

## **Plain and simple, health literacy makes a difference**

Cigna Healthcare<sup>SM</sup> has an unwavering focus on health literacy and using plain language rather than jargon is a big part of that.

“If someone doesn’t know how to take their medication, can’t follow a provider’s care instructions, or can’t understand how to schedule or get to an appointment, their health outcomes suffer,” says Alice Woelke Evans, a registered nurse who helps customers with complex medical cases. “Improving our customers’ health literacy strengthens our ability to effectively address social determinants of health (SDOH), which is a foundational part of The Cigna Group’s mission to reduce health inequities and provide each person with every opportunity to achieve their full health potential, regardless of social, economic, or environmental situations.”

While clear communications with our customers is always top of mind, Cigna Healthcare emphasizes its importance each year during Plain Language Week, engaging employees and showing them ways to communicate clearly and empower our customers to move toward better health.

In fact, a [2023 survey](#) of insured adults showed that 51% reported difficulty understanding at least one aspect of how their insurance works, while 25% found specific terms like “deductible,” “coinsurance,” “prior authorization,” and “allowed amount” hard to understand.<sup>1</sup>

This year’s Plain Language Week begins September 9. Employees will have access to a variety of educational sessions and learn more about Cigna Healthcare’s tools, approaches, and strategies for empowering customers through clear communication.

### **Clinical Navigators Pilot: Delivering better care through clear communications**

Evans is participating in the Clinical Navigators pilot, a health literacy program that launched in Virginia in February, with plans to expand to five additional states.

The pilot aims to address low health literacy in rural areas, with the goal of reducing visits to emergency departments and urgent care centers. It emphasizes clear communication in engaging customers during an acute health need and assessing social determinants of health (SDOH) concerns.

In addition to nurses, the team includes a social worker, case managers, a data analyst, medical directors, and a pharmacist.

“We’re using a new system called [PointClickCare](#)<sup>®</sup> to get information when customers have been in the ER, to get their diagnosis, and to get their current status – usually within 24 hours of their ER visit,” said Evans, who was named the [Cigna Healthcare 2023 Health Literacy Hero](#). “The system helps the team be proactive – recognizing customers who wouldn’t have otherwise be seen as needing case manager outreach.”

The team makes sure customers understand what their ER providers told them and the instructions for follow-up care. The pilot also goes beyond health literacy, Evans said. The team’s case managers address SDOH concerns, determining if customers are safe, have food, or need housing, and directing them to resources to help.

“It’s about establishing trust and getting customers aligned with a doctor, since many don’t have primary care physicians,” she said. “It’s also about helping customers understand the differences between an ER and urgent care – or virtual care like [MDLive](#) – as well as the cost differences among those care options, and much more.”

### **A customer under the radar no longer**

Over the past six months, the pilot team has seen numerous success stories, Evans said. For example, they reached out to a customer who had been diagnosed with a fractured foot and learned he was living in a car, felt unsafe, and lacked food.

“He didn’t have a safe place where he could heal,” she said. “We pulled in our social worker, and we found him a safe place to stay, and we got him food. Then we got case management involved and brainstormed – with the customer – about what resources might be available and found housing assistance for him.”

None of that would have happened without the pilot program, she said. “He went to the ER and was discharged. He wasn’t a high-cost claimant, no chronic illnesses, no meds – he flew completely under the radar, but because he had an active cell phone and because we utilized PointClickCare, we were able to track him down to help.”

<sup>1</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, “KFF Survey of Consumer Experiences with Health Insurance”, June 15, 2023.