

Plain Language Word List

Many health care providers and advocacy groups unintentionally use complicated words and phrases in their consumer materials. To help you avoid complex wording and medical jargon, this word substitution list provides simple alternatives to complicated words and phrases.

If there are words that you frequently use that do not appear on this list, please email them to Beccah Rothschild, Director of Health Literacy Projects, to have them added (beccah_rothschild@berkeley.edu). HRA will update this list on a quarterly basis.

A	Instead of...	Try...
	abide by	agree to, follow
	absence	no, none, not here, not present
	accessible	open, ready, within reach, can be used by
	accrediting agency	agency that renews/licenses
	accommodate	meet, agree to
	accompany	go with, show up with, go along with
	accomplish	carry out, do
	accordance (with)	agree with, follows
	accorded	given
	according to our records	our records show that
	accordingly	so
	accrue	add, gain
	accurate	correct, exact, right
	achieve	do, make
	acknowledge	thank you for, accepted, recognized, approved
	acquaint	get to know, meet
	acquire	get, buy
	active role	taking part in
	activity	something you do (often)
	actual	real
	addendum	more information/facts/news
	additional	more, added, extra, other
	address	discuss
	addressees	you
	addressees are requested	please
	adjacent to	next to
	administer	run, handle, direct, manage, to give out
	admission	let you enter or join the plan
	advanced (stages)	late stages, far along
	advantageous	helpful, better, useful
	adverse (reaction)	bad reaction

adversely affect/impact	hurt, set back, make worse
advise on	recommend, tell
affix	stick, join, attach, add, fasten
afford an opportunity	allow, let
affordable	low cost, at a good price, at a price you can pay
affording	giving, making
after the delivery of treatment	after you have been treated
aggregate	total
ailment	sickness, illness, problem with your health
alleviate your symptoms	help you feel better
allergen	something that causes an allergy
allocate	divide, give, share
alternatives	choices, options
ameliorate	improve, make...better
amend	change
announce	call, give out, tell (everyone)
anticipate	expect
a number of	some
apparent	clear, plain, easy to see
apparently	it seems, we think, it looks like
appreciable	many, much, large
appropriate	proper, right, correct, useful
appropriate government authority	government department/office
approximately	about
are required to	must
arrive onboard	arrive, join
as a consequence of	because
as a means of	to
ascertain	decide, find out, learn, tell, confirm
as prescribed by	in, under
assist, assistance	aid, help
associated with	goes along with, is part of
as soon as reasonably practicable	as soon as we can
attached herewith	here is
attain	meet
attempt	try
attending physician	doctor working on your case
at the present time	at present, now
attorney	lawyer
audit	review, inspect, look at

	authorization	permission (or explain more fully), your written permission, your written approval
	authorize	let, allow, approve, permit
	authorizing disclosures	allowing us to share information
	available	on hand, at hand, ready for use
	avoid	stay away from, do not use
B	Instead of...	Try...
	be advised	know
	before any costs are incurred	before we do anything that will cost you
	be in the position to	can
	benefit	help
	benign	will not cause harm, is not cancer
	breach	break
	brochure	flyer, handout, booklet, folder
	burdensome	difficult, hard, tough
	by means of	by, with
C	Instead of...	Try...
	capable of, capability	able to, ability, can
	caveat	warning
	cease	end, stop
	certification	license, permit
	certify	confirm in writing
	chronic	happens again and again, does not end
	circumstance	case, cause, concern, action, condition, situation
	clinical indicators	signs or symptoms of your health problem
	close proximity (to)	close to, near
	collaborate	work together
	collaborating with	working with
	collect and maintain	get and keep
	combined	joint
	commence	begin, start
	commercial members	members who get health insurance through their work
	committed	pledged, promised, devoted
	communicates	tells, lets you know
	communication skills	able to talk and understand
	communication source	source of information
	compensate	pay
	competent	able to make choices, decisions
	compliance with the law	according to the law, follows the law
	complications (flu-caused)	health problems caused by (the flu)
	comply with	follow, obey

