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----News Release ----

Dr. Google: Finding Safe and Reliable Health Information Online

With a smile on her wizened face, she laughed and said, “You’re never too old. At 91 years old I’m still learning and try my best.” She was an interested library patron attending a *Health Online: Finding Information You Can Trust* workshop. This Wisconsin Health Literacy (WHL) educational workshop helped users navigate the web, find reliable health information online, and make the most of their online resources. With technology literally in the palm of our hands, patients, healthcare professionals, and consumers searching health information rely more and more on online searches.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, health care services, not just health information, moved online. Accessing **credible** health information is an increasing concern. The PEW Research Center earlier in the pandemic reported 7 out of 10 United States adults looked up information online about COVID-19. When we look at overall health information, nearly 59% of United States adults looked up health information online, according to the 2013 Health Online PEW study. Since that time the use of technology has increased dramatically.

Even people with strong literacy skills can experience low health literacy, especially using the internet. Low health literacy does not discriminate. It can affect anyone. Studies show that 9 out of every 10 Americans struggle with health literacy issues at least some of the time. Health literacy is an individual’s ability to obtain, process, and understand basic information and services about their health. WHL, a division of Wisconsin Literacy, Inc., raises awareness of the importance of health literacy and fosters better communication between health care consumers and health care providers.

As technology continues to advance and include telehealth visits and electronic health records and patient portals, navigating health information online is a **necessary** skill. WHL developed a curriculum to help everyone find reliable health information online. *Health Online: Finding Information You Can Trust* reached targeted older adults and other populations more likely to have lower levels of health literacy and addressed the digital divide in accessing and using online resources for health information.

At the Cobb Public Library, one collaborator said, “All participants were amazed at what they thought they knew, but really didn’t. They learned: how to use safe websites – using complete

thoughts, not just one word, to find information – to realize the first site listed is not always the best. I'm confident everyone left with greater confidence in their ability to find safe sites protecting their health and the health of their family.”

WHL collaborated with many community partners statewide that had low-resources and served high-risk populations. One of the biggest concerns was the use of technology for future programming. Thanks to funding and project support from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine – Greater Midwest Region, WHL provided technology for workshops and offered a larger reach where internet access is limited in many rural Wisconsin communities. Currently, the program offers free community-based workshops and train-the-trainer programming for professionals. This WHL program takes place both virtually and in-person, based on organizational needs and following COVID-19 safety measures.

Impressed with this project, the National Institute of Health's (NIH) *All of Us* program is expanding this program nationally. They will create online learning resources for library professionals throughout the United States to be educated and trained on facilitating the *Health Online: Finding Information You Can Trust* workshop.

There is still a lot of pressing work to help people navigate health information during these challenging times. If you'd like to work together to bring educational health online workshops to your community, contact Caitlyn Mowatt, Project Manager at caitlyn@wisconsinliteracy.org.

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Wisconsin Health Literacy, a division of Wisconsin Literacy, Inc., raises awareness of the importance of health literacy and fosters better communication between health care consumers and health care providers. For more information: www.wisconsinhealthliteracy.org or contact [Stan Hudson](#) at (608) 257-1655 ext. 2.