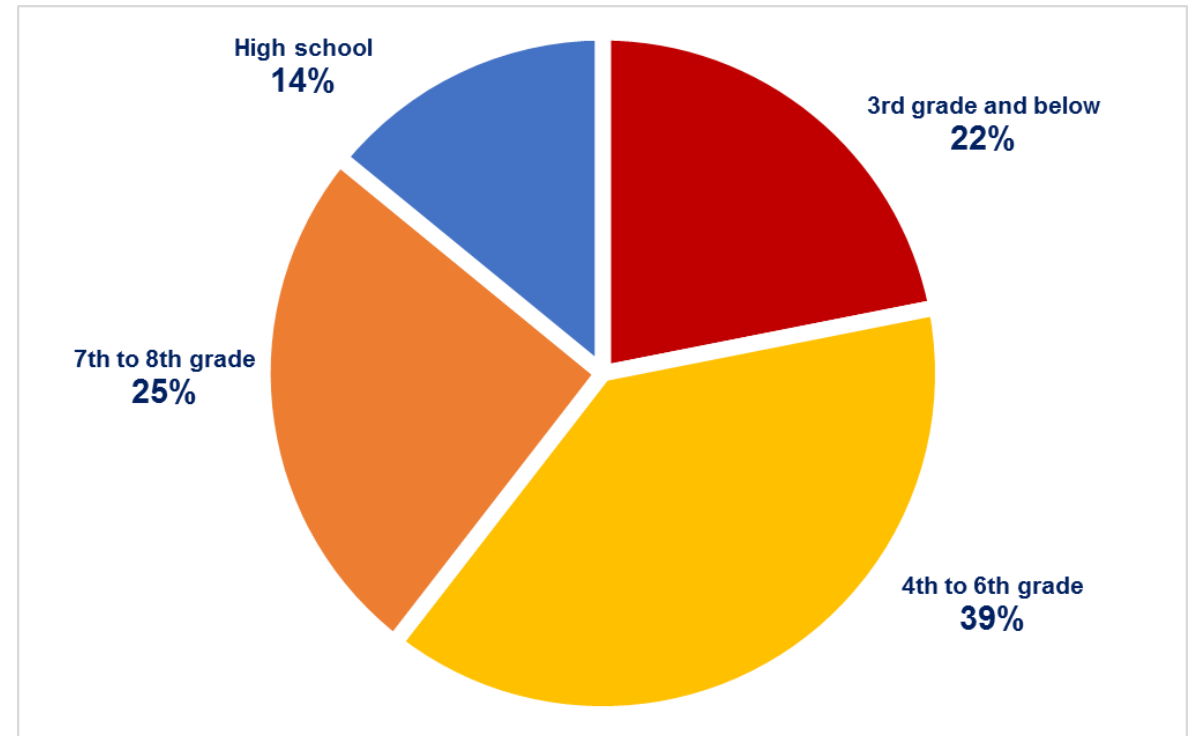
- Slower rate of translation/dissemination of any research findings
- Less access of Health Information and intervention technology

Diabetes Health Literacy Patient Survey

- Number of participants: N = 389
- 6 CommUnityCare sites: NC, RZ, SEHWC, PFL, MANOR and SOUTH
- Data collected: June 9, 2015 – August 7, 2015 (9 weeks)
- Survey items:
 - Personal information
 - Health literacy: Diabetes REALM and Newest Vital Sign (NVS)
 - Diabetes self-care activities
 - Diabetes knowledge test
 - Diabetes care confidence
 - Stress and depression
 - Patient experience
 - Healthcare access
 - eHealth confidence