component	part
comprehensive	total, all, the whole, complete, full, major, large
comprise	make, form, include, made up of, gives, is
concept	idea
concerning	about, on
condition	health problem, how you feel
conduct	act, direct, handle, lead, give
confer	give, award, talk about, discuss
confinement	kept in one place, limited
confirm(ation)	support, look at to be sure, make sure
consent	accept, permit, let
consequently	so
consider	think about
consolidate	combine, join, merge
constitutes	is, forms, makes up, gives
construct	make, build
consult	ask, check with, refer to, look at, talk to, meet
contains	has
continuation of care	being able to get care from your doctor even if she no longer works with your health plan
contracted group	the group of doctors who work with your health plan
contributes to	also causes
coordinate	make all parts of your care work together; talk with other doctors, nurses, or other health care providers
coordination or management of care	coordinating your care, making sure you get the care you need, overseeing your care
co-payment	fee paid for a doctor visit, hospital stay or other service
correctional institution	jail or prison
court order, subpoena, warrant, summons or similar process	court order, legal demand
covered entities	health plans that have to comply with privacy rules
currently	now

D	Instead of...	Try...
	deceased person	dead person, someone who died
	deductible	the amount you pay before your insurance starts to pay
	deem	believe, consider, think, find
	delete	cut, drop
	demographic	personal statistics, personal information

demonstrate	prove, show, teach, explain
depart	leave, go
designate	choose, name, select, pick
designee of this facility	employee who has been identified, employee who we have identified
desire	want, wish
detailed	complete, with all the facts, covers everything
determine	decide, figure, find out
detrimental	bad, harmful
develop	make, write, form, create, learn
diagnosis	cause of your illness
diet	what you eat, your meals
difficulties	problems
directed	told by your doctor (nurse)
directive	guide, plan, steps to follow
discharged	sent home, let go
disclose	show, share, give, tell
disclosures we will make	information we will share
discontinue	drop, stop, end, quit, cancel
discreetly	carefully, privately, wisely
discrimination	difference between
discuss	talk about
disseminate	give (out), issue, pass (out), send (out)
disturbance	problem, change, something unusual
documents	records, papers, proof
domicile	where you live, home, address
dosage	amount, how much medicine to take
due to the fact that	since, because
during that time	during, while
during the period	during, while
dysfunction	problem

E	Instead of...	Try...
	economical	low cost
	educate	teach, tell, show
	effect	make; result
	effective date	takes effect on, starts on
	e.g.	for example
	elect	choose, pick
	eligible to enroll	can sign up, can join
	eliminate	cut, drop, end, quit, stop
	emergency	something that cannot wait, accident, crisis
	employ	use
	employee review activities	employee reviews, evaluations

employees, hospital personnel	hospital staff, people who work at the hospital
enable	allow, make possible
enclosed	inside, with this _____, included
encounter	meet
encourage	urge, ask to, help, suggest
endeavor	try; effort
enlarge	get bigger, make bigger
enroll	choose, join, become a member
ensure	make sure
entire duration	during the whole time
entities	facilities, institutions, organizations
enumerate	count, list
equitable	fair
equivalent	equal, the same
establish	set up, prove, show, start
established protocols	has rules
evaluate	test, check, rate, decide, think about
evidenced	shown
Evidence of Coverage (EOC)	your contract with [health plan] that tells you what [health plan] will and will not pay for
evident	clear, plain, easy to see
examination	exam, test
examine	look at, check, test
exceed	out do, pass, top, go beyond
except as described	except
exceptions, restrictions, and limits	limits
excessive number of	too many
exclusions	services not covered by the plan, services your insurance does not pay for
exclusively	only
exercise your rights	use your rights
exhibit	show
expedite	hurry, speed up, make faster, rush, lose no time
expeditious	fast, quick
expeditiously	fast, soon, right away, quickly
expend	spend, pay out, give
expense	fee, cost, charge, price
experienced adverse events	been injured or hurt
expertise	ability, skill
explain	tell, show
extensive	complete, full, goes on for a long time, large, long, major

F	Instead of...	Try...
	facilitate	ease, help, move along
	facilities	clinics, offices, buildings
	factor	other thing
	failed to	did not
	family can be notified about your condition, status and location	your family can be told about your health and where you are
	family member or personal representative	family member who is your legal representative for health care
	feasible	can be done, workable, will work
	file a written complaint	write or email a letter of complaint
	filing a complaint	complaining
	finalize	complete, finish, end
	fluid level	how much water your body has
	for a period of	for
	forfeit	give up, lose
	for further instructions	to find out what to do next
	for the purpose of	for, to
	for the reason that	because, since
	formulary drugs	a list of the prescriptions covered by your HMO
	forward	send, give
	frequently	often
	function	act, role, work, do, serve
	fundamental	basic
	furnish	give, send
G	Instead of...	Try...
	gauge	measure, get an idea of
	generic (drugs)	drugs that are not brand name
	give consideration to	think about, consider
	government entity or agency	the government
	grant	give
	grievance	complaint, problem, you do not agree
	Group Coverage	health insurance you get through your [job]
	guidelines	rules, steps to follow, directions
H	Instead of...	Try...
	has a requirement for	needs
	has the capability	can
	health care professionals	people who care for you, doctors and nurses
	health information we have is incorrect	health information is wrong

