

**To:** All Providers  
**From:** PerformCare  
**Date:** February 13, 2025  
**Subject:** Q1 2025 Provider Memo: Understanding the Impact of Language Barriers

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Behavioral Healthcare is unique, as it relies heavily on effective communication such as, articulating emotions, describing psychological distress, and sharing personal experiences, which are key to an accurate diagnosis and successful treatment.



Non-English speakers may find themselves unable to express their innermost feelings, and that inability to clearly communicate can be detrimental to their overall wellbeing, leading to feelings of frustration, anxiety, and isolation, which can worsen behavioral health conditions. For this reason, **Language-Concordant Care**, where the clinician is proficient in the client's preferred language, is ideal for producing the best opportunity to form an effective therapeutic relationship. However, this type of care is not readily available in all regions, leaving providers to consider **Automated Machine Translation**, where speech goes

through a computer automated program for translation between clinician and client, such as Google Translate. This method has both ethical and practical concerns and should be avoided unless specifically requested by the client. Alternatively, **Translator-Mediated Care** services, such as in-person translators or services like Language Line, which utilizes professional linguists to ensure accuracy, is an acceptable service to use when Language-Concordant Care is not available.

Language has a substantial impact on the therapeutic relationship and treatment outcomes. Even when an interpreter is available, language barriers in behavioral health settings can lead to potential misdiagnoses, inadequate treatment plans, lack of trust between providers and consumers, and (ultimately) poorer health outcomes. However, research shows that when an interpreter receives some clinical training and is empowered to assist the clinician in addressing cultural dynamics that arise, clients report better perception of the clinical interaction. These factors result in a greater likelihood that clients will return and improved outcomes for treatment. In this clinician-interpreter model, the clinician must establish the roles of the interpreter, clinician, and client, while empowering the interpreter to adjust the translation for cultural norms.

The following are ways to enhance communication strategies:

- **Incorporating Bilingual Professionals and Interpreters into Treatment Teams**
- **Availability of Multilingual Resources**, such as pamphlets, videos, online content in Spanish and other languages, is essential to ensure wider reach and accessibility.
- **Effective Communication Tools:** Clinicians can improve the client's therapy experience by learning how to read non-verbal cues, understanding cultural nuances, and using Patient-centered communication tools, such as visual aids and simplified language.
- **Types of Language Aids:** Using over-the-phone and video interpretation, face-to-face interpretation, interpretation embedded in telehealth and electronic health record systems and translation services for written documents can assist clients and therapists to communicate effectively and efficiently.
- **Spanish Language Crisis Services:** The Crisis Text Line added a Spanish Language Version and 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline both added Spanish language text and chat services.



#### Resources for Requirements for Language Services

- **PerformCare Provider Manual and Contracting:**  
<https://pa.performcare.org/assets/pdf/providers/resources-information/provider-manual.pdf>
- **Federal laws:** Section 601 of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), 42 U.S.C. 2000d, Federal Executive Order 13166, Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and Section 1557 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (Pub. L. 111-148):  
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/regulatory/statutes/title-vi-civil-rights-act-of-1964>
- **State requirements: Limited English Proficiency Requirements Medical Assistance Bulletin 99-25-01:**  
<https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/dhs/documents/docs/publications/documents/forms-and-pubs-omap/mab2025011601.pdf>
- **The Language Resources Presentation (which includes listing of PerformCare and county partner interpreter resources):**  
[https://pa.performcare.org/providers/training-education/performcare-presentations.aspx#collapse3\\_2](https://pa.performcare.org/providers/training-education/performcare-presentations.aspx#collapse3_2)