



Category: <b>PHSA CORPORATE</b>	
Subject/Title: <b>LANGUAGE ACCESS POLICY</b>	Reference Number:
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Approved by: <b>PHSA EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL</b>	Revision Number:

## 1. PREAMBLE

The Provincial Health Services Authority (“PHSA”) and its Agencies, hereinafter referred to as the PHSA are committed to ensuring that all patients and clients receive the best possible health care while ensuring patient/client safety, and attaining positive health outcomes. As a growing percentage of British Columbians speak a first language other than English, delivering health care in an accurate, meaningful and appropriate manner may be challenging and pose risks. Risk is also a factor when language access is hindered by the geographic location. The PHSA recognizes that risk issues related to language barriers remains consistent across all geographic locations and within all non-English speaking communities, however large or small, and the PHSA works to mitigate this risk wherever and whenever possible.

Effective communication between patient/client and health care provider is one way to mitigate risks. Mutual understanding and accurate information exchange between the patient/client and the health care provider are key in alleviating risk and liability concerns such as uninformed consent and misdiagnosis due to miscommunication. When a patient/client share a common language with the health care provider or are provided with the appropriate means to communicate and gain understanding, risk is immediately reduced.

The PHSA also endorses quality health services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate through its [Code of Ethics](#) Policy, which affirms that staff will provide:

- *health and social services to patients and their families with sensitivity and respect, being mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity;*
- *health and social services impartially and objectively, and free from wrongful discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, language.*

## 2. PURPOSE

The PHSA expects its staff and medical personnel to reduce risks when there is a language barrier by utilizing appropriate language resources such as interpreters and translators.

## 3. SCOPE

This Policy applies to:

- all employees of the PHSA or any of its affiliated Programs and Agencies;
- physicians with privileges at any of the PHSA's facilities;
- medical staff including physicians on contract, residents, and clinical trainees;
- university faculty and support staff who work at PHSA facilities;
- students working for, or associated with, the PHSA or any of its affiliated Programs and Agencies.

## 4. DEFINITIONS

**Interpreting** is the oral rendering of one language into another and vice versa to facilitate the exchange of communication between two or more persons speaking different languages.

**Translation** is the written rendering of one language into another written language ensuring equivalency in meaning.

**Appropriate Interpreter Services** means providing language assistance that maximizes staff communication through the use of Professional Interpreters and/or Bi/Multilingual Staff Volunteer Language Assistants. Use of family members and untrained bi-lingual individuals increases the risk of miscommunication and incomplete/inaccurate data collection and would therefore not be considered appropriate.

**Professional Interpreter** is one who:

- Has been tested for language fluency;
- Has been accredited by a recognized institution or has been oriented to health care interpreting<sup>1</sup>;
- Adheres to the Healthcare Interpreting Standards (1996);
- Can accurately and completely render communication from one language to another.

Professional interpreters may be freelance interpreters screened and approved by the Provincial Language Service (PLS), a program of the PHSA or they may be contracted (by the PLS) through agencies providing interpreter services that conform to stipulated guidelines.

**Reasonable Time** for urgent interpreter requests is defined as allowing up to 30 minutes for the provision of a face-to-face interpreter or 2 -5 minutes for a telephone interpreter. This time shall be marked from the time an intake request is completed until the acquisition of an interpreter. If a face-to-face interpreter is not available, a telephone interpreter will be accessed.

**Risk** associated with health care generally refers to the possibility of patients and clients suffering harm or loss. Providing appropriate language access (interpreter or translation services) mitigates this risk.

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<sup>1</sup> The latter part of this statement only applies to languages of lesser diffusion.

## **5.0 POLICY**

The PHSA is committed to mitigating risks related to delivering health care to limited/non-English speaking patients/clients served by the PHSA. As such, PHSA staff and medical personnel will seek out appropriate language resources when communicating with limited/non-English speakers recognizing circumstances in which care must be delivered immediately, and then followed by communication with the patient/client/designate.

Effective language access will be achieved using a multi-pronged approach, such as the use of professional interpreters for verbal communication and professional translators for written communication.

### **5.1 INTERPRETER SERVICES**

Effective communication is an essential facet of health care. From prevention information to assessment, diagnosis and treatment options, all messages must be communicated in a manner that informs and allows for understanding in order to be effective. It is the responsibility of the PHSA Agency or Program to ensure that communication between staff and patient/client or patient/client designate is not impaired due to limited English proficiency.

PHSA staff will access appropriate interpreter service through the Provincial Language Service (PLS), a program of the PHSA (see Appendix A), in order to ensure safe and effective health care delivery to patients/clients. The PLS will make all reasonable efforts to provide an interpreter within the specified requirements and a reasonable timeframe. While effective communication is important in all health care provider and patient interactions, priority will be given to the following situations:

- informed consent for treatment;
- key medical information (i.e. treatment options/plan or diagnosis);
- highly emotional content.