health record is the physical property of	health record belongs to
healthy living	eating well, getting regular exercise, and seeing your doctor for routine checkups
henceforth	from now on, from today
hereby	from now on
herein	here
hereinafter	after this
heretofore	until now
herewith	below, here
HMO	a health plan that makes you get services from certain doctors, labs, and hospitals
hold in abeyance	wait, postpone, do later
honor	follow, abide by
hospitalization	time in the hospital
however	but

I	Instead of...	Try...
	identical	same
	identifiable information	personal information that can identify you
	identify	find, name, show
	i.e.	that is
	if you require assistance	if you need help
	immediately	at once, now, right now, right away, very soon
	impacted	affected, changed
	implement	start, put in place, get started, do, follow, carry out
	in accordance with	by, following, under
	in addition	also, besides, too
	in an effort to	to
	in an emergency situation	in an emergency
	in conjunction with	with, along with
	inasmuch as	since, because
	in a timely manner	on time, promptly
	incapable	unable, unfit, helpless, cannot do
	inception	start, beginning
	incomplete	lacking
	incorporate	join, put together, combine, bring into
	incorrect	wrong
	increasingly	more often, more and more
	incumbent upon	must, required
	Independent Medical Review	a way to look at your medical needs to see if the treatment that you are asking for is necessary for your care
	indicate	show, tell, say, list, write down, mark, check off

individually identifiable health information	information about your health care that identifies you
individual(s)	patient(s)
individual right	a person's right
inform	tell
information is kept by or for the hospital	hospital keeps the information
information on or accompanying the bill	information with your bill
indicate	show, write down
indication	sign
ineligible	cannot be accepted, do not meet the standards
inflammation	redness, swelling
influenza	flu
information	facts, news, details
initial	first
initially	at first, first, to start with
initiate	start, begin
injections	shots
in lieu of	instead of, or, in place of
inmate of a correctional institution	prisoner
in order to	to
in-patient	when the patient is in the hospital
inquiries	questions
in regard to	about, concerning, on
inspect and receive a copy	get a copy, ask for a copy, see and get a copy
instructions	steps to follow, how-tos, guides, directions, plan
interface with	meet, work with
interfere	get in the way of, keep from, cause problems, prevent
intermittent	off and on
interpose no objection	do not object
in the absence of	without
in the amount of	for
in the course of	during, in
in the event that	if
in the following instances	in these cases
in the majority of cases	usually, most often
in the near future	shortly, soon
in the process of	during
in view of	since
in view of the above	so, for this reason
in view of the fact	because

	irregular	uneven, not usual, not normal
	irreversible	cannot be changed, cannot be fixed
	is applicable to	applies to
	is authorized to	may
	is in consonance with	agrees with, follows
	is responsible for	Is in charge of, handles
	it appears	seems
	itemized	listed, recorded
	it is essential	must, need to
	it is requested	please, we ask, I ask
	is required to	must
J	Instead of...	Try...
	jeopardize	risk
	judicial administrative proceeding	legal event such as a court case
	justify	prove, show
L	Instead of...	Try...
	large numbers of	many, most, [state a specific number]
	law enforcement	police, FBI Officers and others who enforce laws
	legal options	legal choices
	legal requirements	the law
	licensure	being licensed
	limited number	few
	limitations	limits
	locality	place, area
	locate	find, put
	lucid	clear
M	Instead of...	Try...
	magnitude	size
	maintain	keep, keep up, care for, look after, save, support, take care of
	majority	most, greatest
	make new provisions effective	make changes effective
	mammogram	x-ray picture of the breast
	(it is) mandatory	(you) must
	material change	significant change
	maximum	greatest, largest, most
	medical group	a group of doctors who have a business together and have a contract with an O to give services to the HMO members