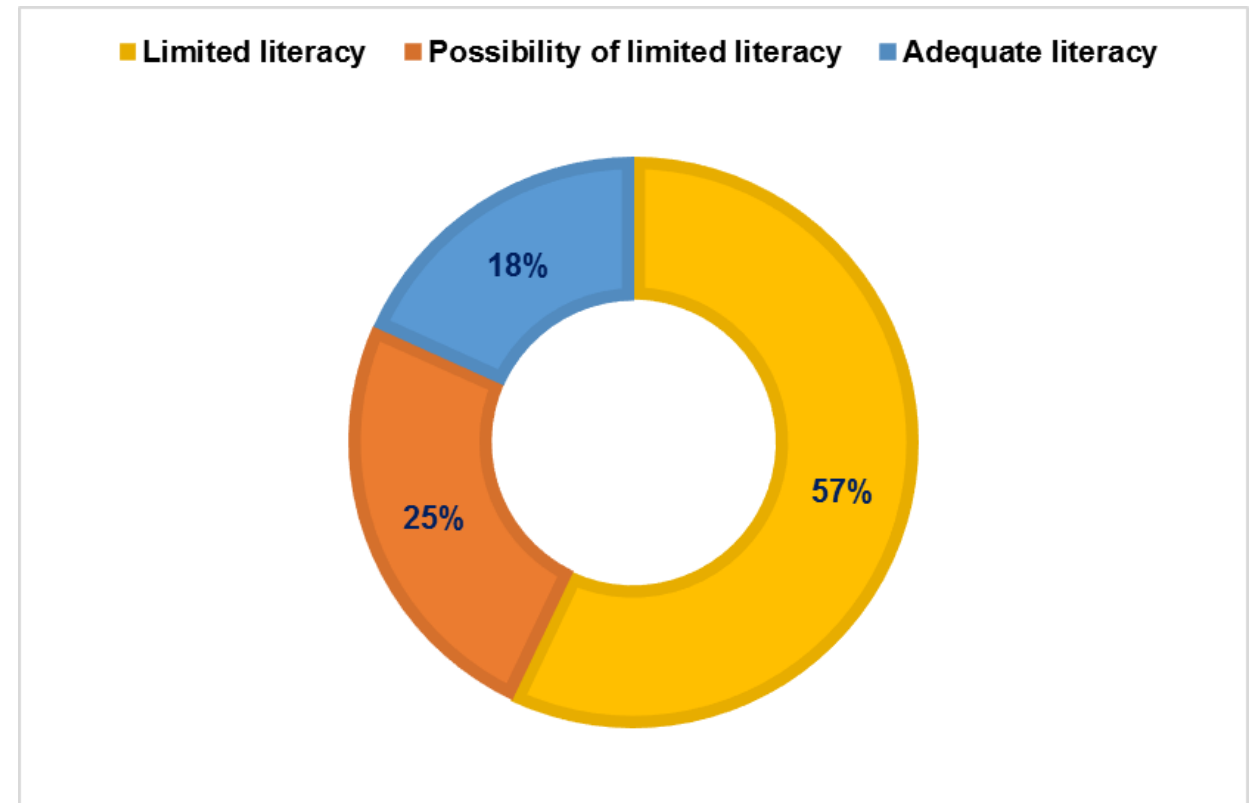
Level of Print health literacy: DM-REALM

- Total number of sample = 389
- **86%** of sample scored at an eighth grade level or below.
- Only **14%** of sample had high school level of health literacy.



