



A Patient Guide to Language Access

How You Can Use This Booklet

“Language access” allows people who do not speak English very well or at all to have full access to health care information and services. You can use this booklet to learn about:

- Language access rights
- Choosing a doctor or other health care provider
- Working with an interpreter
- Next steps for change

Table of Contents

- I. What Are My Rights?
- II. Where Can I Find the Care I Need?
- III. What Should I Consider When Choosing a Doctor or Other Health Care Provider?
- IV. What Should I Know About Working with an Interpreter?
- V. Next Steps for Change
- VI. “I Speak” Cards

I. What Are My Rights?

There are laws in place to ensure that language access services are available to you at your health center.

Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, health insurance marketplaces, health care providers, and hospitals that receive federal funding are *required to offer language access services to their patients*.

Health care providers receiving federal funding should:

- Provide language assistance services for enrollment
- Provide written materials in major languages spoken in the area
- Take steps to ensure people who speak different languages can access health programs or activities

Federal law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and health conditions. *The prohibition against national origin discrimination includes discrimination on the basis of language.*

If you believe that your rights are not being met, you have the right to file a complaint within 180 days from the date of the incident.

For more information visit:



AAPCHO

- Asian Americans Advancing Justice (<http://www.advancingjustice-aaajc.org/news-media/publications/section-1557-affordable-cafe-act-protections-against-discrimination>)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Civil Rights (<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/office/file/languageaccess.html>)

II. Where Can I Find the Care I Need?

A community health center in your neighborhood may be a good place to find a doctor or health care provider who can meet your needs. Community health centers provide affordable, quality medical, dental, and behavioral health services to everyone, regardless of ability to pay. They are also governed by people like you, who live in the community and use their services. All of these reasons make community health centers a good resource to meet your cultural and language needs in accessing health care.

To find a community health center near you, check out: <http://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/>

III. What Should I Consider When Choosing a Doctor or Other Health Care Provider?

Here are some questions you may want to ask when choosing a doctor or other health care provider:

- How many staff speak my language?
- What are their roles (nurse, doctor, medical assistant, etc.)?
- Have they worked with patients that speak my language before?
- If an interpreter is needed, how long will I need to wait?
- If an interpreter is needed, will they be provided in-person or by phone/video?
- Are the interpreters trained in providing medical interpretation?
- How will I be able to make an appointment, or reach someone in an emergency?
- Will you be able to refer me to specialists and other services (such as a pharmacy or dental clinic) that can serve me in my language?

IV. What Should I Know About Working with an Interpreter?

The role of an interpreter in a health center is to bridge communication between people who speak different languages.

Interpreters can vary in background and training. They must be fluent in both languages and be able to communicate in a clear and concise manner. It is best to use one trained in health care terminology so that health information can be communicated accurately.

Using family and/or friends as interpreters is not recommended. Although they may be comforting, especially in unfamiliar situations, having family or friends as interpreters may lead to other problems. They may become too emotional, or withhold crucial information from you since they



AAPCHO

want to do what is best for you. Often times, when they are not trained, they may not know the correct medical or technical terminology, and important information may be missed or relayed incorrectly.

If you do not like the interpreter assigned to you at the health center, you can ask to change to another person who may be a better fit for your needs. If you cannot understand the interpreter, you can ask them to repeat the message or explain it in a different way. Always ask questions when you need to. However, if you cannot understand them at all, you should notify the health center.

V. Next Steps for Change

Work with your health center

- Share your feedback by filling out a comment card or grievance report
- Get involved by joining patient leadership groups in the health center
- Become an advocate for others in need of language access by participating in public forums

Connect with organizations that advocate for patients' rights and language access

- <http://www.aapcho.org>
- <http://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org>

Write to your legislators and share your story

- This website allows you to search for your congressional representatives, including their contact information, by entering your zip code:
<https://www.opencongress.org/people/zipcodelookup>

VI. "I Speak" Cards

An "I Speak" card lets people know you need interpretation services. It can help you notify health care staff which language you prefer.

Simply write your name on the blank line front and back. Then cut along the lines of the border. You can laminate the card for future use. Keep this card in your purse or wallet and present it whenever you are seeking health care.

(See example here: <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/civilrights/res/pdf/EngVN.pdf>. They will actually be printed in the appropriate language in our final booklets)

About AAPCHO

This booklet was created by AAPCHO, the Associations of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations. Established in 1987, AAPCHO is a national association of 35 community health organizations dedicated to promoting advocacy, collaboration and leadership that improves the



AAPCHO

ASSOCIATION OF ASIAN PACIFIC COMMUNITY HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS

health status and access of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders (AA&NHOPIs) in the United States and its territories.

This publication was made possible by grant number U30CS09735 from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Bureau of Primary Health Care. The contents of this publication are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of HRSA.