

Accessing Health Information Important for All Segments of Society

How much of a role do wealth, age, and education attainment influence a person's use of the Internet for health information? What kind of role can on-line health information have for rural Canadians?

The federal government's *Connecting Canadians Agenda* is a six-point platform including a number of interlinked initiatives: Canada On-line, Smart Communities, Canadian Content On-line, Electronic Commerce, Canadian Government On-line, and Connecting Canada to the World. It is intended to make Canada the most connected nation in the world. At the same time, it is designed to "improve access to federal government programs and services for rural Canadians.

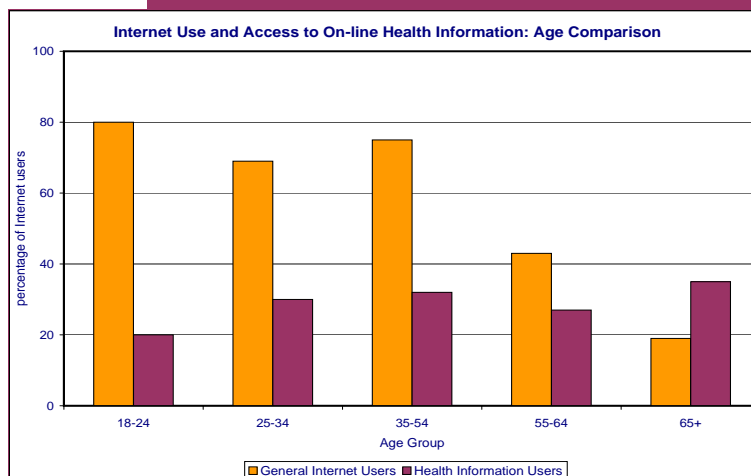
The government recently established Rural and Remote Canada On-Line, calling it "a single window to knowledge, information, programs and services for and about rural and remote Canada." Rural and Remote Canada On-Line has

a special section dedicated to health information, ranging from women's health to a list of web links to other health pages.

The NRE Household Survey results showed significant differences in Internet use depending on three factors: wealth, education attainment, and age. Typically, younger, wealthier, more educated Canadians are most likely to use the Internet.

health information. Only 20% of Internet users in the youngest age group, 18-24, used the Internet for health information. These findings could be attributed to the possibility that seniors have a greater need to access health information, and those with Internet access are making use of this resource. There was very little gap among Internet users in different income brackets and their use of the Internet for health information.

Education was the only demographic in which there were large differences in accessing health information. Among Internet users with less than a grade nine education, only 11% used the Internet for health information. In contrast, 38% of rural internet users



However, the differences among Internet users who access health information on-line based on various demographic features are much less pronounced. 34% of all Internet users access health information on-line. Rural internet users aged 65+ reported the highest numbers with 35% accessing

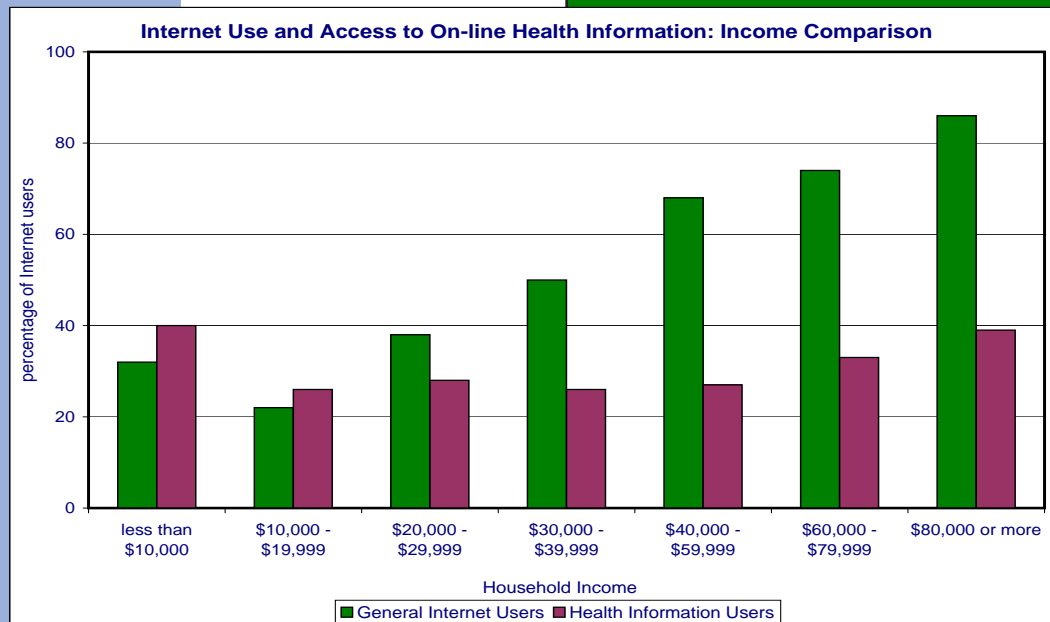
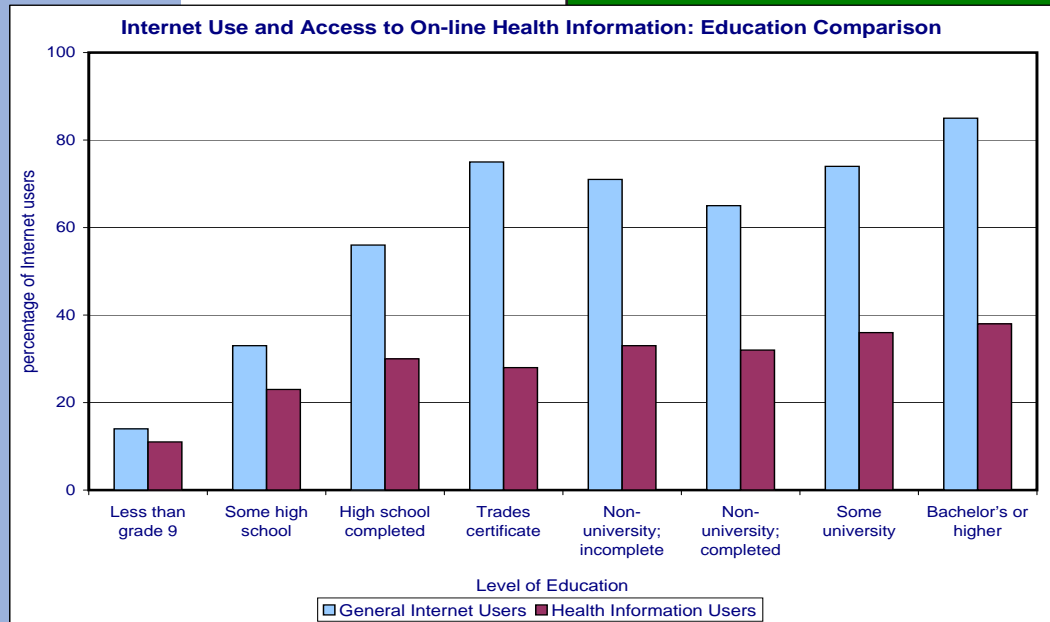
with a Bachelor's degree or higher access health information.

While there are important demographic differences between general Internet users and those who do not use the Internet, there are almost no differences among users of the Internet for health information.

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This demonstrates that health information on-line is important for all segments of society; however, the number of Canadians accessing health information on-line could be increased.

The fact that at least one-third of Internet users in 2001 were taking advantage of on-line health information demonstrates the need to not only promote the availability of such information, but ensure that it is reliable. This could be a role for Health Canada as the Internet could serve as a tool to help equip patients with information to better interact with their doctors.



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