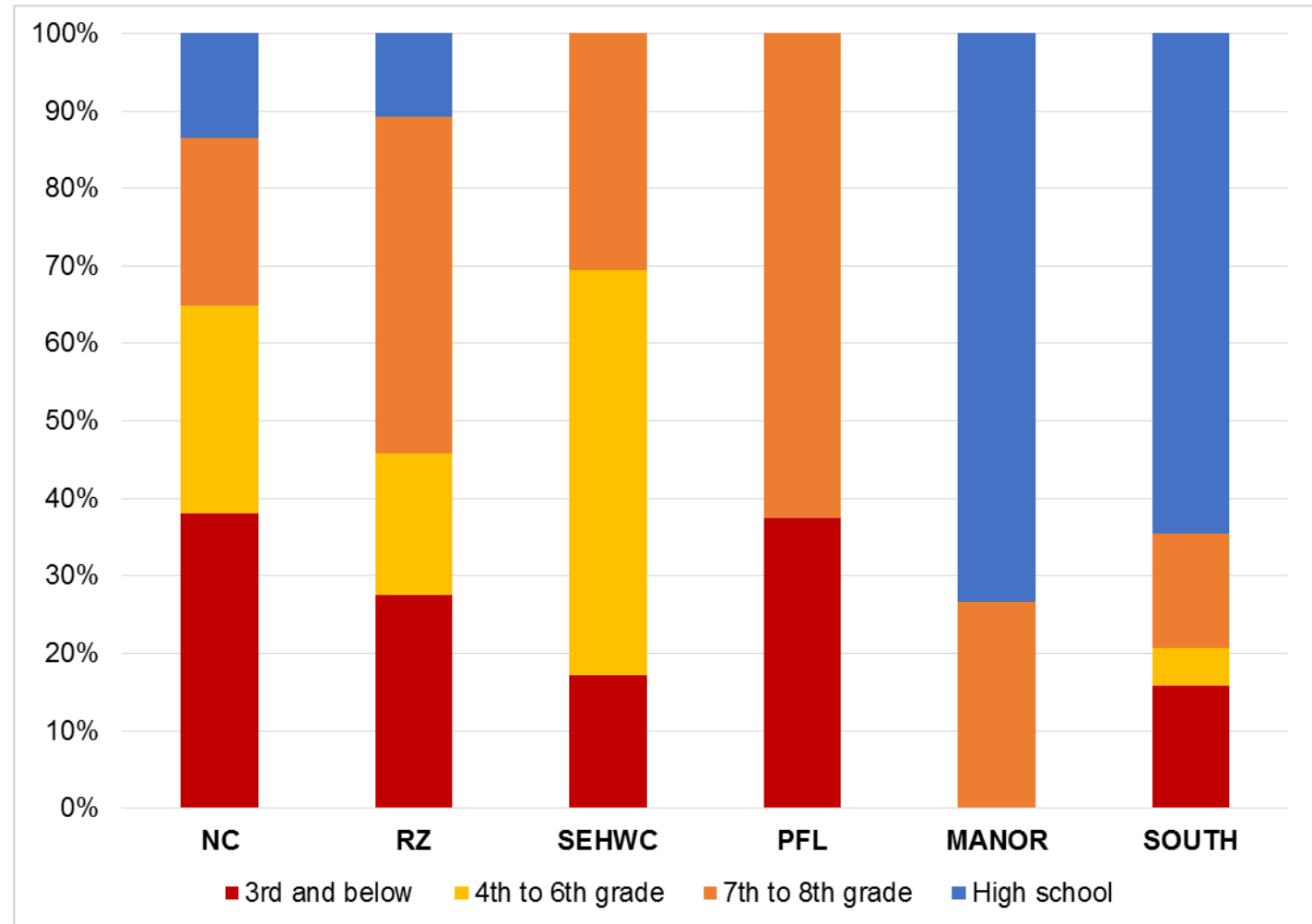
Level of functional health literacy: Newest Vital Signs (NVS)

- **82%** of participants exhibited either limited or possibility of limited health literacy.
- Only **18%** exhibited an adequate level of health literacy.



