



**Language Services:  
A Path of Value for your Business**  
Improving Outcomes for Culturally and  
Linguistically Diverse Patients

# Introduction

One in five people in the U.S. speak a language other than English at home.<sup>1</sup> That represents about 68 million people nationwide, a number that's projected to grow steadily in the years to come. Of the 68 million Americans, more than one-third (twenty-five million) are considered limited-English proficient (LEP), meaning, they speak English less than "very well."<sup>2</sup>

From a healthcare standpoint, these numbers have major implications. That means 8.6% of patients in the U.S. will encounter some type of language barrier when receiving care from a doctor or hospital.

As population demographics shift, the need to improve language access in healthcare is clear. But many organizations still struggle to systematically address the communication needs of LEP patients. As a result, studies show that LEP patients experience reduced quality outcomes – including 1.5 days longer length of stay and 9.4% higher readmission rates than English-speaking patients.<sup>3</sup>

An effective language access program, which includes interpretation and translation services, can help bridge these language gaps to improve the quality of care for LEP and deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) patients. Generally, language services are often viewed as an expense, another necessary cost of doing business. However, the narrative surrounding language access programs in healthcare is shifting. Aside from improving care for LEP and DHH patients, language access programs **represent a major opportunity to deliver value-based care that is sustainable for hospitals and health systems.**

In this white paper, [REDACTED] explains the value proposition for a robust language access program: **an essential service that can deliver high-quality and cost-effective care while improving the overall patient experience.** You will learn that a properly designed and implemented language access program can not only advance health equity, but help healthcare organizations deliver value in three ways:

1. Improve reliability
2. Reduce costs
3. Increase revenue



**Learn how your language access program can create a path to value for LEP, DHH patients, and your business.**

<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau. Nearly 68 Million People Spoke a Language Other Than English at Home in 2019. Census.gov. Published December 6, 2022. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/12/languages-we-speak-in-united-states.html>

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 1: Background on Patient Safety and LEP Populations. <https://www.ahrq.gov/health-literacy/professional-training/lepguide/chapter1.html>

<sup>3</sup> Lindholm M, Hargraves JL, Ferguson WJ, Reed G. Professional Language Interpretation and Inpatient Length of Stay and Readmission Rates. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*. 2012;27(10):1294-1299. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-012-2041-5>

## Improve Reliability

The path to value starts with the patient journey. By following how an LEP or deaf and hard of hearing patient engages across the continuum of care, your organization can identify opportunities to improve communication through the consistent use of interpretation and translation.

Normalizing the use of interpretation can increase revenue and improve the quality of care for LEP and DHH patients. To accomplish this, healthcare organizations must first develop a strategy to build a reliable language services foundation to deliver consistent, effective communication

The Joint Commission defines high reliability as “consistent excellence in quality and safety across all services maintained over long periods of time.”<sup>4</sup> For language services to be reliable, the program needs to deliver a high level of quality that’s both consistent and replicable.

### Characteristics of a Reliable Language Services Provider

When selecting a language services provider, you’ll encounter a wide range of options and pricing structures. It is key to choose a partner that is reliable. Consider these partnership factors to ensure your program excels:



**User experience:** For interpretation services to be used consistently in LEP and DHH patient encounters, interpretation needs to be offered in a way that ensures a positive experience for patients and providers alike. A reliable language services provider will consider the specific clinical situation and offer multiple ways to quickly connect patients with a qualified medical interpreter— whether that’s in-person, video remote, or over-the-phone interpretation. Delivering a positive patient experience is a key component of building trust, which leads to higher levels of patient engagement and satisfaction.



**EMR integration:** Choosing a language services provider that can integrate with your organization’s electronic medical record (EMR) can improve data integrity and eliminate manual data entry. Additional benefits of EMR integration can include shorter wait times, automated documentation, improved compliance with state reporting requirements, the ability to identify and track measurable data related to language services, and it can reduce staff burnout.



**Equipment requirements:** Your language services provider should adapt to the technological needs of your patients, staff, and providers. This means offering the flexibility to provide interpretation on the devices that match the technological landscape of your organization and fit within your existing workflows and processes. That may include a range of devices, such as smartphones, laptops, tablets, or dedicated interpretation-specific equipment.

<sup>4</sup> High Reliability | Joint Commission Resources. [www.jcrinc.com](http://www.jcrinc.com).  
<https://www.jcrinc.com/products-and-services/high-reliability>



**Network quality:** A highly reliable language services provider is built on a strong network. When evaluating language services providers, ask specific questions about both the security and uptime of the platform.



