

# Assessment of Oral Health Literacy: One Approach

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SCHOOL OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH

**Health Literacy is inextricably linked to  
improving oral health... especially among  
low income groups**

# Health Literacy is:

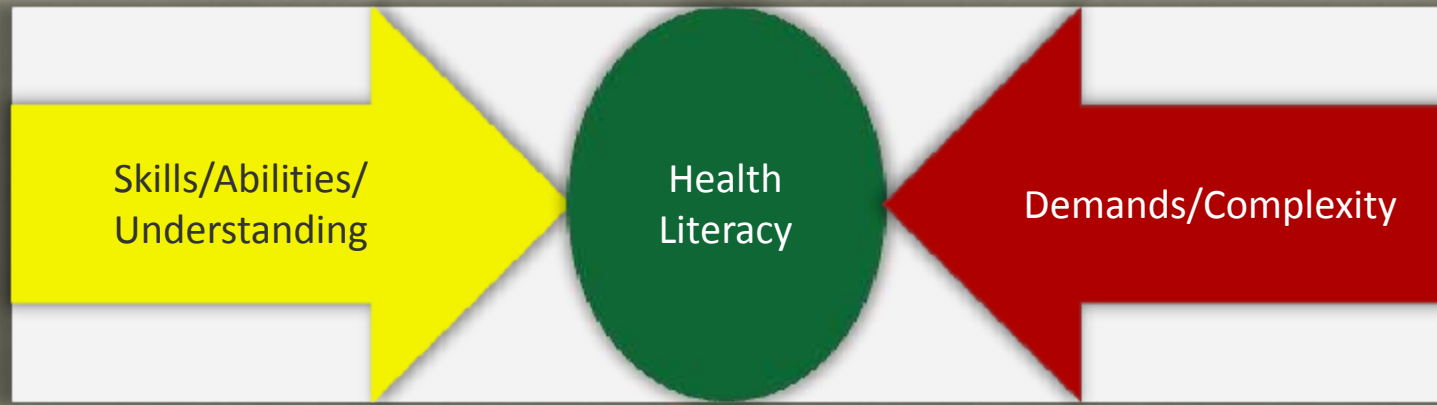
**the interaction between skills of individuals  
and demands of the healthcare system(s)**

IOM Report 2004



# Our Challenge is to:

- Address the mismatch between demands of the healthcare system and the skills of those using and working in the healthcare system(s).



# Users (Patients) Need to:

- **Know how to locate and navigate a health facility**
- **Read, understand, and complete many kinds of forms to receive treatment and payment reimbursement**
- **Articulate their signs and symptoms**
- **Listen to providers**

# Users Need to: (cont.)

- Know about various types of health professionals and what services they provide and how to access those services
- Trust us
- Know how and when to ask questions or ask for clarification when they do not understand
- *Understand* their options in all procedures

# Most Importantly

- **Users need to understand that oral health is part of total health and we can keep our mouths healthy**

**In Maryland we are focusing on caries prevention because that is our priority. But, this model would work for any content area.**

# We opted to conduct

- A state-wide oral health literacy needs assessment
- We had used this process previously in another content area



# Conducting an Assessment to Meet this Challenge

- Establish local or state needs
- Determine what the public knows and does regarding caries prevention & early detection
- Determine public's perceptions of providers communication skills
- Determine what other publics (Head Start, WIC) know and do regarding caries prevention & early detection.

# Conducting an Assessment to Meet this Challenge (cont.)

- **Determine what health providers know and practice regarding caries prevention & early detection**
- **Determine communication techniques used by healthcare providers**
- **Conduct environmental scans of dental facilities**

# Surveys

- **Mail surveys of dentists, dental hygienists, physicians and nurse practitioners**
- **Mail surveys of WIC and Head Start personnel**
- **Phone survey of adults 18 years of age and older with child 6 years of age and younger in home**

# Focus Groups:

- **Focus groups or 1:1 interviews with dentists, dental hygienists, physicians and nurse practitioners**
- **Focus groups with low income adults (4 English; 2 Spanish)**
- **Focus groups with Head Start and WIC personnel**

# Results: General Public

- **Does not understand how to prevent dental caries**
- **Does not know what fluoride is or what it does**
- **Does not know what sealants are or what they are used for**
- **Neither adults nor children drink tap water, especially low income**