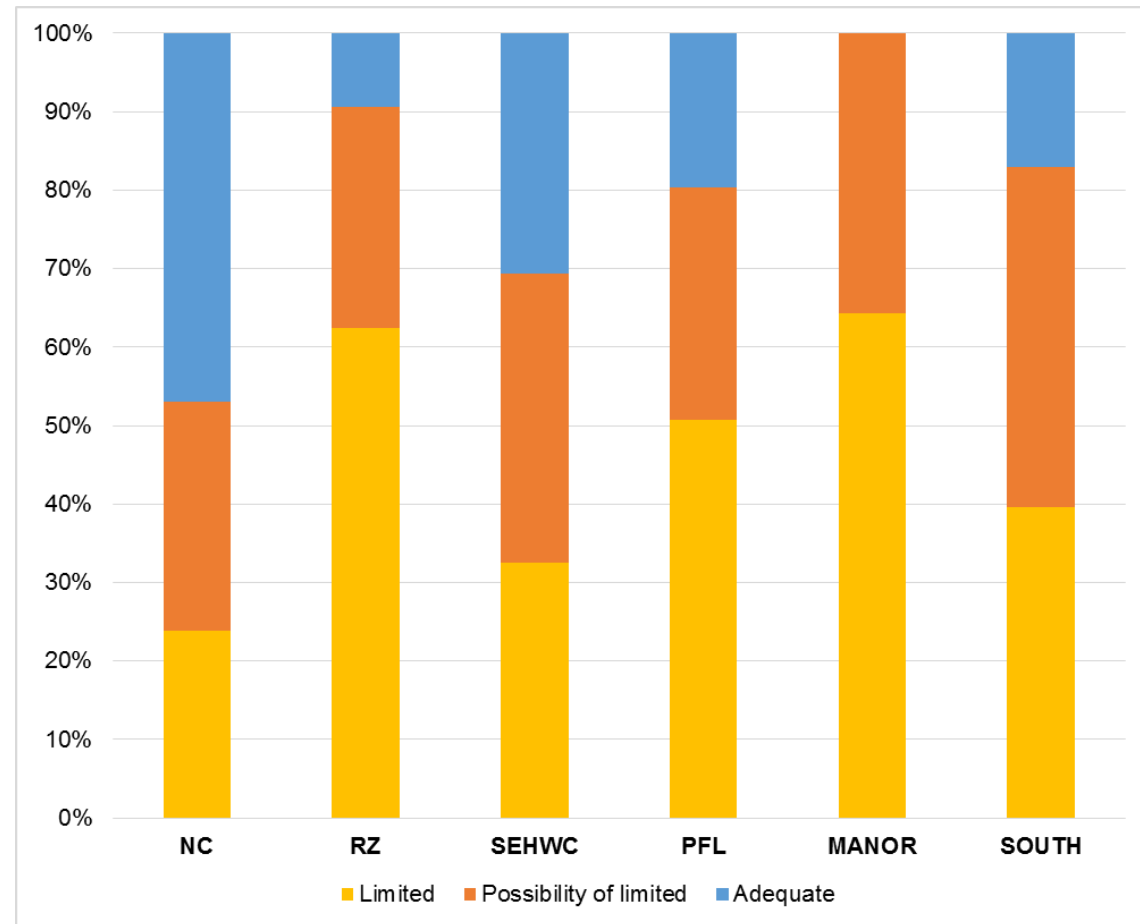
Level of health literacy by sites: DM-REALM

- There were significant differences of Oral health literacy based on DM-terminology among sites ($p < .001$).
- SEHWC and PFL showed **100%** of limited literacy (8th grade and below).

