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## **Vision**

The Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) recognizes the importance of being able to communicate effectively with individuals across our many missions and functions, including those with [Limited English Proficiency \(LEP\)](#) or who are deaf or hard of hearing and utilize [American Sign Language \(ASL\)](#). The [Office of Health Equity](#) (OHE), under the guidance of the Office of Preventive Health & Health Equity (OPHHE), leads the Department's efforts, through policy, to provide meaningful access for LEP and ASL individuals in its programs, activities, services, and operations.

## **Mission**

OPHHE is to improve the lives of Mississippians by promoting healthy lifestyles, preventing and controlling disease and injury and protecting health through policy, systems, and environmental change.

OPHHE has historically provided the leadership and successfully implemented health promotion, disease and injury prevention, and disease management programs with a focus on underserved, vulnerable, and diverse populations.

OHE values the diversity of our community and seeks to foster an equitable, inclusive, and accessible environment that respects individual differences. This includes ensuring access to quality services and program benefits regardless of an individual's ability to communicate and understand the information provided or their cultural background.

## **Purpose**

1. LEP and ASL policy and procedures align with the strategic goals described in the strategic Language Access Plan. These goals are to:
  - Deliver Services Effectively
  - Advance Health Equity
  - Improve Quality
  - Eliminate Health Disparities
2. Identify health disparities and their root causes in an effort to promote evidence-based solutions that lend to an equitable system and focus on training, policy and program development, material review and development, staff recruitment, translation services, and community involvement.
3. Utilizes the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) as general guidelines in order to provide a uniform framework for developing and monitoring culturally and linguistically appropriate policies, plans, and services.



4. Provide education and awareness to our MSDH workforce members and federally funded program providers. This education supports their ability to take all reasonable steps to inform the public about our language accessibility services.
5. Ensure that the public has access to our programs and services, regardless of their English proficiency.

### **Authority**

August 2000, [Executive Order 13166](#), *Improving Access to Services for Persons with LEP* establishes guidelines for MSDH to ensure meaningful access by individuals with LEP or deaf and hard of hearing to MSDH-administered services, programs and activities.

### **Guidance**

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, [42 U.S.C. 2000d](#) et. seq. and its implementing regulation at [45 CFR Part 80](#) provide that no person shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin under any program or activity that receives Federal financial assistance.
- February 2011, United States Attorney General's memorandum to heads of Federal agencies, [Language Access Obligations Under Executive Order 13166](#)
- May 2011, United States Department of Justice, [Language Access Assessment and Planning Tool for Federally Conducted and Federally Assisted Programs](#)

### **Steering Committee Oversight**

OHE's LEP Steering Committee conducts LEP oversight for the agency. The steering committee ensures that we integrate language access into our regular business processes and maintain our focus on these services. Steering committee leadership meets biannually with representatives from the LEP advocacy community. As needed, we will schedule more meetings around special topics of immediate interest or concern.

## **SUMMARY OF OUR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY**

### **SERVICE DELIVERY STRUCTURE**

#### **Service Delivery**

The Language Access Department (LAD) under OHE delivers services through a statewide network of more than 85 offices that include:

- Regional offices
- Local Health Department offices
- Teleservice centers
- Processing centers



- Hearing offices (includes satellite offices, national hearing centers, and national case assistance centers)
- The Office of Appellate Operations
- MSDH Central Office in Jackson, Mississippi

MSDH local offices are the primary points of contact for in person support. MSDH teleservice centers handle telephone calls to the MSDH national 800 number. MSDH workforce members in processing centers primarily handle all services related from WIC to Healthcare.

The LAD provides quality healthcare service in more than 200 languages through our:

- Team of bilingual and multilingual employees
- National telephone interpreter service
- Translator service contracts.

These services also are available through all MSDH offices, which may have their own bilingual and multilingual workforce members. In addition, MSDH can use a state contracted interpreter service. People with LEP or ASL needs can have access to the services in person, by telephone, online, and through video service delivery.

### **Technology & Data Driven Decisions**

OHE takes advantage of opportunities to identify and record a customer's language preferences. MSDH employees use this data to arrange for services in the person's preferred language. The Language Access Plan (LAP) firmly commits to ensure that the data accurately reflects the customer's language preferences.

To fulfill this commitment, LAP consistently:

- Refers to Public Information Materials
- Reviews MSDH business processes for data collection.
- Emphasizes the importance of language collection accuracy to MSDH workforce members
- Conducts ongoing data reviews to ensure reliability
- Invests resources to address data quality

### **Resource Allocations**

MSDH Language Access Department carefully considers the needs of people with LEP and people that are deaf or hard of hearing to determine our budgetary requirements for service delivery. Language service usage is reviewed regularly to help the agency prioritize workloads and to devise language access strategies to meet the needs of people who face barriers to services and benefits because of LEP or ASL needs.

- The LAD establishes policies, procedures, and guidelines to identify people with LEP and ASL needs.