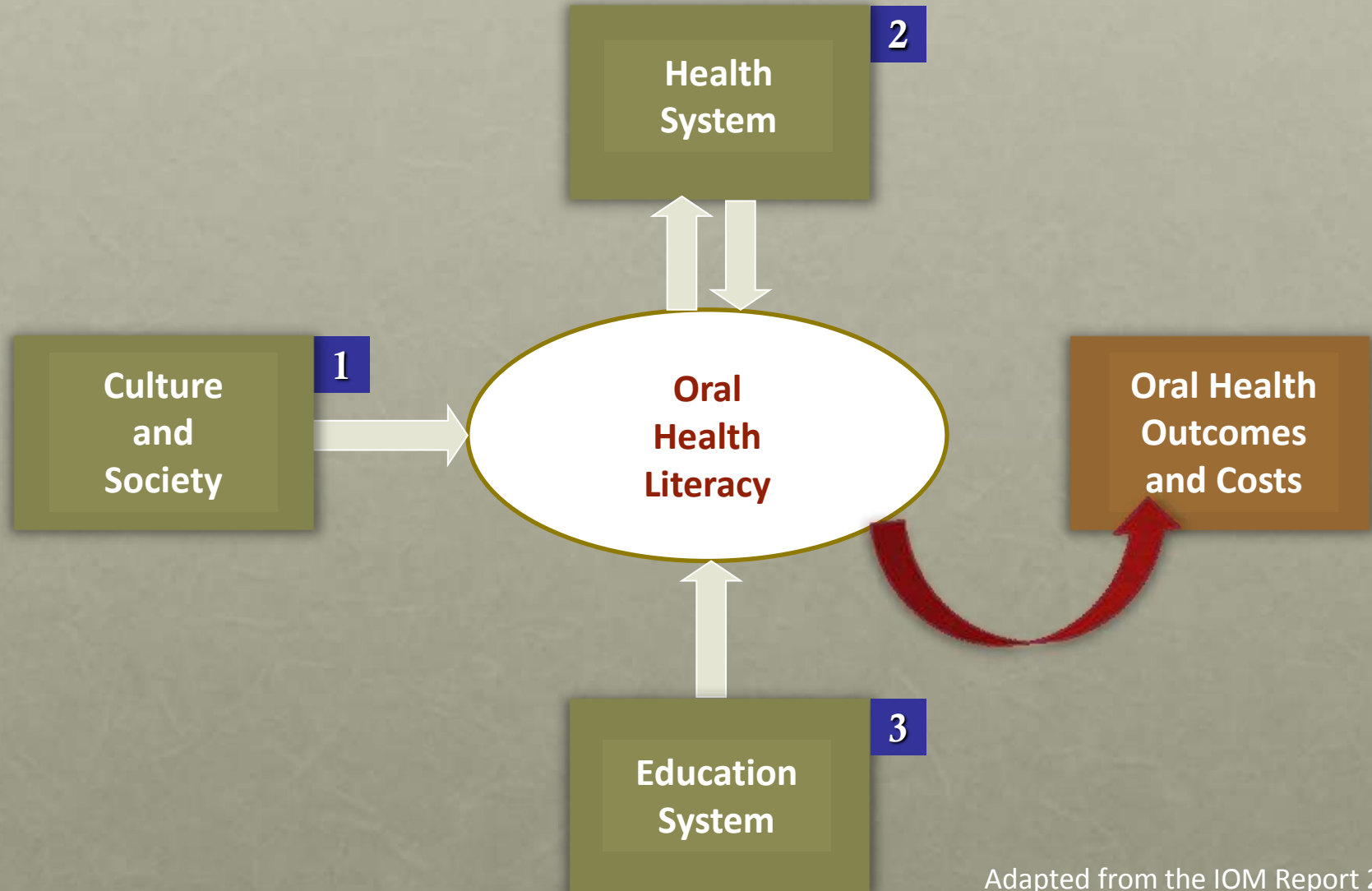
# Results: Health Providers

- **Many, including dentists and dental hygienists do not have a good understanding about how to prevent tooth decay.**
- **Many/most do not provide dental sealants**
- **Most health care providers do not use recommended communication techniques**

