Health

How to Access Healthcare Services in Your Language

Understanding Your Language Rights

If you have Limited English Proficiency (LEP), you have the right to get healthcare information in a language you understand. Laws make sure you get language services for free. This helps you understand your medical conditions, treatment options, and other important health information.

Key Laws Protecting Your Rights

Federal Laws:



Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964:

- **What It Means**: Healthcare providers receiving federal funds must make sure people who don't speak English well can still get the services they need. This includes providing language assistance so you can understand your care.
- **Who It Covers**: All healthcare providers and programs that get federal financial help.

Executive Order 13166:

- **What It Means**: Federal agencies and any organizations that receive federal money must have plans to help people with limited English skills. They need to make sure you can access services and understand the information provided.
- **Who It Covers**: Federal agencies and organizations that get federal funds, including healthcare providers.

Affordable Care Act (ACA):

- **What It Means**: Healthcare providers must offer free language services, like interpreters and translated documents. They also must let you know about these services in your language. The interpreters must be trained in medical terms and ethics. You cannot be punished for asking for language help.
- **Who It Covers**: Health programs and activities that get federal funding.

PPMD's information, resources, and trainings can be made available in languages other than English, including sign language upon request. Please contact us regarding your translation and interpretation needs.

Maryland State Laws:



Maryland Language Access Act:

- **What It Means**: Maryland state agencies, including healthcare providers, must provide language assistance services such as translation and interpretation for free. This law ensures you can understand and access services provided by state agencies.
- **Who It Covers**: All state-funded services, including healthcare.

Maryland Department of Health Language Access Plan:

- **What It Means**: Ensures that you have access to healthcare services in your preferred language if you are a LEP individual. This plan outlines how state agencies should provide language assistance to ensure you get the care you need.
- **Who It Covers**: Healthcare services provided by state agencies.

Healthcare Provider Responsibilities

Offering Interpreters:

- **In-Person Interpretation**: Providers must arrange for a qualified medical interpreter to be present during your appointment if you need one. The interpreter should be skilled in medical terminology and able to communicate clearly.
- **Phone or Video Interpretation**: If an in-person interpreter is not available, providers should offer interpretation services over the phone or through video conferencing.

Translation of Important Documents:

- **Documents to Translate**: Providers must translate essential documents like consent forms, medical instructions, patient information brochures, and discharge summaries into your preferred language. This ensures you understand all important health information and instructions.
- **Availability**: These translated documents should be provided to you without delay and should be readily available whenever needed.

Cost:

- **Free Services**: Language services, including interpreters and translated documents, must be provided at no cost to you. You should not be charged for these services, as they are considered part of your right to equal access to healthcare.

Your Rights



Legal Requirement:

- **Language Access**: Under federal laws such as Title VI and the ACA, healthcare providers that receive federal funding must provide language assistance services to ensure you can understand and participate in your healthcare.

Interpreter Services:

- **What You Get**: You have the right to a qualified interpreter during medical visits. This includes in-person interpreters, as well as phone and video interpreter services if needed. The interpreter should be proficient in both your language and medical terminology.

Translated Documents:

- **What You Get**: Important medical documents like consent forms, discharge instructions, and health education materials must be translated into your primary language to ensure you understand all aspects of your care.

Notification of Rights:

- **Informing You**: Healthcare providers must let you know about your right to receive language assistance services for free. This information should be provided in your language to ensure you fully understand your options.

Non-Discrimination:

- **Fair Treatment**: You should not be treated unfairly or receive worse care because of your language needs. Healthcare providers must take reasonable steps to ensure effective communication with you, regardless of your English proficiency.

Confidentiality:

- **Privacy**: Interpreters must keep all information confidential. Using family members or friends as interpreters is not recommended because it may compromise your privacy and the accuracy of the information.