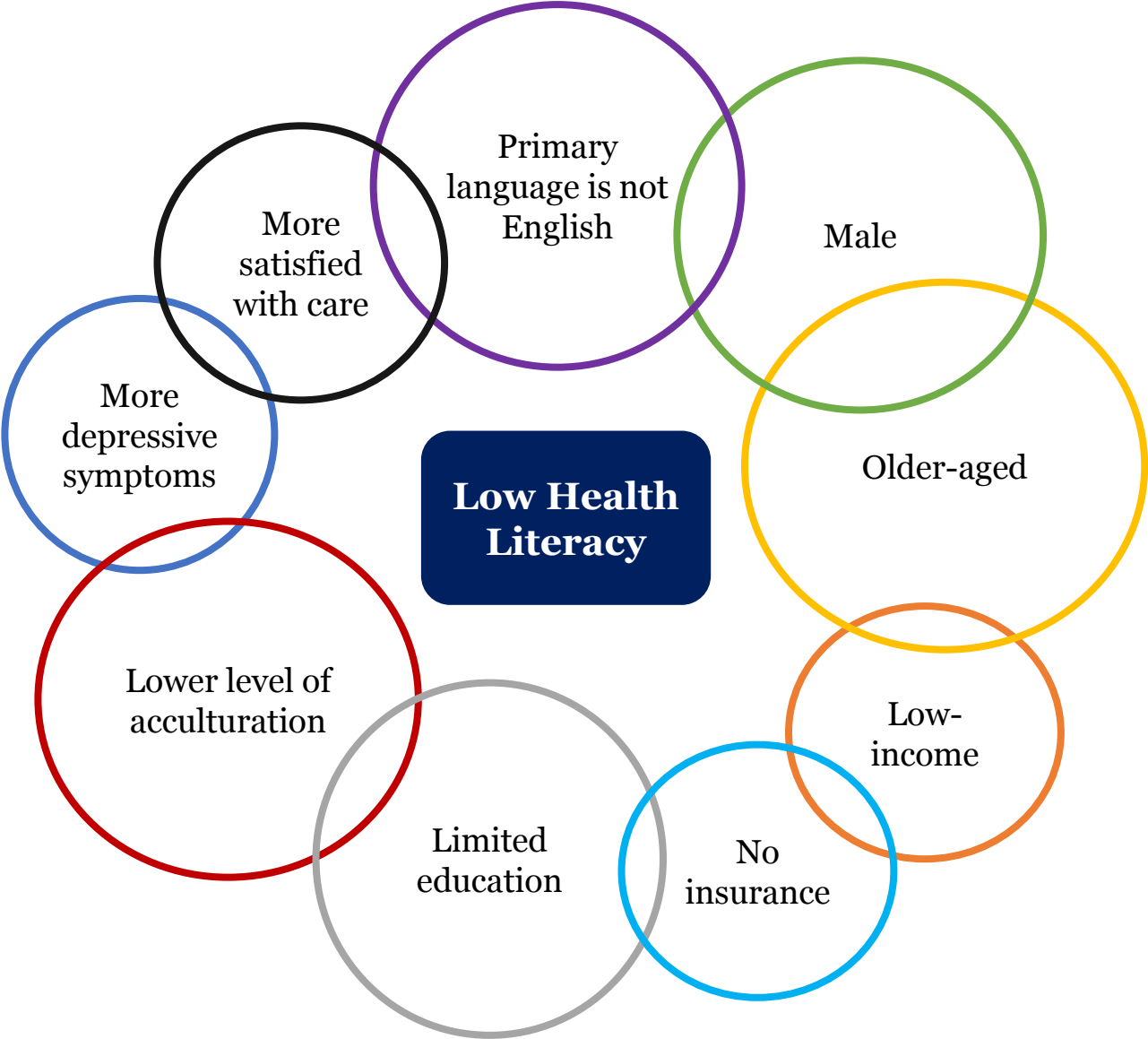


Level of health literacy by Sites: NVS

- There were significant differences of **health literacy based on numeracy** among sites ($p < .001$).
- Over **60%** of RZ and MANOR participants exhibited a limited level of health literacy .



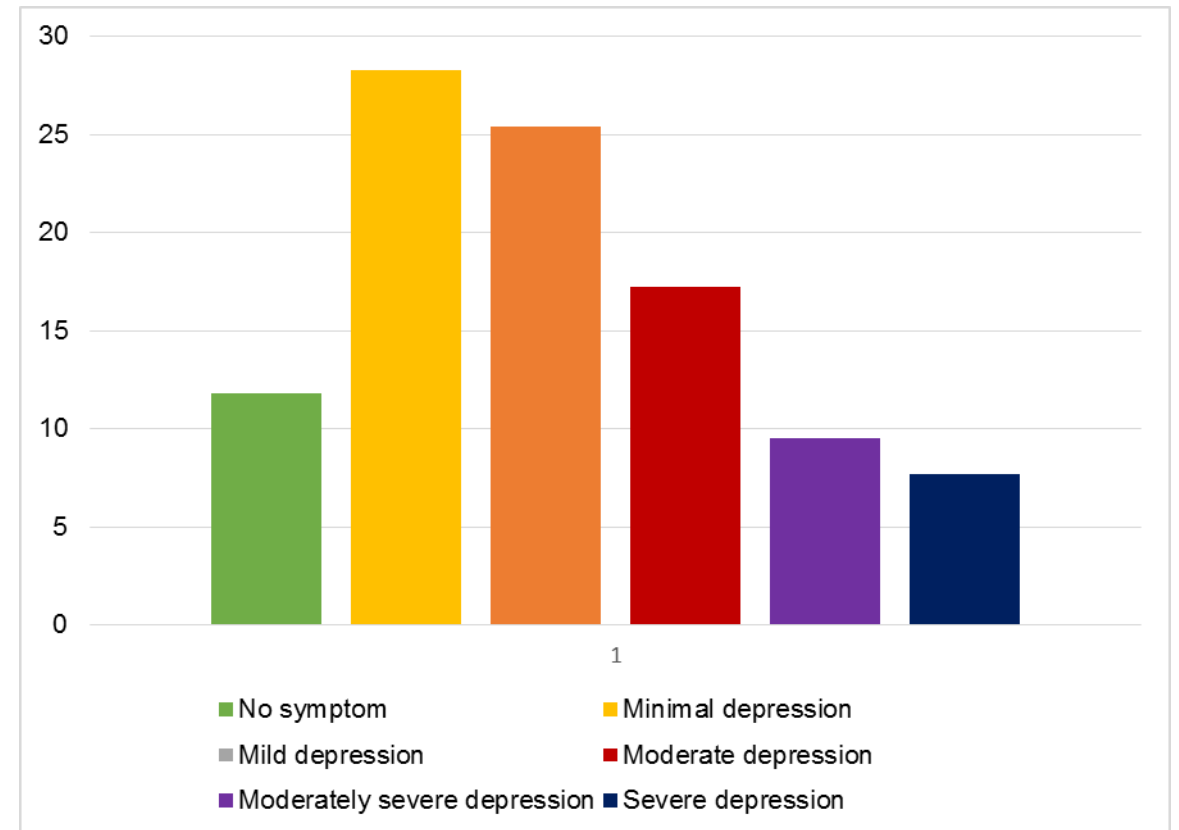
Who are the patients at highest risk of low health literacy in Travis County?



