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Increasing Language Access In Oregon: Learning Modules

Chapter 3: Steps and Best Practices for Providing Interpreter Services

Chapter 3

Discusses best practices for providing interpreter services, including defining good faith effort.

Chapter 3. Steps and Best Practices for Providing Interpreter Services

In this chapter, we will look at steps and best practices for providing interpreter services. We will review key steps to take when offering interpreter services, share practical strategies to overcoming barriers and explain how you can use the "good faith effort" exception when credentialed interpreters are unavailable.

What steps should you take to provide interpreter services?

To comply with Oregon law and ensure patients receive safe, equitable and effective care, follow a consistent set of steps when arranging interpreter services. Appendix 1 provides a sample workflow for reference.

- **Identify and regularly assess the need for interpreter services.** Use intake processes to determine if a patient needs an interpreter and document this information in the patient's medic[...] allows for early scheduling and m[...] needs or preferences may chang[...] and build in routine opportunities needed.

- **Check for available staff.** If you[...] credentialed interpreters in-house[...] bilingual staff), see if they are ava[...] Working with staff the patient alre[...] and build trust.

- **Schedule a credentialed interp[...]** interpreters listed in the central re[...] company, use the central registry[...] credentialed. When contracting d[...] to identify credentialed interpreter[...] verification and contact tool, not a[...] through the language service con[...] existing organizational processes[...]

What are tips and best practices to overcome barriers when providing interpreter services?

Although you may face challenges in offering interpreter services, there are strategies that can help address them. The best practices below can help make it easier to provide patients with access to credentialed interpreters.

Invest in staff. Sometimes there can be limited availability of credentialed health care interpreters to meet interpretation demand. This is a concern for less commonly spoken languages or specific dialects such as Mixtec, Zapotec, or Dari. Investing in interpreter staff can build organizational capacity and help build trust with patients who feel more comfortable with familiar staff members.

- **Best practices/tips:**
  - To expand in-house capacity, organizations may find it useful to support bilingual staff in becoming credentialed interpreters.
  - Organizations might consider hiring dedicated interpreter positions or creating positions such as a language access coordinator who can help coordinate credentialed interpreters for patient appointments.
  - Pay differentials (e.g., higher pay) for credentialed staff to help incentivize or retain credentialed interpreter staff.

Chapter 3 Details

- Discusses best practices for providing interpreter services
    - Outlines steps to offer interpreter services, from identifying needs to scheduling credentialed interpreters.
    - Shares tips to overcome barriers when providing interpreter services, such as interpreter shortages, scheduling delays, and patient preferences.

- Defines good faith effort
    - Explains what constitutes a good faith effort and when it applies.
    - Notes that documenting attempts and interpreter details helps demonstrate compliance.

Steps to Provide Interpreter Services (slide 1 of 3)

To ensure patients receive safe, equitable, and effective care, providers should follow a consistent process when arranging interpreter services.

Identify and regularly assess the need for interpreter services

- Ask patients their preferred language during intake and record it in their medical record.
- Reconfirm preferences at future visits.

Check for available staff

- Determine if an in-language provider or credentialed bilingual staff member is available.

Schedule a credentialed interpreter

- Prioritize interpreters listed in the OHA Health Care Interpreter Central Registry.
- Work with a language service company to identify an interpreter or contract directly with an interpreter.

Steps to Provide Interpreter Services (slide 2 of 3)

Document appropriately

- Confirm interpreter details (name, registry number, and language) in the record

- Maintain and periodically update a preferred interpreter list.

- Providers who bill for Open Card/fee-for-service members must document visit details as outlined in OAR 410-120-0001(3)(a-e).

- Providers working with CCOs may also need to document additional information to meet the MLA measure.

Schedule in advance, when possible

- Schedule an interpreter early for less commonly spoken languages and for ongoing services.

- Confirm whether the patient's language preferences or interpreter availability have changed.

