

# Language Justice for Survivors Across Services



Both survivors and advocates have shared that survivors face barriers to health and behavioral health care access. Many organizations do not have culturally or linguistically diverse staff who represent the culture and community where their services are located. Without services in their language, survivors are unable to access the support they need.

Language justice includes providing meaningful access to services in a survivor’s language of choice (including American Sign Language, also known as ASL) or in the language where they feel the most comfortable or empowered.

## Language Access Protections

There are several protections to guarantee language accessibility including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ([45 CFR 80](#)), [Executive Order 13166](#), and the Affordable Care Act ([Section 1557](#)). The [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) describes quality standards for video interpretation of ASL. In addition to federal guidelines, all states have passed legislation supporting language access.

## Barriers to Service

Survivors may feel stigmatized when they are not understood. Survivors often experience extended wait times to receive services when organizations rely on a limited number of in-house bilingual or multilingual providers for interpretation. Bilingual/multilingual staff members who act as interpreters should have training or certification. Staff who have specialized skills or additional job duties such as interpretation should be compensated for their skill sets.

Organizations should not rely on persons accompanying a survivor to services—such as a friend or family member—for interpretation as this can compromise safety and contribute to inaccuracies. Professional interpretation services have been shown to reduce healthcare disparities and improve care (Karliner et al., 2007).

Learn more about the different types of interpretation services as well as the pros and cons in [Providing Language Services to Diverse Populations: Lessons from the Field](#).

## Capacity-Building For Domestic Violence Organizations

Many domestic violence programs want to increase language accessibility but don't know where to start. Here are some resources to support developing and implementing a language access plan:

- The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence's [Interpretation Technical Assistance & Resource Center](#) offers culturally-specific capacity-building support for advocates, providers, and legal services; tip sheets, and other language access resources
- Esperanza United's [Language Access: A planning tool for advocacy organizations](#) includes a toolkit supporting development and integration of language access services, and a process to review or improve existing language access plans
- [Executive Order 13166 Limited English Proficiency Document: Tips and Tools from the Field](#) includes guidance for domestic violence service providers
- The Vera Institute of Justice's publication [Culture, Language, and Access: Key Considerations for Serving Deaf Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence](#) provides insight and information to serve deaf survivors

## Capacity-Building for Health and Behavioral Health Services

Health and behavioral health organizations may find the above resources useful. Here are some additional resources to support the development and implementation of a language access plan:

- The [Guide to Developing a Language Access Plan](#) by the Centers for Medicaid and Medicaid Services provides an overview of language access assessment and development
- [LEP.gov](#) includes several tools to support [Language Access Planning](#)
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Civil Rights has a resource center for [Limited English Proficiency \(LEP\)](#) as well as [National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care](#)
- The Department of Justice has published a [Language Access Assessment and Planning Tool for Federally Conducted and Federally Assisted Programs](#)
- [Medicaid.gov](#) provides information about reimbursement for [Translation and Interpretation Services](#)
- The Peer Recovery Center of Excellence Toolkit: [Increasing Accessibility with Translation & Interpretation Services](#) provides guidance and resources for incorporating translation services into peer support.

## Locating and Working with Interpretation Services

- The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence has tip sheets on [Interpretation Services](#) and [How to Work with Interpreters](#)
- The LEP.gov [Interpretation](#) page provides information about working with interpreters and interpreter certification programs
- The American Translation Association hosts a [Language Services Directory](#)
- The National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters hosts a [Registry](#) of interpreters
- [Language Line Solutions](#) offers several options for interpretation and translation services
- The [Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc](#) and National Association of the Deaf's [Deaf Interpreters Registry List](#) can assist with connecting to interpreters for the Deaf
- [DeafHope](#) has tip sheets about [Providing Interpreters to Deaf Survivors](#) and [Certified Deaf Interpreters](#)

## Referrals

When referring a survivor to services, help to reduce barriers and facilitate access to health and behavioral health care by contacting the organization ahead of time. You may want to ask some of the following questions:

- “I would like to refer someone whose primary language is \_\_\_\_\_. How can they access interpretation services at your organization?”
- “What type of interpretation services does your organization provide?”
- “Is any necessary paperwork or other information translated into \_\_\_\_\_?”
- “Can one request an interpreter of a specific gender?”

## Resources for Interpreters

- The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape offers a short guide about [Trauma-Informed Interpreting](#)
- The Canadian resource [Healing Voices Interpreting for Survivors of Torture, War Trauma, and Sexual Violence](#) covers several areas for supporting interpreters working with survivors of sexual and domestic violence in Module 8
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network publication [A Socio-Culturally, Linguistically-Responsive, and Trauma-Informed Approach to Mental Health Interpretation](#) includes several resources to support interpreters in the mental health field

## Reference

Karliner, L. S., Jacobs, E. A., Chen, A. H., & Mutha, S. (2007). Do professional interpreters improve clinical care for patients with limited English proficiency? A systematic review of the literature. *Health Services Research*, 42(2), 727–754.

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