(see Appendix B for other specific examples in which and interpreter may be utilized)

All efforts to comply with the Language Access Policy will be documented in the Agency or Program patient/client record system.

PHSA discourages the use of family and friends as interpreters. When a patient/client refuses the services of a PHSA assigned interpreter, a waiver (see appendix C) must be signed by the patient/client or designate and kept with the patient/client record. A PHSA assigned interpreter must remain present at the session to ensure that medically necessary information is presented accurately by the patient/client approved language support.

### **5.2 TRANSLATION SERVICE**

The increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of PHSA's patients/clients requires service providers to assess the content and context of written information for cultural and linguistic appropriateness. PHSA staff will access appropriate translation service through the Provincial Language Service (PLS), a program of the PHSA (see Appendix A).

The PHSA encourages signage and print materials related to patient/client care and health care prevention that is appropriately translated and assessed for cultural appropriateness. The PHSA recognizes that translation alone may not always be the

best or only path for print materials. Community testing may be used as a tool to augment either the translation process, or the content of the English documents to create accessible, meaningful materials for diverse cultural communities.

## **6. CONFIDENTIALITY**

All patient/client information collected during the course of an interpreting or translation request is deemed, and will remain, confidential. Information is only disclosed to those directly responsible for carrying out all aspects of the service provision.

## **7. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY ACT**

All matters covered by this Policy are subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPPA).

FOIPPA further strengthens the requirement to reduce risk in this area. To be FOIPPA compliant PHSA must ensure that all PHSA affiliated parties involved in patient/client care abide by strict standards of confidentiality and maintain patient/client privacy through appropriate collection, use and storage of private patient information. Using volunteer interpreters, other patients/clients, the general public, etc. does not constitute FOIPPA compliance. Further compliance is ensured through obtaining consent (through signage) for disclosure, use and storage of personal information.

## APPENDIX A

### PROCEDURE FOR ACCESSING LANGUAGE SERVICES

PHSA staff access **interpreter services** through the Provincial Language Service (PLS). The PLS was established by the PHSA as a centralized service that operates on a cost-sharing/recovery basis (a pre-determined and agreed upon fee for the service will be charged to the requesting Agencies/Programs<sup>2</sup>).

The PLS provides health care interpreting services to all of the PHSA.

Interpreters can be booked by

- phone at 604-875-3402 (Lower Mainland) or toll free at 1-877-228-2557 (1-877-BC-TALKS); or
- on-line via <https://plscustomer.phsa.ca> (account and password required)

Requesters should be prepared to provide the following information:

- Your name and phone number
- Language of client /patient
- Location of session
- Date and time of session
- Estimated duration of session
- Name of health care provider that will be attending
- Name and telephone number of client (optional)
- Gender preference (if relevant to session)
- Type of session

To ensure on-site interpreters are available at the requested time, pre-booking sessions whenever possible is recommended.

The PLS provides **translation and community testing services** for a wide range of documents including patient education materials, research documents, signage, reports, prescriptions, information articles and pamphlets. To access translation and community testing services call:

- 604-875-3402
- toll free 1-877-228-2557 (1-877-BC-TALKS)

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<sup>2</sup> PHSA interpreter services are provided at no cost to patients and clients with MSP coverage or refugees with standing in BC.

## **APPENDIX B**

The following is a list of situations and procedures (although not exhaustive) that may require the use of appropriate interpreter services when language is a communication barrier between health care provider and the patient/client:

- Explaining medical services;
- Obtaining informed consent;
- Explaining/teaching any diagnosis/prognosis and plan for medical treatment;
- Explaining any change in treatment/care plan or condition;
- Explaining any medical procedures, test or surgical interventions and obtaining consent;
- Explaining patient/client rights and responsibilities;
- Explaining the reason that seclusion or restraints are/were needed for patient care;
- Providing medication/treatment instructions and explanation of potential side effects;
- Explaining discharge plans and providing teaching;
- Discussing issues at patient/client and family care conferences and/or health education sessions;
- Discussing end-of-life decisions;
- Providing patient/client/family education;
- Discussing family issues and issues of abuse;
- Discussing infant feeding concerns.

**APPENDIX C**

**Interpreter Service Waiver**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, do not want a PHSA assigned professional interpreter to assist  
Patient/client name

in my communication for \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of the month of \_\_\_\_\_  
Type of session

20\_\_\_\_. Therefore I assert my right to provide my own language assistance.

I understand that a PHSA interpreter will be present and utilized as needed by the health care provider.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patient/client Signature

***For office use only***

A PHSA assigned interpreter provided sight translation of the *Interpreter Services Waiver* to the patient/client.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Health Care Provider Signature