

LITERACY LANDSCAPE: CANADA'S CHALLENGE

Proficiency in literacy is measured on a scale ranging from zero (0) to five (5), with zero indicating very poor skills and five reflecting an ability to deal with complex, lengthy text.

Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) 2012:

- Compared to OECD countries, Canada has more people with **highest and lowest literacy** scores – almost **1 in 5 Canadians (17%) performed at Level 1 or below**
- Canadians are **below OECD average** on **numeracy** scores – almost 1 in 4 (23%) perform at Level 1 or below
- **1 in 2 Canadians (49%)** scored **below high-school equivalency – Level 3** - widely considered the minimum level required for the 21st century workplace
- More than **60% of immigrants** - new or established — scored **below Level 3**
- About **40% of early school leavers** and **25% of immigrants and Aboriginal people** performed at the lowest proficiency level (**Level 1 or below**)

TD Economics "Literacy Matters" 2007-2015

- **40% of Youth** (aged 16-24) underperform in literacy
- **60% of Aboriginal people** — our youngest and fastest growing demographic — **lack the literacy skills** needed for the labour market
- **Costs to individuals:** drastically reduced education and employment opportunities, more frequent interaction with the justice system, poorer health outcomes
- **Costs to society:** billions of dollars in lost productivity, investment and economic opportunity; a more segmented and isolated society; and a weaker engagement in civic participation and democracy.
- **Raising literacy scores** to adequate could create a payoff of **\$80-\$100 billion** for the Canadian economy.

"Higher literacy can boost the economic and financial success of individuals and the economy as a whole. It can reduce poverty, improve health, lift community engagement and lead to a higher standard of living. **In fact, it is hard to identify any other single issue that can have such a large payoff to individuals, the economy and society.**" – TD Economics

LITERACY AND ITS LINKS

Literacy and the **Justice System**

- According to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, “Neighbourhoods with lower literacy rates have higher crime rates. And people who commit crimes are more likely to have lower levels of literacy. So are victims of crime.”
- Every dollar allocated to vocational and basic education programs for offenders yields a 200-300% return on investment (Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2012).

Literacy and **Health**

- People with lower levels of literacy are generally 1.5 to 3 times more likely to have an adverse health outcome as people with higher levels of literacy.
- People with higher levels of literacy are more likely to participate in disease screening and prevention practices, and are less likely to be hospitalized (DeWalt et al., 2004).

Literacy and **Poverty**

- Literacy is a protective factor that can insulate or mitigate the negative effects of poverty.
- “[Engaged reading] is the best predictor of who goes to university, regardless of socio-economic background and parental education. It is the best predictor of life income, career options, even life partner choices.” (Jerry Diakiw, March 2014.)

Literacy and the **Economy**

- “Raising every Canadian adult to Level 3 would reduce Social Assistance rolls by 84,000 and generate annual benefits savings of \$542M” (Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2012)
- “Differences in average adult literacy levels...[explain] as much as 55% of the differences in the long-term growth rate of GDP per capita and productivity growth at the national and international level.” (Coulombe, Tremblay, & Marchand, 2004 & 2006).
- Adults with higher literacy skills are less likely to be dependent on social assistance and more likely to pay higher taxes, support local businesses, volunteer in their communities and participate more actively in the democratic process.

The harmful costs of low literacy are hidden in plain sight.

Investing in Canadians’ literacy and learning skills – especially those living in poverty – is a high impact investment for individuals, families, communities and the country as a whole.