

Apple Health (Medicaid) Language Access Provider fact sheet

An individual with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) is someone whose primary language is not English, and who has limited ability to speak, read, understand, or write English. Providers must ensure that LEP Individuals and those who are Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, or visually impaired are provided with meaningful access to health care services. Meaningful access means providing linguistically and culturally appropriate language access services to ensure that individuals can fully understand and participate in their health care.

Equitable communication is essential to high-quality care. Individuals with LEP, people with disabilities, and those who are Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing communities often face systemic barriers to care. This results in worse health outcomes. Ensuring meaningful language access is more than compliance. It's a moral obligation to ensure every Apple Health client can feel safe, respected, and fully informed when seeking care.

Note: Providers should not assume someone with LEP can effectively communicate in a health care setting. Medical terminology or the use of signed language often requires qualified language access support for full comprehension.

Provider regulatory requirements

Health Care providers are required to comply with the following federal and state regulations regarding language access:

- [Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act \(ACA\)](#)
- [The Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#)
- [RCW 49.60.030 Freedom from discrimination](#)—Declaration of civil rights
- [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#)
 - Applies to providers and entities receiving federal funds
- [Managed Care Contract Requirements](#) (IMC Subsection 3.7.1.1.1)

While there are some differences between what each of these statutes cover, all providers are expected to adhere to the following principles:

- Providers must offer language access services in a timely and appropriate manner.
- Language access services must be free of charge to the individual and their companions assisting with the individual's health care needs.
- Certified interpreters must be provided to individuals when requested or when needed for effective and meaningful communication.
- Interpreters must be certified to provide interpreter services in a health care setting.
- All language access services must comply with HIPAA and other privacy regulations to protect patient information.

These requirements are rooted in the principle that all individuals deserve dignity, clarity, and autonomy in their care experience regardless of language, disability, or cultural background.

Note: There are limited situations when a qualified interpreter may be used instead of a certified one. For example, if the language needed is uncommon. In these instances, the interpreter must still meet the organization’s requirements for language proficiency, interpreter trainer, code of ethics, and scope of practice.

What is included in the provider’s payment?

The payments providers receive include all costs related to delivering the service. This includes costs for following federal, state, and agency rules such as providing Language Access Services.

Provider responsibilities to individuals with disabilities

In addition to language access, providers have a legal obligation to ensure effective and meaningful communication with individuals with disabilities.

- Providers must ensure that communication with people with disabilities is equally effective compared to communication with those without disabilities.
- Providers must offer appropriate auxiliary aids and services, such as sign language interpreters, large print materials, or assistive listening devices to effectively meet the communication needs of the individuals they are working with.

Note: The nature of the aids and services will vary based on the needs of different individuals. Providers should work with individuals as much as possible to provide aids and services that meet their needs.

Ensuring language access

Providers are responsible for training their staff on how to effectively communicate with people who need language access services and what resources are available. Providers should also work with their own legal counsel to develop policies and procedures that align with their setting and the people they serve.

Can clients use a family member as an interpreter?

No. To protect client safety, privacy, and understanding, providers must offer qualified or certified interpreters for clinical communications, such as discussing diagnoses, treatment options, or understanding consent for procedures.

- Using family, friends, or children as interpreters is not allowed in health care settings under Washington law (RCW [74.04.025](#) and federal law) and Title VI of Civil Rights Act, ADA).
- If a patient refuses a professional interpreter and wants a family member instead, providers should confirm the decision is voluntary, explain the risks, and document both the offer and the refusal of professional interpreter services.
- Family members may be present to offer emotional support and comfort to the patient but should not be used to interpret medical information.

Interpreter services for Apple Health providers

The [Health Care Authority’s \(HCA\) interpreter services program \(ISP\)](#) assists Apple Health providers access qualified spoken and sign interpreters for prescheduled Apple Health (Medicaid) covered appointments. On-

demand interpretation is not available. Providers submit requests for an interpreter using an online system. Visit the [Interpreter services provider webpage](#) to learn more.

Interpreters are independent contractors or freelance interpreters. HCA does not contract directly with any interpreter and the interpreters choose which requests they are willing to accept from HCA ISP.

Note: Interpreter availability may vary, especially for less commonly spoken languages. As HCA continues to expand interpreter networks, we encourage providers to report language access gaps. This helps us improve service equity for all Apple Health clients.

HCA ISP does not include:

- Inpatient hospital services
- Nursing facility services
- Administrative services
- Answering or responding to general phone inquiries or reminder calls
- Provider's employees interpreting
- Other miscellaneous office tasks
- Apple Health Expansion clients

Note: Providers should contact the client's Apple Health Expansion plan for language access support and guidance requesting language access assistance.

Clients enrolled in managed care

Managed care organizations (MCOs) support equitable language access for clients enrolled in managed care who face communication barriers, helping ensure they receive the care they need based on their individual needs. MCOs should be contacted directly for language access support and scheduling assistance related to services that fall outside the scope of the HCA Interpreter Services Program (ISP).

MCOs are also responsible for ensuring interpreter services are available at no cost to their Apple Health enrollees for all interactions between clients, MCO staff, and any contracted providers.

MCO Interpreter services contact information

Managed Care Organization	Interpreter services contact information
Community Health Plan of Washington	Call 1-800-440-1561 or email Customercare@chpw.org
Coordinated Care	Call 1-877-644-4613 or (844) 354-9876 for foster care
Molina Healthcare of Washington	Call 1-800-869-7165
UnitedHealthcare Community Plan	Call 1-877-542-9231
Wellpoint Washington	Call 1-833-731-2167

Note: If the MCO is not able to support the language access request for their enrollee please escalate your request to hcamcprograms@hca.wa.gov to review and intervene if appropriate.

Resources

HCA Resources

- [HCA Language Access](#)
- [HCA Nondiscrimination Statement and grievance](#)
- [HCA ISP](#)

Additional Resources

- [ADA Effective communication](#)
- [HHS Civil Rights requirements for TANF and Medicaid](#)
- [OCR Guidance on Section 1557 Language Access](#)
- [45 CFR- Language Access requirements](#)
- [Title VI guidance](#)
- [RCW 49.60.030 – Freedom from discrimination – Declaration of Civil Rights](#)