

Why it's important

Education is important to all of us for many reasons, and it directly impacts on how healthy we are. Overall, people who are better educated are healthier than those with lower education levels.

Lack of education in itself does not lead to ill health. However, in combination with other social determinants, it contributes to poorer health and wellbeing.

Education can affect health in a number of ways:

- Education is strongly linked with the other social determinants of health such as income and employment
- Higher levels of education can provide people with more resources which, in turn, can enhance their health outcomes. Education can be a powerful enabler in moving people out of poverty
- Education is associated with earning power as well as job satisfaction and control, which in turn can impact on mental and physical health
- Education provides opportunities to increase knowledge, develop understanding and enhance skills, empowering people to influence the factors that shape their health.

Health literacy is related to education and is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.

People with low health literacy are less likely to seek health care, be able to appropriately manage their own chronic health conditions and practice healthy behaviours than those with higher literacy levels, and they have higher rates of hospitalisation and stress.



"I'm not a very quick learner, it takes a while for me to get new things. And I just started playing up a bit. My primary school teacher sent a note saying I needed help with Maths and English, but I didn't get any."

Greater Hobart Tasmanian

Why is education and literacy an issue for the health of Tasmanians?

Many young people do not complete their secondary education

The progression rate from year 10-12 is 70% in Tasmania compared to 78% for Australia. We have a school retention rate from Year 8 through to Year 12 of 72% compared to 84% Australia as a whole¹.

Many people do not have post-school qualifications

Tasmania has the lowest proportion of people aged 15-74 with non-school qualifications (54%) compared with the national average (59%).²

Children from poorer households are more vulnerable

40% of Tasmanian children from lower socioeconomic households were developmentally vulnerable on one or more Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains compared to 11% of children from higher socioeconomic households.³

Tasmanian adults have very low literacy skills

According to the 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey⁴, Tasmania had the lowest levels of adult literacy in all domains:

Prose & document literacy:

- Only one half of Tasmanians were assessed as having adequate prose (51%) and document literacy skills (49%), compared with 54% and 53% respectively for Australia. This meant that they had sufficient prose literacy skills to understand and use information from various kinds of narrative texts, including newspapers, magazines and brochures, and sufficient document literacy skills to locate and use information contained in such formats as job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and charts.

Numeracy:

- Less than half (44%) of Tasmanians were assessed as having adequate numeracy skills to effectively manage and respond to the mathematical demands of diverse situations, compared with 47% of Australians.

Problem solving:

- Only about a quarter (27%) of Tasmanians were assessed as having sufficient problem solving skills to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work, compared with 30% of Australians.

Health Literacy:

- Around one third (37%) of Tasmanians were assessed as having sufficient health literacy skills to understand and use information relating to health issues such as drugs and alcohol, disease prevention and treatment, safety and accident prevention, first aid, emergencies, and staying healthy, compared with 41% of Australians.

Lower levels of literacy exist in rural areas

Tasmanians in regional municipalities tended to have lower literacy levels compared with those living in major metropolitan areas.⁴

References & Resources

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016, *4221.0 Schools Australia*: abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4221.02015?OpenDocument.
 2. ABS 2015, *6227.0 Education and Work*: abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6227.0May%202015?OpenDocument.
 3. ABS 2014, *4261.6 Educational outcomes, experimental estimates, Tasmania, 2006-2013*: abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4261.6.
 4. ABS 2008, *4228.0, Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary Results 2006*: abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/1307.6Feature+Article1Jun+2008.
- Tasmanian Government, *26Ten*, 26ten.tas.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx
 - Department of Health & Human Services, *Health Literacy*, dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/about_us/health_literacy
 - World Health Organisation, 2003, *Social Determinants of Health, The Solid Facts*: euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/98438/e81384.pdf.

