

# PROVIDER RESPONSIBILITY TO LANGUAGE ACCESS IN HEALTHCARE

## Why This Matters

Ensuring language access protects patient rights, promotes equitable care, and builds trust in healthcare relationships. As a provider, adhering to these guidelines fosters an inclusive and compliant healthcare environment.

## KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEDICAL PROVIDERS

### 1 PROVIDE MEDICAL INTERPRETERS

- It is your responsibility to ensure clients have access to a **qualified medical interpreter** during their visit.
- Clients **can** bring their own interpreter or use one provided by their health insurance, but they should not be asked to arrange interpretation themselves.
- Interpreters must be trained in medical terminology to ensure accurate communication.

### 2 AVOID RELIANCE ON FAMILY OR FRIENDS

- While clients may choose to bring a trusted individual, providers should not assume or rely on family members or friends to serve as interpreters.



## RESOURCES

You can find more information for providing language access for patients in the **National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS)**.

- Developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), these standards offer a blueprint for delivering culturally and linguistically appropriate services.
- Key sections include providing qualified interpreters, culturally relevant training for staff, and collecting patient language preferences.

Language access is also addressed in the **Joint Commission Standards on Communication in Healthcare**

- Accreditation standards emphasize the importance of identifying and addressing patient communication needs.
- Includes guidance on documentation of preferred language and use of certified interpreters.

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## IF INTERPRETATION SERVICES ARE NOT PROVIDED



### Clients' Right to Report

- If interpretation services are not made available, clients can file a complaint with the medical facility (clinic, hospital system, etc.).
- Each facility should have an accessible and transparent process for submitting complaints.

### Prohibition Against Retaliation

- It is illegal for providers or health systems to retaliate against clients for making a complaint about lack of language access.

## *Reporting Discrimination or Privacy Violations*

Clients who believe they have experienced unfair treatment or discrimination based on:

- Race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability
- Breaches of privacy regarding health information

Can file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights (HHS OCR):

- Complaints can also be filed by a family member, advocate, or friend on the client's behalf.
- HHS OCR offers free support, including in-language assistance and alternate formats (e.g., Braille, large print).