Adult Literacy and Basic Education

THE FACTS

MORE THAN

30 Million

adults in the United States cannot read, write, or do basic math above a third grade level.

Read on to understand how low adult literacy is affecting every facet of our life, and how much we can change by working to address this issue to ensure literacy is for everyone.
The Need

8.1 million adults dropped out of school before eighth grade.
That’s more than 2x the number of births every year in the United States.

1.5 million people with the lowest levels of literacy are incarcerated.
That’s the equivalent of the entire population of the city of Philadelphia.

Since 1983, more than 10 million Americans reached the 12th grade without having learned to read at a basic level.
That’s the total population of LA, SC combined.

Public funding for adult education and English language instruction has declined by 17% from 2002 to 2012 when adjusted for inflation.

$160 million would provide approximately $1,000 in funds to serve each of the reported 160,000 people in the United States who are on waiting lists for adult education.

Funding

Adult Education Public Funding Sources

- Federal: 44%
- State: 45%
- Local: 10%
- Tuition: 1%

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A 1 percent increase in average literacy rates yields a 1.5 percent permanent increase in the GDP. That’s approximately an additional $2.31 BILLION increase to the GDP of the United States.

States that raise high school graduation rates experience significant declines in incarceration rates. A one percent increase in the high school completion rate of all men ages 20 to 60 would save the U.S. as much as $1.4 billion per year in reduced costs from crime.

That’s the same amount of money Americans spend on teeth whitening products each year.

Single mothers with a high school degree are 24% less likely to be on welfare than those who are high school dropouts.

Improved education results in potential savings in public assistance costs—welfare, food stamps, and public housing—of between $7.9 and $10.8 billion.

Parents with a high school diploma or GED are 11% more likely to assist their children with homework.

Children of parents who had not completed high school scored lower in vocabulary assessments than children of parents with a high school degree or equivalent.

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One source estimates the annual cost of low health literacy in the U.S. at between $106 billion and $238 billion. That’s roughly the same amount American corporations spend on advertising in one year.

Each high school dropout costs the United States economy about $260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity over his or her lifetime.

If half of the dropouts from the class of 2008 had graduated, the additional spending and investments would have created 30,000 NEW JOBS.

Adults with low health literacy go to the emergency room more often than adults with higher health literacy skills.

They are also less likely to get flu shots, more likely to delay or forgo mammograms, and are more likely to suffer from heart failure.

Among people with low levels of financial literacy, 29% of men and 32% of women are likely to engage in problematic credit card behavior.

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ABOUT PROLITERACY

ProLiteracy is the largest adult literacy and basic education membership organization in the nation. It works with adult new readers and learners and with local and national organizations to help adults gain the reading, writing, math, computer, and English skills they need to be successful. ProLiteracy advocates on behalf of adult learners and the programs that serve them, provides training and professional development, and publishes materials used in adult literacy and basic education instruction. ProLiteracy has 1,000 member programs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia and works with 50 nongovernmental organizations in 34 developing countries. For more information, visit ProLiteracy.org.