Communities

- Recognise that many Tasmanians within your community may have low literacy skills. Help create communities that support people to enhance their literacy skills.
- Advocate for school facilities to be available outside of school hours for other community skills development activities.
- Use existing community resources such as schools, libraries, on-line access centres and community houses to enhance literacy outcomes for community members.
- Advocate for recognition of the value of arts in education. For example see: *Bridging the gap in school achievement through the arts*: eprints.qut.edu.au/69164/1/69164.pdf.
- Build literacy skills development into existing programs where people already gather for a common purpose - e.g. art, sport and recreation groups, and community gardens.
- Establish local enterprise, knowledge and skills development programs that use a range of learning styles and models - e.g. arts programs and peer-education programs.
- Provide opportunities for local community members, such as older Tasmanians and new mothers, to share their knowledge and skills.
- Support local schools to retain students to Year 12 and to help students to complete their schooling.
- Speak out about issues that may act as barriers to education such as housing, transport and income, and encourage the government to fund education and learning opportunities in local communities (write letters to politicians, become part of lobby groups or write to the media).

Individuals

- **For help with literacy difficulties contact the Reading Writing Hotline – Free call 1300 655 506.**
- Read, listen and talk to your children.
- Support young people to stay in school to Year 12 and to participate in education or training beyond school.
- Encourage young people to reach their potential and choose pathways that lead to satisfying work and lifelong learning.
- Support neighbours, friends and colleagues in seeking help with literacy difficulties.
- Become involved with the 26Ten literacy and numeracy initiative: 26ten.tas.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx.
- Share your knowledge and skills with others either through formal training programs or informally with individuals or groups.
- Participate in knowledge and skill development programs yourself, such as those offered by Adult Education, Community Houses, University of the 3rd Age, Learning & Information Network Centres (LINCS) and On-line Access Centres.
- Volunteer for programs that offer literacy support for newly arrived migrants and refugees.



Workplaces (Managers, Workers, Volunteers) & Service Providers

- Develop community and health information resources that are appropriate for low literacy levels - e.g. using graphics, plain language and visuals.
- Develop service delivery and organisational policies to respond to the low literacy levels in Tasmania, so that verbal as well as written information is provided where appropriate, interpretive services are offered, and referrals are provided to services that can help enhance literacy skills.
- Develop partnerships with education and adult literacy providers.
- Recognise the need for staff to have culture based literacy - i.e. that accounts for the differing understandings and perspectives that different cultures may have.
- Offer health self management programs that recognise low literacy levels in Tasmania and seek to build literacy and empowerment.
- Offer apprenticeship, traineeship and mentoring programs that incorporate work-based literacy development and job pathways in a supportive environment.
- Provide ongoing professional development opportunities to staff and volunteers to improve literacy skills.

Politicians & Governments

- Provide free educational opportunities for all Tasmanians and contribute to building a culture that values education.
- Commit to a well-resourced, system-wide supportive schools framework that ensures that all schools are equipped with enough specialised staff to support students with higher needs.
- Increase access to educational opportunities by providing affordable and appropriate accommodation and transport for students living in remote, regional and urban fringe areas.
- Provide further education and training opportunities, including accredited training programs, to disadvantaged job seekers in areas of locational disadvantage.
- Work with Aboriginal organisations to improve school retention rates among Tasmania's first peoples.
- Provide resources to investigate and respond to the nature and incidence of absenteeism in schools.
- Provide ongoing funding for a mandatory statewide program to tackle bullying and discrimination.
- Work with the National Disability Insurance Scheme to enhance resource allocation to students with disabilities in mainstream schools so that they are truly included. This includes better access to trained teachers' aides as well as assistance with forward planning for the transition from school to work.
- Allocate funding to implement comprehensive and sequential sexual health and relationships education from K-12 in partnership with government and non-government organisations.
- Protect vulnerable citizens from being targeted by high interest money lending businesses and other businesses that lock people into expensive contracts (because they do not understand the fine print).
- Provide opportunities for lifelong learning including adult education.
- Increase and enhance early learning opportunities, particularly among disengaged families so that children are 'school ready'.
- Provide appropriate and ongoing support for program and service delivery through Tasmania's Child and Parenting Centres.
- Provide support for university students, particularly first year students on low incomes or from disadvantaged backgrounds who are more likely to drop out.
- Commit to 26 TEN by ensuring that all government agencies use plain language communication within the public service: 26ten.tas.gov.au.
- Recognise the centrality of arts to cognitive and emotional wellbeing and the impact it has on deep learning, Arts education needs to be seen as a core curriculum component and be accessible to all students from all backgrounds at each level of education.