- The LAD identifies the preferred language, both spoken, sign, and written, of people with LEP or ASL.
- MSDH provides guidance to employees on how to use language services to assist customers in our:
  - Program Operations Manual System (POMS)
  - Hearings, Appeals, and Litigation Law (HALLEX) manual
  - Teleservice Center Operating Guide (TSCOG)

## **Interpreter Services**

It is not required for people in need of language assistance to provide their own interpreters. MSDH will provide an interpreter free of charge to any person who requests language assistance or whom we believe could benefit from an interpreter. To ensure quality interpretation, MSDH encourages customers to use our free interpreter services.

If a customer with LEP prefers to use their own interpreter, we must determine if the interpreter the customer prefers meets our interpreter requirements. A customer's own interpreter could be a family member, friend, or other third party. MSDH does not permit children under the age of 18 to serve as interpreters. Refer to *Qualified Interpreter* in the *Definition of Terms* Section of this document for requirements. In some instances, we could deem it necessary for customers to use MSDH interpreters to ensure adequate language access.

## **Bilingual and Multilingual Workforce Members**

MSDH bilingual and multilingual public-contact workforce members help us to provide quality customer service to people with LEP. MSDH identifies the need to hire bilingual or multilingual workforce members based on national trends in demographics and language preferences. It is advertised bilingual-skilled positions to hire individuals with the language skills necessary to communicate with LEP customers often requires more time to conduct business in languages other than English. MSDH policies encourage the use of bilingual and multilingual examiners for the examinations.

## **Training**

Workforce members are required to know how to identify customers with LEP or ASL and the procedures to access our language assistance services. We train direct service personnel to ensure the effective implementation of our policies and procedures, which include services to our customers with LEP or ASL. Training is available to all MSDH workforce members on:

- LEP and ASL services
- Cultural Diversity and inclusion
- Unconscious Bias
- Health Equity



This training helps employees deliver effective and efficient language access services to our customers with LEP or ASL needs. Our blended approach to training uses multiple communications methods, for example:

- Interactive video training.
- Video-on-demand.
- Various blended learning products (such as combination of video-on-demand, live presentations, other videos, and training aids and guides).

These and other LEP resources are accessible through MSDH's internal Learning Management System (LMS) known as HealthStream. MSDH HealthStream includes training tools to:

- Enhance skills, which includes workforce members language skills
- Contribute to the agency's goal to provide optimal service to customers with LEP or ASL

MSDH develops and reviews training materials. It also considers recommendations from advocates to maintain and constantly improve basic language access training. It includes training on how to:

- Identify customers with LEP, take appropriate action, and use available resources to assist them effectively;
- Implement policies and procedures to provide effective language access services to people with LEP;
- Identify, assess, and record the language preferences of customers with LEP at the earliest point of contact;
- Access language assistance through multilingual services, which includes in-house bilingual interpreters, translators, and telephone interpreter services;
- Secure translations of non-English documents;
- Identify language needs in the communities we serve.

The agency maintains a centralized electronic repository which contains all LEP policy and procedure references. These resources are available to MSDH workforce members through the agency's intranet.

### **External Partnerships**

When the agency provides financial assistance to an entity that facilitates access to our programs and services, the recipient and any sub-recipients must also be able to facilitate access for people with LEP. The entity must take reasonable steps to ensure that people with LEP have meaningful and equitable access to its programs and activities. MSDH programs monitor such entities to ensure adherence to MSDH policies and defined expectations of meaningful and equitable language access for the customers.

In addition, MSDH maintains external partnerships with advocates and third-party organizations. These advocates and third parties assist people who face barriers to MSDH services, which





include people with LEP or ASL. MSDH conducts external outreach to promote the availability of Health Equity training on Cultural Competence to these third-party organizations.

### **Written Communications and Translation of Documents**

To provide communication autonomy and improve administrative efficiency, the LAD provides authorized translations of written communications in languages other than English. They also translate evidentiary and other documents received from the public to English. The LAD constantly identifies materials that require translation into the languages our customers with LEP use most frequently, develop a priority order for the translation workload, and allocate resources to translate the materials. The LAD regularly reassesses the materials that require translation to ensure that MSDH maintains current and effective public information materials.

### **Public Information Materials**

The Language Access Department Multilanguage Gateway includes detailed instructions in several languages to help people access our free interpreter services. This site includes links to publications in languages other than English. These publications and instructions are also available from the [Information Desk - Mississippi State Department of Health \(ms.gov\)](#) home page when you select the:

- “Language” link at the top of the page; or
- Email the [language.access@msdh.ms.gov](mailto:language.access@msdh.ms.gov)

**Note:** All of MSDH webpages have a “Language” link at the top of the page. We maintain a Spanish language website for people to conduct business with us in Spanish. You can view our website and all the publications with a computer, tablet, or smartphone.

### **14.7.8 Outreach to Customers with Limited English Proficiency**

The Office of Health Equity actively collaborates with a wide range of language access advocates and government entities. It gauges the needs of the LEP and ASL communities to ensure that MSDH has a broad perspective and identifies the best ways to serve these populations.

