

## Improving Access to Health in British Columbia with our Focus on Health Literacy

### About MAXIMUS Canada

MAXIMUS Canada administers Health Insurance BC, delivering the province-wide Medical Services Plan (MSP) and PharmaCare programs for British Columbia's 4.3 million residents and 13,000 health providers. We communicate with BC residents using over 80 forms, 400 letters and our Contact Center, which handles an average of 6,200 calls each day (1,500,000 calls per year). We also work closely with the Ministry of Health Services (MoHS) on their website.

**The Issue** – Over the years, Canada's population has become increasingly socially, ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse. At the same time, a 2007 Canadian Council on Learning study concluded that 60% of adults lack the capacity to find, understand and act upon health information to make informed decisions about their own care. Creating new communication strategies is key to meeting the public's informational needs and reducing this health literacy gap.

**Our Challenge** – In BC, diversity is one of our greatest strengths, but comes with many formidable communication challenges. Although Canada has two official languages, English and French, 17% of British Columbians speak other languages in the home, including Punjabi, Mandarin and Cantonese. Every year, over 40,000 new residents arrive in BC, and their health literacy may be limited by language and a lack of understanding of our provincial health system.

BC's population is also diverse in many other ways. Seniors are the fastest growing demographic in BC and are the most frequent users of our health care system. Other BC residents have a range of physical and mental disabilities, and some may rely heavily on the health system and may have specific accessibility needs. In addition, BC is vast and geographically diverse, with many of its residents living in rural and remote areas where they are often far from medical services, and may have limited information access.



Our challenge is to meet the needs of all BC residents by improving health literacy and ensuring that they can enrol in MSP and PharmaCare and have access to BC's health care services.

**Our Solution** – Our comprehensive approach to clear communication includes the following:

**Multilingual Contact Center** – Customer Service Representatives are available in four languages. They undergo extensive training to ensure clear, concise information is provided to BC residents with varying levels of health literacy.

Health Literacy is an individual's ability to find, read and understand information about health, so that he or she can navigate the health system and make appropriate decisions.

*Skilled communication experts* – We have two full-time communications employees to manage and update letters, forms and website content. They are also responsible for developing communications strategies to explain new policies and procedures.

*Easy-to-read letters and forms* – We have revised and consolidated all letters to ensure they are written in plain language with clear direction and concise information. Forms are revised on an on-going basis to have a consistent look and feel, and easily understood and consistent field categories.

*Accessible websites* – We work closely with MoHS to ensure their website incorporates best practices for accessibility. We are increasing the number of forms available online and ensure that they are screen-reader friendly, clearly laid-out and easy to navigate for those with visual impairments and other disabilities.

**Our Results, Our Future** – Through all these efforts, MAXIMUS Canada is helping to improve the health literacy of BC residents. Our continuous review of communications, and business and technology processes makes it possible for us to accommodate our clients' changing needs. The results have been reduced call volumes in our Contact Center and fewer errors and inconsistencies in forms – outcomes that improve efficiency and effectiveness for BC residents, health care providers, the MoHS, ourselves and the health care system of the province.

MAXIMUS Canada continues to look at emerging media applications so that we can communicate with our clients in ways that are relevant to their lifestyles. Our parent company, MAXIMUS Inc. has begun exploring the use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and email. MAXIMUS Canada has also begun strengthening its relationship with the MAXIMUS Center for Health Literacy located in our corporate office in Virginia. This Center is a group of writers, graphic designers, researchers and "plain language" translators who have become experts at communication with diverse populations. Both new media applications and the Center for Health Literacy will continue to help us learn and apply best practices to improve health literacy for all BC residents in the future.

For more information, please contact  
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