**Interpreter merit:** When choosing a language services provider, it's important to understand that the interpreter's experience and training can directly impact the patient experience. Even though interpreters offer the same basic service, each brings their own level of individual expertise to the table. Working with experienced interpreters that only specialize in medical interpretation, and are qualified medical interpreters, can deliver results that include more accurate interpretations and shorter encounter times. To learn more about the value of Qualified Medical Interpreters, read **"Searching for Excellence? How to Choose the Right Qualified Medical Interpreter."**



**Training opportunities:** In addition to offering interpretation for LEP and DHH patients, a language services partner should offer resources to help train your staff and providers on how to effectively work with interpreters. Not only do these best practices improve the patient experience, but care teams that receive training report shorter encounter times and greater satisfaction with their ability to communicate with LEP patients.<sup>5</sup> It can also result in fewer errors and improved productivity – factors that directly impact revenue and cost savings.



A highly reliable language services provider offers predictable levels of service over long periods of time – leading to high-quality care, improved patient satisfaction, and reduced medical errors.

<sup>5</sup> Masland MC, Lou C, Snowden L. Use of Communication Technologies to Cost-Effectively Increase the Availability of Interpretation Services in Healthcare Settings. *Telemedicine and e-Health*. 2010;16(6):739-745. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1089/tmj.2009.0186>

## Reduce Costs

When a language access program provides consistent, reliable interpretation for LEP and deaf and hard of hearing patients, hospitals and health systems can build more efficient processes that ultimately reduce the cost of care.

This is done by analyzing how LEP and DHH patients interact with your organization across the care journey – and finding methods to effectively engage appropriate language services at every step. Here are some ways a quality language access program can help reduce costs:

### Readmission Rates

Hospital readmissions represent a significant – and often avoidable – expense for hospitals nationwide. According to 2018 data from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, there were a total of 3.8 million adult hospital readmissions within 30 days.<sup>6</sup> This number represents an average readmission rate of 14% and an average readmission cost of \$15,200 per patient. In 2023, the average readmission rate grew to 14.6%.<sup>7</sup>



These hospital readmissions are costly for patients and health systems alike. LEP and DHH patients can find themselves on the receiving end of expensive emergency room bills. Hospitals are forced to utilize their highest-cost resources to care for patients. And high readmission rates can impact reimbursement for Medicare patients because of performance-based payments through the Hospital Readmissions Reduction Program (HRRP).<sup>8</sup>

For LEP patients, the effective use of language services is directly linked to better outcomes and lower readmission rates. When LEP patients can effectively communicate with providers, they are more likely to understand how to manage their conditions, take medications, and follow up if symptoms return. Studies show that readmission rates are 9.4% higher when an LEP patient does not have access to an interpreter during admission and discharge.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Overview of Clinical Conditions With Frequent and Costly Hospital Readmissions by Payer, 2018 #278.

<sup>6</sup> <https://hcup-us.ahrq.gov/reports/statbriefs/sb278-Conditions-Frequent-Readmissions-By-Payer-2018.jsp#first>

<sup>7</sup> Readmissions Medicare Cost Report July 2023. Definitive Healthcare; 2023. Accessed July 27, 2023. <https://www.definitivehc.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/medicare-fee-for-service-payment/acuteinpatientpps/readmissions-reduction-program>

<sup>9</sup> Lindholm M, Hargraves JL, Ferguson WJ, Reed G. Professional Language Interpretation and Inpatient Length of Stay and Readmission Rates. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*. 2012;27(10):1294-1299. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-012-2041-5>





## Length-of-Stay

Reducing the length-of-stay for LEP and deaf and hard of hearing patients is another way hospitals can reduce costs. Compared to English-proficient patients, hospital stays for LEP patients average about 1.5 days longer when professional interpreters are not utilized at admission and discharge. With the cost of hospital stays averaging \$10,000 or more per day, this length-of-stay reduction could translate to a savings of \$15,000 for each LEP patient.<sup>10</sup>

A shorter length-of-stay benefits hospitals, health systems, and LEP and DHH patients alike. Unnecessary days in the hospital may lead to increased hospital-acquired patient complications (e.g., healthcare-associated infections, falls) and increased costs for patients and healthcare systems.<sup>11</sup> When patients occupy a bed for less time, hospitals can admit and treat more patients with the same resources.