The LEP Steering Committee hosts bi-annual meetings with national language advocacy groups. At these meetings, MSDH obtains feedback and perspectives about our language access service delivery. External partners also maintain regular communications with advocates. These meetings and contacts are opportunities for MSDH to learn the changing needs of our customers with LEP.

OHE has established cooperative relationships with diverse populations with LEP and their advocates within the nine districts. These relationships also help us to consider whether we need any modifications to our policies and procedures.



## **Oversight and Quality Assurance**

The Office of Health Equity oversight and quality assurance efforts help us monitor the efficiency of our language access services. These efforts include:

- The review of agency directives, procurement, and data quality.
- Customer satisfaction surveys.
- Advocate and customer feedback.

The analysis of the feedback and data helps us enhance our LEP service delivery and training. Each Health Department office takes reasonable steps to ensure that employees and contractors who provide language access services follow the agency policy guidelines.

## **Performance Measurement and Evaluation**

The LEP Steering Committee re-examines priorities and assesses our language access services, policies, and procedures on an annual basis. It also reviews the language access policies periodically to ensure alignment with the Agency Strategic Plan and the current needs of the public. It also conducts constant reviews of the language access services contracts to ensure that contractors provide quality LEP services. In the reviews, it will ensure that the contracts and interagency agreements:

- Contain language that adequately describes our language needs, requirements, and quality expectations.
- Provide a means to assess whether our contractors' delivery of language access services meets our quality standards.
- Provide a means to hold our contractors accountable to meet our quality standards.

This framework allows MSDH to respond quickly to any issues that could arise about language access services, policies, and procedures.

## **Data Analytics and Reports**

The LEP Steering Committee routinely reviews policies and business processes to ensure that these documents remain current. This includes monitoring for trends or areas that could benefit from improvement, more policies, or resources. The Language Access Department monitor:

- Frequently requested languages.
- Feedback from employees.
- Customer surveys.
- Customer complaints.

Data reports are part of the Office of Health Equity transparency efforts. The OHE continues to expand these data transparency efforts and publishes yearly and quarterly data for spoken language preferences. This data is posted on the MSDH website.



## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Authorized Translator** — A Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) workforce member or contractor who meets all of the below criteria:

- Reads, writes, and demonstrates fluency in both English and another language.
- Has demonstrated competence to translate written text from one language to another.
- Has received authorization from their Social Security office or by contract with us to perform this function.

**Bilingual** — Ability to read, write, speak, and understand English and one other language fluently.

**Bilingual Employee** — A MSDH workforce member who reads, writes, speaks, and understands English and another language fluently. In addition, their Health Department office authorizes them to provide language support.

**Interpretation** — When a person listens to a communication in one language and orally converts it to another language, while keeping the same meaning.

**Interpreter** — A person who speaks English and another language fluently and facilitates communication between two people. They facilitate communication between the person who needs language assistance and the Health Department representative, who is not proficient in the person's preferred language. Other languages include sign language.

**Limited English Proficient (LEP) Persons** — Persons with limited or no ability to read, write, speak, or understand English.

**American Sign Language (ASL)** – A visual language. With signing, the brain processes linguistic information through the eyes. The shape, placement, and movement of the hands, as well as facial expressions and body movements, convey information.

**Multilanguage Gateway** — The Agency's public internet site with information in multiple languages about MSDH programs and services.

**Multilanguage Resources** — The Agency's internal intranet site for workforce member who serve customers with limited English proficiency. This site is only available to all MSDH employees.

**Multilingual** — Ability to read, write, speak, and understand English and two or more languages fluently.  
**Multilingual Employee** — A MSDH workforce member who reads, writes, speaks, and understands English, and at least two other languages fluently. In addition, their Health Department office authorizes them to provide language support.



**Qualified Interpreter** — An authorized MSDH workforce member or any other individual whom MSDH determined meets the below criteria.

- This person reads, speaks, understands, and demonstrates fluency in both English and another language.
- Demonstrates familiarity with basic medical terminology.
- Agrees to comply with MSDH requirements about confidentiality and disclosure of information.
- Has no personal stake in the outcome of the patient that would create a conflict of interest.
- Agrees to provide an accurate interpretation for both MSDH questions and the customers responses.
- Does not assume or infer facts or dates that the customer does not provide.
- Is over the age of 18
- Has a high school diploma or equivalent
- Has attended a 40-hour Interpreter training

**Language Access Line (LAL)** – A contracted agency-wide service that provides interpreter services by phone in more than 200 languages and dialects including access to ASL interpreters. This service can be access by phone, iPad, or computer to accommodate the patient needs.

**Translation** — Conversion of written text from one language to another that maintains the same meaning

**MSDH** — The Mississippi State Department of Health

**OPHHE** — The Office of Preventive Health and Health Equity.

**OHE** — The Office of Health Equity.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have feedback or concerns about our language access services, you can email us at [Language.Access@msdh.ms.gov](mailto:Language.Access@msdh.ms.gov) . Otherwise, you can write to the following address:

Office of Preventive Health and Health Equity  
Office of Health Equity  
Attention: Language Access Department  
P O Box 1700  
Jackson, MS. 39216

