

## **Background**

The Medical Interpreting Service (MIS) provides American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting for deaf patients in both emergency and non-emergency medical appointments in BC.

MIS has been managed by the Provincial Language Service, a program of the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), since 2007. Prior to that, it was first managed by the Ministry of Health then moved to PHSA's Contract Management Office in 2002. The Provincial Language Service also provides interpreting and translation services to BC health authorities in more than 150 languages.

Since 1998, the provision of medical ASL interpreting services has been awarded on a contractual basis, to the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WIDHH). WIDHH is a non-profit organization dedicated to creating a society in which people who are deaf, deafened, deafblind and hard of hearing are able to fully participate. The current two-year contract with WIDHH expires in fall 2017.

To PHSA's knowledge, a formal review of MIS services has not been conducted. The Provincial Language Service commissioned a formal review of current services in fall 2016, in part to prepare for an upcoming RFP process, to focus upon exploring opportunities for service improvement and efficient delivery of this service for the deaf community. DLR Consulting was retained and Debra Russell, Karen Malcolm and Anita Harding completed the work. The review was conducted between October 2016 and January 2017.

The purpose of the review was to gather input from stakeholder groups to determine the effectiveness of the current service, identify service gaps and make recommendations for moving forward. The review included:

- Examining the current services and programs offered by MIS
- Comparing delivery models in other agencies that provide ASL medical interpreting services
- Interviews with WIDHH and PHSA employees
- A survey of sign language interpreters who currently provide service to MIS
- A survey of health care providers who have used MIS
- Focus groups and targeted interviews with deaf and hard of hearing community stakeholders – both consumers and providers

## **Outcomes & recommendations**

Participants identified several features that are successful within the MIS model:

- Large group of competent interpreters who provide services.

- Services that are specifically designed to meet the needs of deaf, hard of hearing and deaf blind citizens when accessing publically funded medical services.
- Commitment to the communities served.

Opportunities for improvement emerged from the review in the following four categories:

- **Structural changes**, which may include clear policies for interpreters that are accessible and transparent and an independent complaint process.
- **Create access for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf Blind communities**, which may include providing the community with more opportunities for involvement and input into the delivery of the service and development of a dual language website (English and ASL) for both the community and health care providers with current information & resources.
- **Ensure quality interpreting services**, which may include mechanisms to support development of interpreters and monitor service quality, and articulating a process for supporting continuity of care.
- **Educational opportunities**, which may include actively promoting the service to health care providers and providing ongoing educational opportunities for ASL interpreters.

## Next steps

The Provincial Language Service is reviewing the MIS review report and determining next steps.

Any change to the service will include outreach to the deaf community.