## Encounter Times

Hospitals and health systems can reduce the costs associated with treating LEP and DHH patients through shorter encounter times. Wait times can be drastically reduced when a language services provider can quickly connect patients with an interpreter. If the interpreter is experienced in medical interpretation, the time savings is even more dramatic.

Experienced medical interpreters generally ask fewer clarifying questions to providers because they're already familiar with the terminology being used. This results in faster, more accurate interpretations and shorter visits.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.healthcare.gov/why-coverage-is-important/protection-from-high-medical-costs/>

<sup>11</sup> Interventions To Decrease Hospital Length of Stay Technical Brief, No. 40. Tipton K, Leas BF, Mull NK, et al. Rockville (MD): Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (US); 2021 Sep

## Liability and Lawsuits

Studies have shown that LEP patients are 40% more likely to experience physical harm associated with an adverse event than English-speaking patients, due in large part to miscommunication.<sup>12</sup> A qualified medical interpreter can help overcome these challenges by delivering clear and effective communication between an LEP and deaf and hard of hearing patient and the physician and staff.

Historically, hospitals and health systems have been held liable for poor interpretation results in a medical mistake, misdiagnosis, or other serious patient safety event. This can leave physicians and staff vulnerable to medical lawsuits – some of which may not be covered by malpractice insurance because they are considered a violation of the patient’s civil rights.

One notable example is the case of Willie Ramirez. When an interpreter mistakenly translated “intoxicado” (a word meaning an illness was caused by something you ate or drank) as “intoxicated,” Ramirez was treated for a drug overdose instead of a brain bleed. The miscommunication left Willie a quadriplegic and cost the hospital a \$71 million settlement.<sup>13</sup>

## Staff Retention

Another means of indirect cost savings from a reliable language services provider is a reduction in staff and provider burnout. According to the American Medical Association, burnout-related healthcare spending adds up to nearly \$5 billion every year. This includes costs associated with increased turnover and reduced productivity among healthcare staff, which can increase the cost of recruitment, training, and staffing.

In many instances, language services are available, but they are not easily accessible or may be cumbersome to use. A reliable language services provider can improve the accessibility and ease-of-use for interpretation, which can reduce the stress and burnout associated with LEP and DHH patient interactions.

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<sup>12</sup> Chandrika Divi et al., *Language Proficiency and Adverse Events in U.S. Hospitals: A Pilot Study*, 19 *Int’l J. Qual. Health Care* 60 (2007).

<sup>13</sup> Price-Wise, G. (2008) *Language, culture, and medical tragedy: The case of Willie Ramirez*. Available at: <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/forefront.20081119.000463/> (Accessed: April 4, 2023).

## Increase Revenue

While LEP patients make up a minority (8.6%) of the U.S. population, they still account for more than 25 million people. That represents a sizable market for hospitals and healthcare systems that is generally underserved.

When a healthcare organization effectively uses language services to offer better care to LEP and DHH patient populations, there are significant opportunities to increase revenue. The major opportunities to increase revenue using reliable language services include:

### Patient Experience

In regions where the proportion of LEP and DHH patients is particularly high, the use of a qualified medical interpreter can significantly increase Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) scores, which is the primary measure of patient satisfaction.

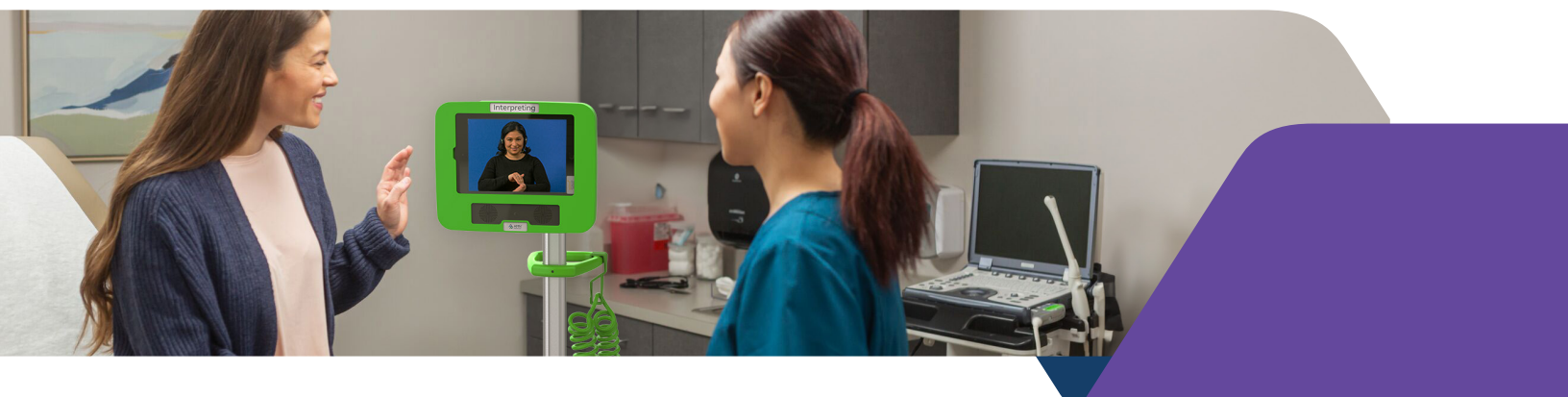
More than half of the HCAHPS survey asks patients to rate specific aspects of communication, including:

- Doctor communication
- Nurse communication
- Staff responsiveness
- Medication communication
- Discharge information

As part of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, acute care hospitals subject to the Inpatient Prospective Payment System (IPPS) must gather and provide HCAHPS data to receive their full IPPS annual payment. If HCAHPS scores are not publicly reported as required, IPPS payments may be reduced. In addition, the Affordable Care Act introduced value-based metrics that tie HCAHPS scores to Medicare reimbursement rates. Providing a better experience for LEP patients can have a direct impact on the payments a hospital receives for its services. To learn more about how LEP patients impact HCAHPS scores, read, **"Boost LEP Patient Satisfaction"**.







## Health Outcomes

To promote overall quality of care for patients, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) instituted multiple incentive-driven programs for healthcare systems. As a result, hospitals are financially incentivized based on the quality of outcomes they report.

The most prominent example is the Hospital Value-Based Purchasing Program (VBP). This program adjusts payments to hospitals based on their performance against several quality measures, including clinical process metrics, patient experience, and outcomes. Hospitals with higher scores receive higher payments, while those with lower scores receive lower payments.

Since reimbursement is tied to quality scores, hospitals that provide high-quality, cost-effective care to LEP and DHH patients can see a direct impact on financial reimbursement for increasing patient satisfaction.

## Patient Adherence

Improving communication between providers and LEP and DHH patients can also help increase revenue by reducing missed appointments and improving adherence to the patient's care plan.

Effective communication builds trust, which is vital in a healthcare setting. The level of confidence that an LEP and DHH patient has in a provider will greatly impact the degree to which they will adhere to a care plan. This can translate to fewer missed appointments – which directly cost healthcare systems more than \$200 billion each year. This is particularly relevant to LEP patients engaged in a long-term treatment plan, such as cancer treatment, that requires regular visits throughout the year.

In addition to reducing missed appointments, improved communication between LEP and DHH patients and healthcare providers can also encourage patients to take a more active role in their own care by scheduling regular well-check visits and preventative care screenings such as colonoscopies and mammograms. These types of LEP and DHH patient visits represent a significant opportunity for increased revenue.

## Patient Loyalty and Referrals

Delivering a positive experience for LEP and DHH patients can impact more than just HCAHPS scores. Leveraged properly, the effective use of language services can also drive patient loyalty and referrals within entire communities and subcultures – resulting in higher patient volumes.

Carla Fogaren, a national consultant on language access and vice president of the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care, has witnessed this effect firsthand during her experience serving as a language access director.

“At one hospital, Brazilian and Haitian LEP patients were moving further south geographically to take advantage of a lower cost of living,” explained Fogaren. “Despite the distance, those same patients would continue to drive more than an hour to receive care at our hospital – all because they knew the interpreters would take care of them and make sure they were treated well.”

This example underscores the value that LEP patients place on effective communication, and how that value can translate to increased revenue.

## Discover Your Path to Value

Let our experienced team serve as your consultative partner to improve language access. Together, we can uncover opportunities to normalize the use of language services across the patient journey, empowering you to deliver high-quality, cost-effective care.

When you partner with [Language Solutions](#), we work as an extension of your care team to deliver:



**Expert Interpreters:** Every [Language Solutions](#) interpreter is a native language speaker who focuses solely on medical interpretation.



**Simple, Secure Technology:** Quickly connect with an interpreter on any device – including smartphones, laptops, and tablets connected to our robust, hospital-grade stand.



