

Why Literacy Matters

In today's information-based society and economy, literacy is more important than ever. The Canadian data from the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) released in November 2005 provides startling facts about Canada's literacy situation. IALSS defines literacy as one's capacity to "use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential". Among the major findings from IALSS are the following:

- Among working age Canadians, 3 million (14.6%) struggle with very serious literacy challenges. They have difficulty with even the most basic written materials. Another 5.8 million (27%) can work with print information but not well.
- More than half of Canadians (55%) do not have the minimum numeracy skills necessary to meet the information demands of today's world.
- Over half of the Aboriginal peoples living in the Yukon, 69% living in the Northwest Territories, and 88% living in Nunavut score below level 3 on literacy tests. (This is in part a reflection of differing levels of formal education and use of a mother tongue other than English or French)
- The literacy skills of parents directly affect their family's income, health and overall quality of life.
- Canadians with lower levels of literacy are more likely to be unemployed and earn less.
- Canadians age 16-65 who report poor physical health have lower literacy skills than those who report better health.
- Higher literacy skills are associated with higher levels of involvement in various community groups and volunteer activities.
- Use of computers is lowest among those with low literacy – meaning that in addition to a digital divide, non-users may also face a literacy challenge.
- A CD Howe report released just last month shows that a 1% increase in literacy skills would boost productivity by 2.5% and lead to a 1.5% permanent increase in GDP – that's \$18 billion a year.

**Unless otherwise indicated, this information is taken from *Building on our Competencies: Canadian Results of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey released November 30, 2005*.

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Literacy Links

Literacy BC: the provincial organization that promotes and supports literacy and learning in BC
www.literacy.bc.ca

BC Ministry of Advanced Education: the provincial government department that provides overall funding and program coordination for British Columbia's public post-secondary education and training system www.gov.bc.ca/aved

Ministry of Education: the provincial government department that oversees the kindergarten to Grade 12 education system and is responsible for early learning, literacy and libraries.
www.bced.gov.bc.ca/

Achieve BC: This site brings together the latest educational tools and information for promoting learning and achievement in early childhood, grade school, post-secondary education, and the world of work. www.achievebc.ca

Literacy Now: is part of Legacies Now, whose mandate is to create sustainable legacies as a result of hosting the 2010 Games. The goals of Literacy Now are to: increase the access to and equity of literacy initiatives throughout the province; sustain literacy initiatives leading to greater success for members of the community and to build community capacity; and increase literacy levels across the lifespan.
<http://www.2010legaciesnow.com/Content/LiteracyNow/LiteracyNow%20Home.asp?langid=1>

The National Literacy Secretariat: the federal government funding and policy body for literacy, housed in Human Resources Skills Development Canada
www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/gateways/nav/top_nav/program/nls.shtml

National Adult Literacy Database (NALD): a comprehensive database of adult literacy programs, resources, services and activities across Canada. It also links with other services and databases in North America and overseas www.nald.ca

Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL): a national non-profit organization that acts as a national voice for literacy through networking, research, government liaison, learner development, communication, collaboration and building the capacity to support the people and organizations involved with literacy education www.literacy.ca

ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation: a national charity that promotes literacy to the general public and the private sector www.abc-canada.org