

What is the issue?

WHAT?

Canada's literacy rate

The world has experienced huge transformations over the past 5 years which has highlighted the critical importance of literacy and its foundational role in shaping educational, economic, and health outcomes.

Today's issues:

- 1 million children are not reading at grade level and 1 in 5 adults face literacy challenges.
- Nearly 400 000 people become Canadian citizens or permanent residents each year, with approximately 55% speaking a first language other than English or French.
- Workplace transformations are brought about by new technologies, and there is a growing need for financial and digital literacy.

Today, Canadians need to have future-ready skills because:

- Literacy skills are essential skills for making informed decisions, accessing opportunities, and navigating a rapidly changing world.
- Literacy is now recognized as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, and communicate in a rapidly evolving, digitally driven, and information-rich world.
- Literacy skills include reading, writing, counting, additional language, financial literacy, digital, and media literacy.

The findings from the 2024 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) report show that there are still critical gaps to address:

19% of Canadian adults

**struggle with basic reading skills,
which is a significant issue with
serious implications.**

Why is literacy an issue?

The facts behind the urgency for Canada.

The demand for literacy support is rising, along with an urgent need for free, inclusive programs accessible to individuals of all ages, families, and entire communities.

It is imperative to offer support to children, youth, adults and entire communities who face systemic barriers to learning whether those are social, economic, and/or historical.

Because:

- A 1% increase in adult literacy could generate \$67 billion annually for Canada.
- About 30% of children in Canada don't meet grade-level expectations. This means over a million kids lack essential literacy skills, especially those from lower-income families and marginalized communities.
- 79% of people entering Canadian correctional facilities don't have a high school diploma.
- Literacy is vital for newcomers, with 56–58% of recent immigrants speaking a first language other than English or French.
- Federal cuts to English and French language programs (Fall 2024) have heightened the need for community-based literacy solutions.
- Higher literacy rates are linked to better health, stronger social cohesion, and increased civic participation.



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How do we address the issue?

United for Literacy proposes a tri-fold strategic plan (2025–2029) plan.

The focus: A Theory of Change towards high impact initiatives to address the short fall of current literacy levels in a knowledge-driven economy.



Strategy A: Deepen our impact

- Develop and expand targeted, higher intensity, impact focused programming in underserved areas.
- Increase and deepen all partnerships to deliver United for Literacy programs.
- Increase the capacity of satellite partners, to deliver meaningful literacy programming.



Strategy B: Expand our Influence

- Scale our influence through stakeholder mobilization.
- Raise public awareness.
- Amplify thought leadership.



Strategy C: Build our internal capacity

- Integrate fund development & increase unrestricted revenue.
- Enhance staff and volunteer recruitment, development and engagement.
- Strengthen our effectiveness as an agile, learning organization.



Guided by the following values:

- By putting learners at the heart of everything we do.
- By having a commitment to reconciliation, equity, and accessibility.
- By strong collaborations and partnerships to amplify voices.
- By remaining agile and learning from each other.

Who are we?

United for Literacy



We have a vision

All people in Canada have the literacy skills they need to achieve their potential.



We have a mission

Each day, we transform lives and strengthen communities through literacy.

To this day, United for Literacy has transformed "every place in a learning place," by customizing our approach for each individual or community we support.

We have historically anchored our activities in the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion—even before it was a widespread concern for society: women in 1920s; newcomers in the 40s; youth leadership roles in the '60s; and learning with and from Indigenous communities in the '70s. At the turn of the 21st century, we embraced the latest technologies to reach the most geographically isolated learners across the country.

United for literacy works with people living in poverty, people with disabilities, newcomers to Canada who desire to improve their language skills, Indigenous, Black and racialized individuals who have historically been underserved by the formal education systems.

United for Literacy's unique value proposition

Since literacy is connected to the achievement of educational, economic and health outcomes for individuals of all ages, **we connect deeply with individuals, families, and entire communities we serve.**

That's what sets us apart.

When does the work start?

The work starts today, and we are looking beyond 2025

In partnership with other organizations, we will co-develop literacy programs that emphasize wraparound and collective impact models to maximize community support and effectiveness.

Our interim outcomes are as follows:

- The necessary initiatives are in place to support underserved individuals and communities on their literacy journey.
- More places have transformed into learning spaces, providing the necessary wrap around supports.
- Literacy is a visible, supported issue, seen as connected to social and economic outcomes.
- United for Literacy has the resources to deliver the plan and intended impact.
- United for Literacy has strengthened its ability to adapt in a rapidly changing environment, with agility and innovation.

Our long-term intended impact means that:

By **2029**

25,000 learners

per year are equipped with the future-ready literacy skills essential for achieving their education, employment, or life skills goals.

United for Literacy will have had an **increased impact on the literacy ecosystem—heightened public awareness, supported policy changes, and strengthened the capacity of partners and communities.**

By **2035**

50,000 learners

per year are equipped with the future-ready literacy skills essential for achieving their education, employment, or life skills goals.

United for Literacy will have had a **positive impact on literacy levels in Canada** which effectively means that the number of Canadian adults at level 0 & 1 will have decreased, and the overall Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results will have improved.