



Colorado Partnerships

Working with Interpreters

Our Medicaid members are a diverse group of people. Some of our members have limited English proficiency (LEP) or communication disabilities (are Deaf or hard of hearing) that prevent them from communicating well in the English language. An interpreter is a critical member of the healthcare team for these patients. CHP/FBHP can help our providers find an interpreter. We've also listed some tips to help you work effectively with interpreters.

Family and friends are not the same as a professional interpreter

Professional interpretation requires expertise in two languages and the ability to communicate a complex message using words and grammar that both the provider and the patient will understand. Professional interpreters are trained to do just this - convey what is being said without changing the message by inserting their own opinions.

In some immigrant families, the adult has limited English Proficiency, but the child speaks English fluently and the adults sometimes depend on their child to interpret for them. This is useful in a situation resolving a cable or electric bill but it is never appropriate in a medical or therapy appointment. This was the case in my family when I was growing up. I also remember at times feeling uncomfortable, especially when it was an adult topic.

Family members, friends, and "informal" interpreters are more likely to modify what the patient has actually said trying to be helpful or to protect their loved-one. Relying on these types of interpreters can result in problems if important health information is inaccurately communicated. In fact, it may put an agency or individual provider out of compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI guarantees that individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) receive the language assistance they need in order to make healthcare services accessible if the healthcare service gets federal funding. This applies to all healthcare services that Medicaid members receive.

CHP/FBHP can find an interpreter for you. Call the customer service number **CHP at 800-804-5008 or FBHP at 866-245-1959**. Our staff will find an interpreter for you and work with your staff to set up the appointment with you, the patient and the interpreter. We've also listed some tips for you and your staff to make the appointment successful:

- ***Allow enough time for the interpreted sessions.***
Schedule extra time for the appointment. Everything said has to be said twice – first in one language and next in the interpreted language. If family members come to the appointment, it will further lengthen the time you will need. Also, what takes a few words in one language may require two paragraphs in another language.

- **Use a seating arrangement where you, the patient and the interpreter form the points of a triangle.** This arrangement makes it easy for the provider and client to talk to each other directly, both verbally and visually, and for the interpreter to support both parties in the conversation.
- **Don't say anything that you don't want your patient to hear.** Everything you say will be interpreted as well as everything the client and his family says.
- **Choose words carefully; limit gestures.** When speaking English, you might use gestures to help convey your meaning. Good interpreters will only interpret the words you speak, and will ignore gestures. The patient, on the other hand, may pay attention to your gestures, which can confuse the patient.
- **Use a normal voice, speak clearly, and not too fast or too loud.** It is usually easier for the interpreter to interpret speech spoken at normal speed, with normal rhythms.
- **Avoid slang and technical terms.** Idioms, technical words, or cultural references might be hard for the interpreter to translate. Also, some ideas/concepts may be easy for the interpreter to understand, but difficult to translate.
- **Keep your statements short; pausing to allow interpretation.** Speak for a short time—one longer sentence or three or four short one. Stop in a natural place.
- **Ask only one question at a time.** If you ask questions in a sequence, you may not be able to match questions with answers, and you may confuse the patient.
- **Allow the interpreter to interrupt when he/she needs clarification**
Talk before the session to agree on signals for “slow down”, etc. Let the interpreter know that you are prepared for him to interrupt to ask you to slow down, to repeat something or explain a word or concept.
- **Expect the interpreter to take notes if things get complicated.**
Don't be surprised if the interpreter takes notes to help her remember. This is an aid to memory, not an interruption.
- **Be prepared to repeat yourself in different words if your first statement wasn't clear.** If you suspect something was mis-translated, go back and repeat what you said in different words.
- **Have a brief meeting after the session with the interpreter.** Meet with the interpreter again after the session to assess how things went, to see if the interpreter is satisfied or has questions or comments about the process.
- **The interpreter is not there just to interpret for the patient or to interpret the patient's language.** The interpreter has two clients. The interpreter is there to facilitate communication between the two of you.