

Guidance for the Provision of Language Access Services



Office of
Mental Health

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Why Provide Language Access Services?

Using Interpreters:



Increases service user satisfaction



Increases engagement and utilization of services



Improves consumer-provider communication (reduces errors and misdiagnosis)



Improves level of consumer empowerment



Improves physical health outcomes



Reduces readmission rates

Title VI of the 1964 Civil Right Act: Prohibits discrimination based on race, color, and national origin in federally funded programs and activities. When a federally funded (i.e., Medicaid) program does not provide language access to a limited-English-proficient person, that program discriminates based on national origin.

Section 1557 - Affordable Care Act of 2010: Section 1557 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability in certain health programs and activities. Applies to any health program or activity, any part of which receives funding from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) such as programs that are partially or fully funded by Medicaid/Medicaid Managed Care/Medicare and the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant/Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant (SABG).

American Disability Act 1990: Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires state and local governments to make their programs, services, and activities accessible to individuals with disabilities, including individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS): Intended to advance health equity, improve quality, and help eliminate health care disparities by establishing a blueprint for health and health care organizations (CLAS Standards - Communication and Language Assistance).

Standards for Provision of Language Access Services

	Great (Gold Standard)	Services Provided in The Service Recipient's Primary Language by Staff/ Clinician
	Preferable	Qualified/Certified Interpreter (i.e., professional interpretation service)
	Less Preferable	Bilingual Staff
	Not Acceptable	Family or Friends (Unless Client Strongly Requests)
	Not Allowed	Minors

Steps to Providing Language Access Services to Provide Care

1 Ask service recipient what their primary language is, or what is the language they prefer to receive care in (using “I Speak” cards if necessary). Use an Interpreter When: An individual does not speak English, speaks English but does not speak it well, or speaks English BUT prefers to receive care in their preferred language.

2 Connecting with an Interpreter: Contact the following language vendor/interpreter: (Enter name of vendor, phone number to call, and access code if utilizing over the phone interpretation/VRI). Once connected (or the interpreter has entered the treatment room), introduce yourself and the limited English proficient, Deaf, or Hard-of-Hearing Individual to the interpreter.

Tips for Working with an Interpreter

1 Brief the interpreter before a conversation.

Providing the interpreter with relevant information (who, what, where, and why) will give the discussion a seamless and professional flow. Also, informing the interpreter on any point that may be sensitive will allow the interpreter to provide the appropriate tone for such issues.

2 The interpreter is only there to interpret the discussion.

Your interpreter should be a neutral presence. They should not in any way give their opinion or are to include themselves in the conversation.

3 Ask the interpreter not to improvise or change the conversation.

A trained interpreter will not alter the conversation. They are there to provide interpretation and understanding.

4 Speak clearly and in a neutral tone.

Although interpreters are often trained to work at a fast pace, you should speak clearly and slowly to ensure and clarity and accuracy. Please also confirm with the interpreter which interpretation type are they fluent in (simultaneous, consecutive, whispered, etc.).

5 Take your time!

Please be sure to allow enough time for the interpretation process. Rushing the interpreter leads to ineffective communication and may result in the limited English proficient, Deaf, or Hard-of-Hearing Individual feeling undervalued and unheard.

6 Always consider cultural factors.

Being prepared and understanding cultural differences

will result in a more effective conversation and interpretation when working with an interpreter.

7 Refrain from using metaphors, acronyms, or slang.

While your interpreter is knowledgeable of metaphors and slang, please refrain from using them as they may not translate well in another language and lead to confusion.

8 Remember to pause between sentences or complete thoughts.

Please do not interrupt when the interpreter is translating and listen to the entire string interpretation before responding.

9 Speak directly to the limited English proficient, Deaf, or Hard-of-Hearing Individual, not the interpreter.

Remember, the interpreter is only there to interpret for you and to provide understanding. They are not the service recipient.

10 Treat the interpreter in a professional manner.

Interpreters are trained professionals. Treating them as such will make the limited English proficient, Deaf, or Hard-of-Hearing Individual feel at ease and lead to more effective communication.

11 Only one person should be speaking at a time.

Make sure that only one person is speaking and avoid interrupting. This may confuse the limited English proficient, Deaf, or Hard-of-Hearing Individual, and take more time if things need to be repeated.