# Based on the Surveys & Focus Groups

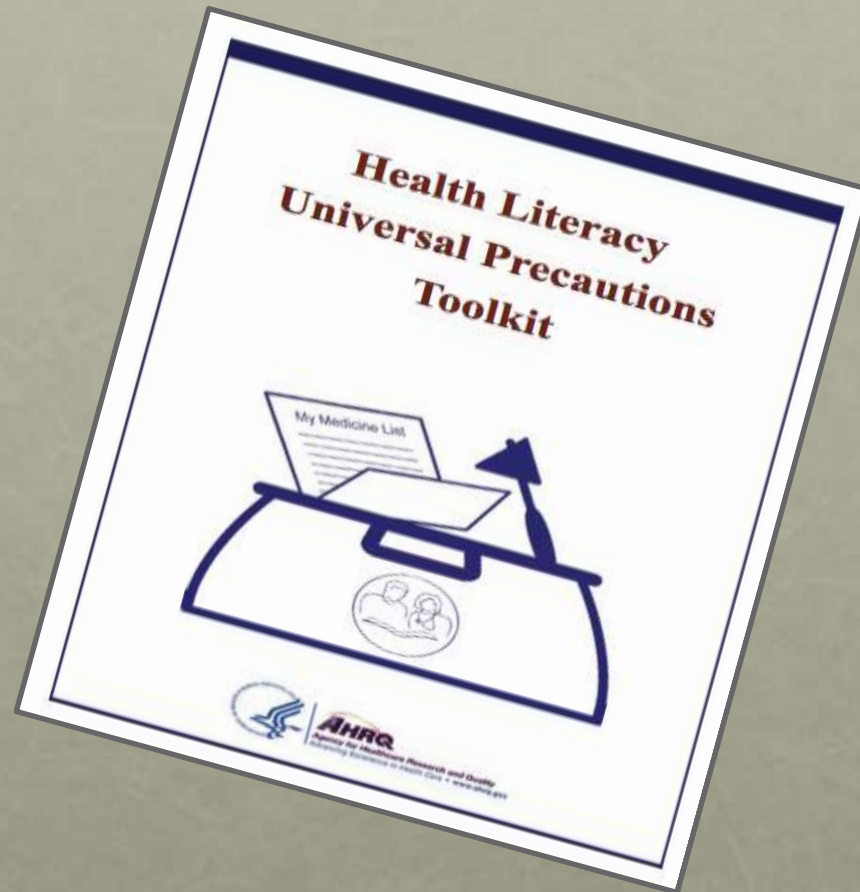
- **We have a good understanding about what interventions are needed for the next steps and these focus groups and surveys prepared us for conducting environmental scans in community-based dental clinics.**

# Oral Health Literacy Framework





# One Approach is to Use AHRQ's Toolkit



# Health Literacy Environmental Scans

- **The purpose of conducting environmental scans is:**
- **to determine the user friendliness of a facility.**
- **to determine if they are patient centered.**

**We have conducted these scans in FQHC's and county health departments in Maryland and are preparing the findings.**

# Environmental Scans Consist of:

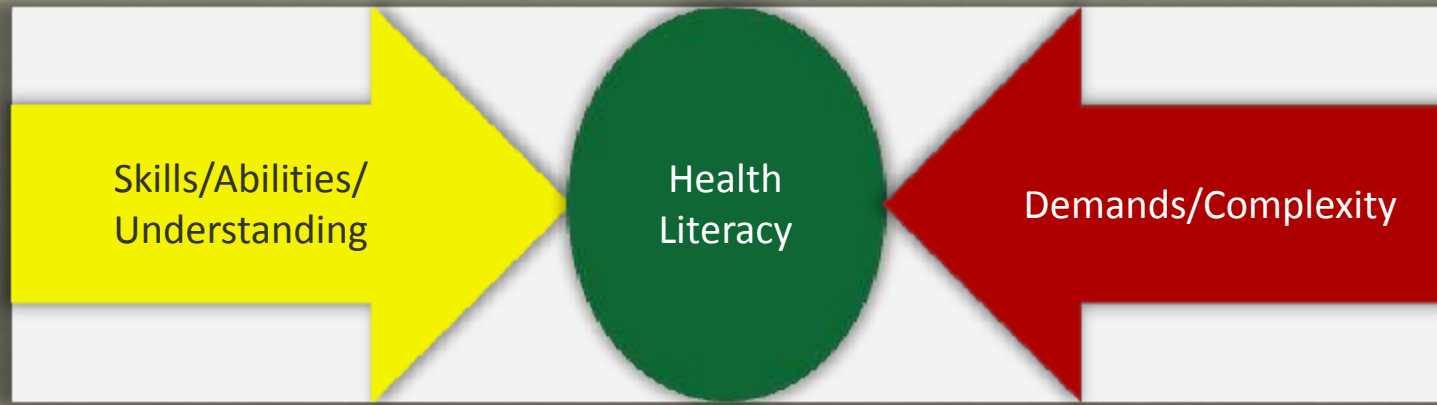
- Phone interview with clinic director: demographics
- Review of website and phone system
- On site reviews of signage and posters
- Collect consent forms and educational materials for analysis
- Personal interviews with patients
- Survey of DDS & DH's regarding use of communication techniques

# Challenges

- Recognizing differences among partners
- Standardizing health messages for consistency
- Persistence
- Gathering data for baseline AND using the data
- Enough personnel, and of course, funding
- Persistence

# Recall Our Challenge is to:

- Address the mismatch between demands of the healthcare system and the skills of those using and working in the healthcare system(s).



# How can You use what we have Learned?

- Survey instruments
- Focus Group Guides
- Environmental scans
- Don't assume everyone is on the same page

# Armed with these data:

- **Develop, implement, evaluate and revise interventions for specific target groups**
- **Educate policy makers about how to prevent dental caries.**
- **Implement policies that foster the improvement of oral health literacy.**

# The Bottom Line.....

**Health Literacy is inextricably linked to improving oral health... especially among low income groups**

**Each of us has a role, opportunity and responsibility to improve oral health literacy.**

**Thank you!**