medication	medicine, drugs, pills, syrup
mentioned	told, said, listed
methodology	method
minimize	decrease, lessen, reduce
minimum	least, smallest
modify	change
make modifications	make changes, change
monitor	check on, watch, keep an eye on
moreover	and, as well, too, also
N	Instead of... Try...
necessitate	cause, make, have to, need to, must
negligible	very small, tiny
network	the doctors, labs and hospitals that work with [health plan]
nevertheless	even so, but
next of kin	close relatives
non-emergency services	care given outside of the emergency room
non-prescription	not ordered by your doctor, can be bought without the doctor's order, over the counter
notify	let us know, tell, call
no later than May 10	by May 10th
not later than 4:00 PM	by 4:00 PM
not required to agree	do not have to agree
notwithstanding	still, even if, yet
numerous	many, [list a specific number]
O	Instead of... Try...
objective	aim, goal, what we hope to do
obligate	must, bind, compel
obligations we have	our responsibilities
observations	reports
observe	watch, see
obtain	get
on behalf of	for
on receipt	when you get
on request	if you ask, when you ask
on numerous occasions	often
on the basis of	because, since
on the grounds that	because
Open Enrollment Period	when you can change health plans, usually in the Fall
operate	run, use, work

operational	working
opportunity	chance, break, opening
optimum	best, greatest, most
option	choice, right
optional	by choice
oral	by mouth
other duties authorized by law	other duties that the law allows them to perform
other purposes permitted or required by law	other purposes that the law allows or requires
otherwise	or, if not
out-of-network	health care providers who are not covered by your specific health plan
out-of-plan	health care providers who do not work with your health plan
out-patient	when the patient does not stay in the hospital
outstanding	very good, excellent, super or unpaid

P	Instead of...	Try...
	parameters	limits
	partially	partly
	participate	take part in, join, go into, do
	participating (providers)	doctors, clinics, etc. that have joined [health plan] or that serve [health plan] members
	perform	do, carry out, end, finish, take
	permit	let
	permissible	allowed, you can
	personal physician	your main doctor
	personnel	people, staff, workers
	pertaining to	about, of, on
	pharmacist	the druggist, person who sells your medicine
	physical property	property of, belongs to
	physician	doctor
	physician-prescribed treatment	care, medicine, therapy your doctor ordered (or wants you to have)
	plan for future care or treatment	care plan
	point in time	point, time
	policies, procedures, practices	our rules and standards
	portion	part
	possess	have, own
	post marketing surveillance information	study drug safety

potentially endangering	possibly hurting
practicable	feasible
precaution	safety measure, care
preclude	prevent, stop, get in the way of
predominant	main
preference	choice, wish, desire, option
premises	building, office
premium	money you pay every month, monthly payment to [health plan]
prepared	ready
prescribed	given, ordered
prescription	medicine, drug, the doctor's order for your medicine
prescription medicines	prescriptions, prescription drugs
prevalent	common, happens often
previous	before, earlier, past, the _____ before
previously	before
primary	main, key, first
Primary Care Physician (PCP)	the main doctor who cares for you
primary care services	Basic health care given by your main doctor
prior authorization	approval from your main doctor
prioritize	rank, put in the right order, put first things first, put things in order of how important they are
prior to	before, earlier
private insurance payers	insurance company
procedure	operation, something done to treat your problem, way, rule, policy, program, style
proceed	do, go ahead, try
process	way, rule, method, step
procure	buy
procurement	getting
proficiency	skill, ability
prohibit	forbid, ban, prevent
prolonged	stays, lasts, carries on, goes on for a long time, continues
promptly	right away, soon
promulgate	advertise, issue, publish
propose	offer, suggest
pros and cons	pluses and minuses, reasons for and against
protected health information	personal medical information that is protected by the law
protect the privacy of your health information	keep your health information private