Other issues?

High incidence of depressive symptoms among patients

- 50% of patients have struggled with moderate or severe depression.
- Only 11.8% of patients expressed no symptoms of depression.



High depressive symptoms can...



- Diabetes self-care activities
- Diabetes confidence

AND THEN

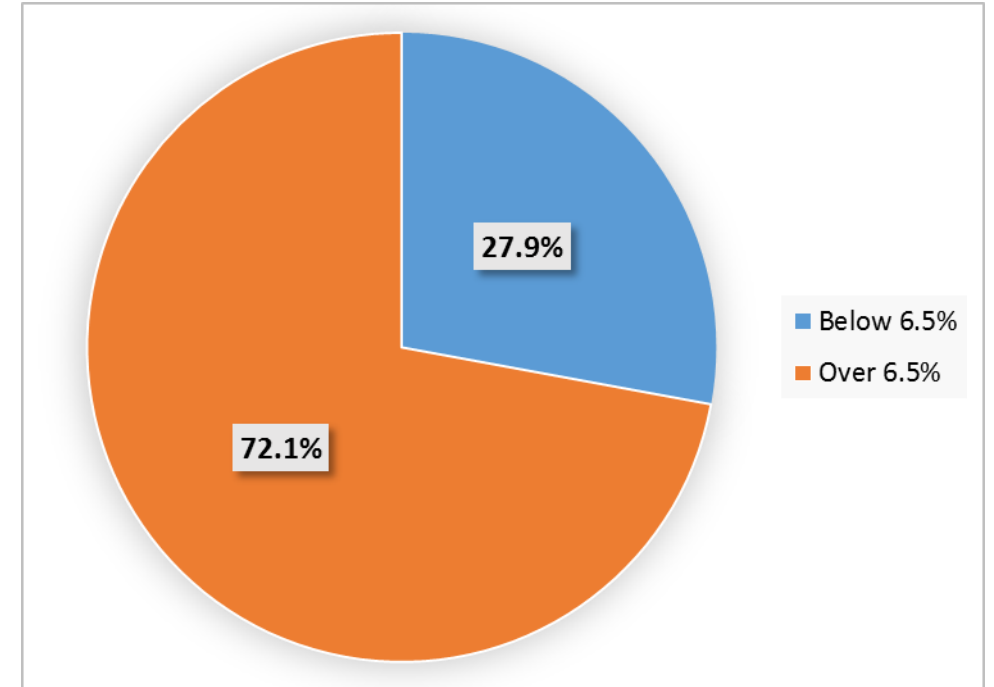


- HbA1c

Other issues?

High incidence of uncontrolled type 2 diabetes

- **72.1%** of patients have uncontrolled diabetes (HbA1c > 6.5 %).
- The average HbA1c level of all participants was **8.1%**.



Urgent Research Agenda for Immigrant Populations

- Valid literacy screening tools for ESL populations
- Effective and sensitive methods of health interventions for target groups
- Translation or dissemination research for ESL population including health technology assisted interventions