







Language Access in Health Care Settings

Advocacy Tips

-  **Ask for a qualified interpreter.** Limited English proficient individuals should have access to bilingual staff or interpreters whenever they are getting health information, services or treatment from a federally funded health care organization. If the medical provider will not provide language access and the patient receives Medicaid, call the patient's managed care organization or the Department of Public Welfare's Fee for Service office at 866.872.8969 to request an interpreter.
-  **Check the website for a contact person.** Large organizations such as hospitals may have a protocol or contact person for language services. You may need to inform the medical staff in that organization about the protocol and contact information.
-  **Educate about the dangers of not using competent interpreters.** Without appropriate, trained interpreters, medical providers run a very real risk of misdiagnoses, medical errors, breaches in patient confidentiality, and lack of informed consent. Their patients may feel confused, and/or anxious, take medication incorrectly, and not follow providers' instructions because they don't understand.
-  **Guide providers in how to use interpreters.** Effective and efficient use of interpreters depends on many factors, including the positioning of the medical provider, patient, and interpreter, speaking directly (saying "I" and "you"), using the interpreter solely as a conduit for the conversation, pausing frequently to allow for interpretation, minimizing jargon, and checking for comprehension. For phone interpretation, the provider and the patient should use a handset that can move as needed for an exam or different situations, and they must talk clearly, unhurriedly, and with pauses to allow the interpreter to speak. Suggest putting interpreter services on speed dial. Share tip sheets for working with LEP patients and interpreters.
-  **Tell patients to request written and/or oral translation of written documents.** Vital documents should be translated. Providers should read and explain documents that are only in English. Patients should always ask what they are signing and should ask questions if they do not understand.
-  **File a complaint.** Notifying leadership in the provider organization about the problem may lead to positive results. If the response is unsatisfactory, anyone can file a Title VI complaint within 180 days after the violation occurred. Send the complaint to the Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights. See the complaint form at www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/complaints/index.html.



Selected Resources

Community Legal Services: Helps low-income Philadelphia residents obtain equal access to justice by providing them with advice and representation in civil legal matters; advocating for their legal rights; and conducting community education about the legal issues that affect them. CLS' Language Access Project focuses on cases and issues that relate to access to services or benefits for Philadelphia's growing limited English proficient and immigrant communities. (www.clsphila.org)

Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition: A diverse coalition that represents the needs of immigrants, migrants, refugees and other new Americans living in Pennsylvania, educates the public, and develops support for fair policies that welcome and sustain immigrants. PICC's Health Care Committee works to improve the health of immigrant communities in Pennsylvania through focused advocacy and education on issues such as expanding insurance coverage, increasing access, and removing barriers to care. (www.paimmigrant.org)

National Health Law Program: A public interest law firm working to advance access to quality health care and protect the legal rights of low-income and underserved people, which has an extensive library of research, policy papers, guides, and other resources on language access. (www.healthlaw.org)

National Council on Interpreting in Health Care: A multidisciplinary organization whose mission is to promote and enhance language access in health care in the United States and which has developed standards of practice to be used as a reference by interpreters and those who work with, train, and employ interpreters. (www.ncihc.org)

Office of Minority Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Produced "A Patient-Centered Guide to Implementing Language Access Services in Healthcare Organizations," National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services, and other resources for health care organizations. (www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov)

DiversityRx: Nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the accessibility and quality of health care for minority, immigrant, and indigenous communities by supporting those who develop and provide health services that are responsive to the cultural and linguistic differences presented by diverse populations. (www.diversityrx.org)

Speaking Together Toolkit: Developed as part of a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation project to provide advice to hospitals on improving quality and accessibility of language services. (www.rwjf.org/qualityequality/product.jsp?id=29653&orig_url=/)

Joint Commission: Nonprofit organization that accredits hospitals and other health care facilities which produced "Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient- and Family-Centered Care: A Roadmap for Hospitals" and has developed patient-centered communication standards for hospitals that are in test phase. (www.jointcommission.org/Advancing_Effective_Communication)

Duke University School of Nursing's 10 Tips for Working with Interpreters: A well-produced 8-minute video demonstrating appropriate communication techniques for health care workers. (www.youtube.com/watch?v=cX_krmqsWJ0&feature=related)