	protocols	rules
	provide	give, offer, say, supply, list
	provide verification	show proof of
	provided that	if
	provider	any person, clinic or group that gives you health care services
	provides guidance for	guides
	provision	giving, supplying, plan, agreement
	purchase	buy, pay for, pick up, take
	pursuant to	by, following, because of, under
Q	Instead of...	Try...
	qualified beneficiaries	your family, family members on your insurance plan
R	Instead of...	Try...
	reason for	why
	rebuttal	response, answer, contradict
	receive	use, get
	recognize	come to see, be aware of
	recommend	advise, suggest, inform, guide
	reconsider	think again
	recover	get well, get better, heal
	reduce, reduction	cut
	refer	send to
	referral	send you to another doctor, get a second opinion
	referred to as	called
	refers to	talks about, mentions
	reflect	say, show
	refrain	stop, stay away
	regarding	about, of, on
	regardless	no matter what
	registration	sign-up
	regret (to tell you)	sorry to tell you
	regular exercise	the amount of physical activity that your doctor tells you to get every day
	regulation	rule
	reject	turn down, deny, refuse
	relating to	about, on
	relative to	about, on
	release information	give out your information
	religious affiliation	religion
	relocate	move
	remain	stay

remainder	rest, left over
remuneration	pay, payment
render	give, make
represents	is, is part of
request	ask for, apply for
require	must, need, want, lack
requirement	need, rule
reside	live at, live with
resolution	decision
resolve	decide, settle, agree, finish, go away, work out
restart	start again
restore	get back, fix, bring back
restriction	limit, rule against
resume	go back to, begin again, go on with, come back
retain	keep
review	check, go over, look at again
revised	new, changed
revision	change
revoke your written authorization	withdraw, take back, tell us not to

S	Instead of...	Try...
	safeguard	protect, keep safe, save
	said, some, such	the, this, that
	screening	test
	scrutinize	look at carefully
	select	choose, decide, pick, prefer
	selection	choice
	set forth in	in
	settle (your account)	pay (your bill)
	significant	important, major
	similar to	like
	solely	only
	solicit	ask for, request
	specialist	an expert in the field, a doctor who has special training
	state	say, tell, write down
	statement	bill, charge
	state-of-the-art	latest
	statutory	by law, legal
	strategize	plan
	subject	the, this, your
	submit	give, send, mail, bring
	subsequent	later, next, following

subsequent to	after
subsequently	after, later, then
substantial	large, much, strong
substantial communication barrier	major communication problem
substantially	more or less, largely
successfully complete	pass
sufficient	enough
supplement	add to
supplementary	extra, more
supply	give, deliver, sell
suspected violation	possible breaking of a rule or law
sustain	support, carry, aid, help save
symptoms	problems, signs, or warnings of illness

T	Instead of...	Try...
	tablet	pill, dose
	take action	start
	task	job, assignment
	terminate (coverage)	end, stop
	that being the case	so
	the month of (January)	in (January)
	thereafter	then, from the on, afterwards
	therefore	so, then, for, since
	therein	there
	thereof	its, their
	the undersigned	I, we
	the use of	using
	third trimester pregnancy	last 3 months of pregnancy, months 6-9 of pregnancy
	this office	we
	thus	so
	timely	prompt
	time period	from to
	training of medical students	training medical students
	transfer	move, change
	transmit	send, give
	transpire	happen
	treatment	cure, therapy, remedy, medicine, diet
	treatment alternatives and options	treatment choices
	treatment and services you receive	care you receive, your care

	types of uses and disclosures	how we share, with whom we share, how the information is used
U	Instead of...	Try...
	ultimately	in the end, finally
	unable to agree to a requested restriction	cannot agree with your request
	unavailability	lack of, there isn't any
	unavailable	not able to get or find, cannot get
	undersigned	I, we
	understanding utilization activities	reviewing health services
	undertake	do, agree, promise
	undertaking utilization review activities	reviewing our work
	under the custody of law enforcement	in police custody
	unforeseen	unplanned, not expected, sudden
	unless otherwise permitted or required by law as described below	unless allowed or required by law
	until such time as	until
	upon receipt	when we get
	upon your request	if you ask
	urgent	cannot wait long, needs attention very soon
	use or disclose	use or give out, share, release
utilize, utilization	use, make use of	
V	Instead of...	Try...
	validate	confirm, prove
	via	in, on, through
	viable	workable, can be done
	vice	instead of, versus
	violation	break the rules
	viral disease	virus
W	Instead of...	Try...
	warrant	call for, permit
	we are in a position to	we can
	wellness	good mental and physical health, feeling good
	whenever	when
	whereas	because, since
	with reference to	about

	with regard to	about
	with respect to	about
	with the exception of	except for
	withdraw	take away, remove, take out
	witness	see
	written complaint	a letter or email
Y,Z	Instead of...	Try...
	you are obligated to	you must
	you are requested to	please, you must
	you must do so in writing	write a letter or email
	zero-rated	free of