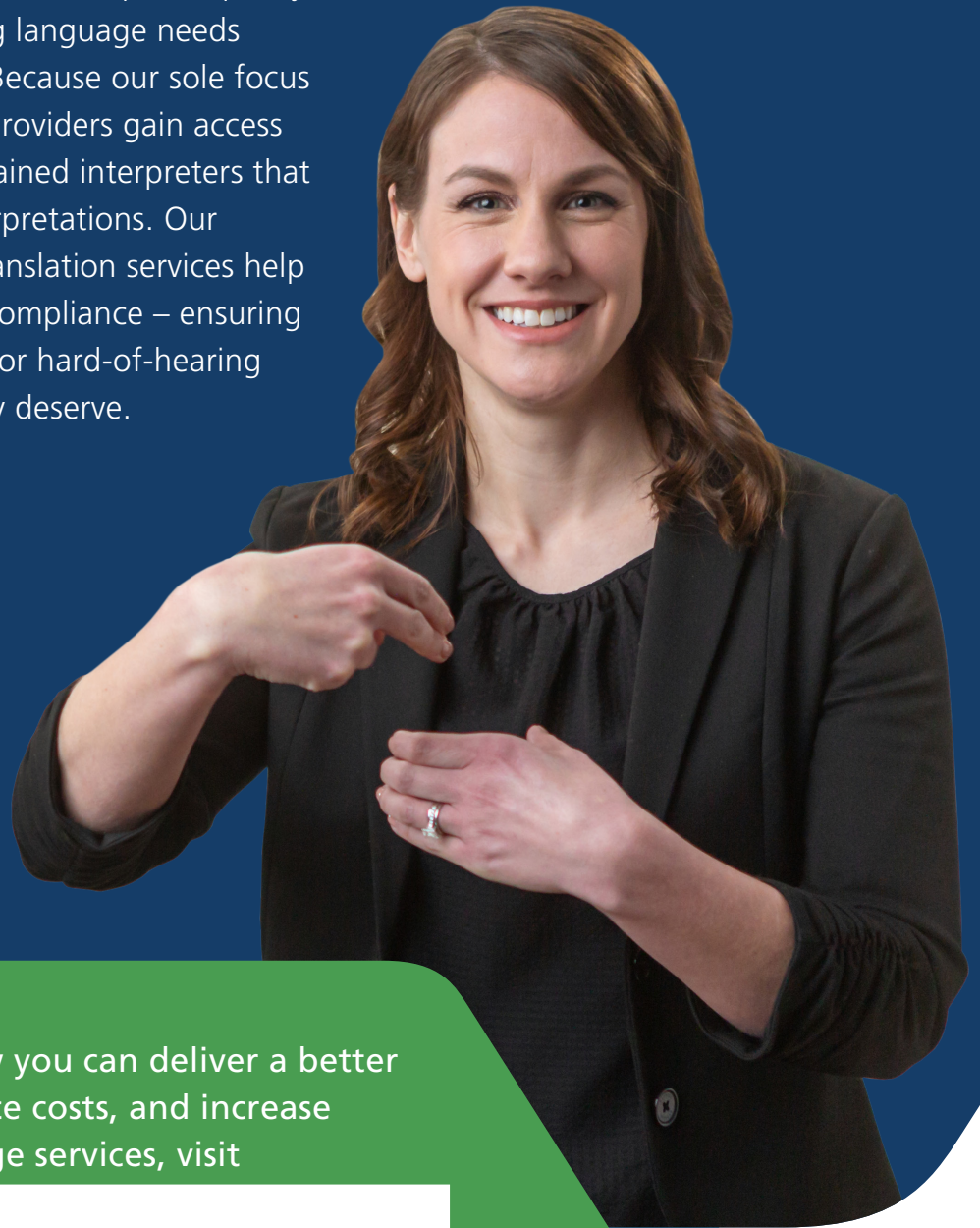
**Seamless Integrations:** Our telehealth and EMR integrations provide instant access to a medical interpreter – making it easy to connect LEP and DHH patients with a medical interpreter, while reducing manual data entry and documentation.



**A Trusted, Strategic Partner:** Leverage the knowledge and expertise of our team to develop strategies that improve patient satisfaction scores and health equity measures.

## About

We help healthcare organizations improve quality and outcomes by addressing language needs across the patient journey. Because our sole focus is healthcare, patients and providers gain access to experienced, medically trained interpreters that deliver timely, accurate interpretations. Our expert interpretation and translation services help improve health equity and compliance – ensuring patients who are LEP, deaf, or hard-of-hearing receive the level of care they deserve.



To learn more about how you can deliver a better patient experience, reduce costs, and increase revenue through language services, visit

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SERVICES**