Our Local Communication Support in MD

- **Diabetes prevention & management programs**
  - Multiple locations

- **COVID-19 testing, vaccinations, community experiences**
  - Baltimore City & Frederick, MD for testing & vaccinations
  - Multiple locations for community experiences

- **Local coalition-building**
  - Community engagement
  - Plain language
  - Language access
  - Message & materials distribution

- **Primary care & oral health providers' communication with patients**

- **CHWs' communication with communities & clients**

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Observation:
Local communication & community activities are not fully resourced

Public Health Glasses

Orgs are responsible for their public communication

- **Personal health literacy: degree to which individuals**
  - Find
  - Understand
  - Use
  - Decide for self and others

- **Organizational health literacy: degree to which organizations enable individuals**
  - Find
  - Understand
  - Use
  - Decide for self and others

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#1 Federal, State info cascades to local

- **Materials too general, specific, technical, or confusing**
  - Example: Images in materials may not match local populations & settings
  - Example: Websites & fact sheets heavy with data, jargon & local health departments don't have staff, time to rewrite in plain language

- **National or state data not relevant to local context, no local data to supplement**
  - County level population data about exposure, risk, status, services not easily available
    - Example: HPV and flu vaccination rates at county level
  - Communication data: difficult to get local communication source & channel info

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What do adult literacy & numeracy skills look like?

https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap/

#2 What's the risk?

State & local public health translate risk

Data-based questions

- Who's at risk?
- Where are risks most and least severe?
- How close is the risk?
- How can people protect themselves?
- Is the remedy safe and effective?

Perception-based questions

- How serious is the risk?
- How susceptible am I?
- How worried should I be?
- Can I protect myself or avoid the risk?
- Is the remedy safe & effective?

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#3: Protocols & channels <u>before</u> events

People understood that things were changing, but what they wanted was transparency. If you don't tell them why things are changing, they lose trust."

We'd get federal reports, but we were still waiting for guidance from the state. By the time we communicated with people, the rules had changed again.

Filling the gap: Single topic, on demand e-newsletter

Plain language resource developed in response to local health department staff need to keep up with rapidly changing guidelines & breaking news

HB1082 Law: Consumer Info Hub (2022)

Recognizes health literacy as public health infrastructure

Strategies and requirements
- Plain language
- Language access
- Training
- Guidelines
- Information distribution

2024: Governor's Executive Order for Plain Language

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Need federal, state commitment to health literacy best practices

- Always use plain language/plain numeracy
- Be simple, yet complete
- Work from a communication goal, main message, & call to action
- Explain what we know & how we know it
- Explain what we don't know & are doing to find out

Locals can add knowledge, attitudinal, & behavioral facts about the intended audience/public

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Takeaways

- Local communication & community engagement must be fully resourced to meet policy & program objectives

- Local public health needs plain language information to contextualize risks for their populations & contexts

- Federal, state, local agencies all need population data to inform communication strategies & implementation

Questions

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