Steps to Provide Interpreter Services (slide 3 of 3)

Ensure access during the visit

- Position the interpreter so the patient and provider can communicate directly.

- Test video or phone technology for remote sessions.

Have policies and procedures for providing language access services

- Describe steps taken to work with a credentialed interpreter.

- Document policies and procedures, including those for working with language service companies.

Good Faith Effort

A good faith effort shows that a provider made every reasonable attempt to schedule a credentialed interpreter before finding another option.

How to document good faith effort

- Record attempts to schedule a credentialed interpreter.

- If you scheduled a non-credentialed interpreter, document their name, language interpreted and interpretation modality (e.g., on-site, phone, video).

Purpose of good faith effort

- Demonstrates compliance with Oregon law.

- Highlights interpreter shortages and capacity needs.

- Builds transparency and accountability with patients and oversight bodies.

Good Faith Effort

Document and Report Good Faith Effort

Providers should:

- ✓ Record their attempts to schedule a credentialed interpreter.

- ✓ Document if they worked with a non-credentialed interpreter, and if so, document the interpreter's name, language interpreted, and the interpretation modality (e.g., on-site, video, phone).

- ✓ Train staff to include good faith effort documentation in their electronic health record or scheduling system so it becomes a standard part of intake and care delivery.

While documenting a good faith effort is important when credentialed interpreters are not available, the goal is to work with credentialed health care interpreters.

Tips and Best Practices: Invest in Staff

Investing in interpreter staff strengthens organizational capacity and builds trust with patients who feel more comfortable with familiar interpreters.

Ways to expand staff capacity include:

- Supporting bilingual staff in becoming credentialed interpreters.

- Hiring dedicated interpreter positions or creating dedicated roles, such as a Language Access Coordinator.

- Offering pay differentials or other incentives for credentialed staff.

Tips and Best Practices: Streamline Scheduling and Ensure Consistency

Establishing clear scheduling systems helps ensure interpreter coverage and consistent communication for all patients.

Consider these best practices to improve scheduling and continuity:

- Flag interpreter needs early—during intake or appointment scheduling.

- Use color-coded schedules, suffix codes, or language-specific phone lines.

- For recurring care, assign the same interpreter when possible.

- Keep a preferred interpreter list with registry and contact information.

Tips and Best Practices: Reduce Administrative Burden

Standardizing workflows can reduce staff workload and make it easier to stay compliant.

Strategies to simplify and align administrative processes include:

- Recording interpreter name, central registry number, and language interpreted.

- Creating quick reference workflow checklists for scheduling and reporting.

- Using EHR templates to streamline scheduling and notetaking.

- Training staff on consistent documentation practices.

Tips and Best Practices: Strengthen Infrastructure for Remote Interpretation

Strengthening your organization's infrastructure helps ensure smooth, reliable interpretation for both patients and staff.

To support high-quality remote interpretation:

- Equip exam rooms with speakerphones or tablets.

- Keep backup devices or rolling carts available for busy areas.

- Test video and audio before each appointment.

- Train staff to troubleshoot common issues.

Tips and Best Practices: Address Patient Concerns

Some patients may hesitate to use interpreters due to privacy concerns or a preference for family members or bilingual staff they already know. Addressing these concerns directly helps build comfort and trust.

Approaches that can help include:

- Explaining that credentialed interpreters are bound by confidentiality and ethics codes.

- Clarifying the risks of using family or friends as interpreters.

- Consider working with traditional health workers to address cultural concerns or other sensitivities.

- Building in routine opportunities to confirm whether interpreter services are needed.

Tips and Best Practices: Collaborate as Needed

Partnerships with community-based organizations and traditional health workers can strengthen language access and expand the pool of credentialed interpreters in your area.

To build effective partnership:

- Collaborate with community-based organizations and traditional health workers to connect with credentialed interpreters.

- Support community programs that train and credential new interpreters.

Thank You!

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