



New York City Council Hearing

Language Access in Hospitals

Committee on Hospitals

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Good afternoon Chairwoman Narcisse and members of the Committee on Hospitals. I am Ivellesse Mendez-Justiniano, Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer at NYC Health + Hospitals (Health + Hospitals). Language access is an essential component of Health + Hospitals' mission to deliver high quality health care services to all patients, regardless of the language they speak. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you to discuss access to language services and related programs at Health + Hospitals.

Whether a patient is walking through the doors of Health + Hospitals, or logging on for a telehealth appointment, it is our mission to provide personalized health care to all New Yorkers, with no exceptions. When a patient begins their health care journey with Health + Hospitals, they will find language posters and signage informing them that we provide free interpretation services, no matter the facility they walk into. With over 300 languages provided through various means, our staff and providers have access to on-demand phone and video interpretation as well as in-person interpretation for spoken and sign languages at select facilities to ensure each patient receives their personal health care information in their preferred language. In addition, through our Accessible Format Directory, Health + Hospitals provides written translation of critical documents into the top 13 languages spoken by the communities we serve, which include:

- Albanian
- Arabic
- Bangla/Bengali
- Chinese (simplified)
- Chinese (traditional)
- French
- Haitian Creole
- Hindi
- Korean
- Polish
- Russian
- Spanish
- Urdu

In 2024, Health + Hospitals provided 41.2 million minutes of interpretation in 190 different languages and dialects. Of the 41.2 million minutes, roughly 74% was via over-the-phone interpretation and 24% via video remote interpretation. These services are provided 24/7 across the system, both in-person and digitally, and through on-site interpreters at select facilities. In addition to these interpreter services, Health + Hospitals also works with vendors to translate After Visit Summaries (AVS) generated by our Epic system as well as pharmacy labels and instructions.

Health + Hospitals strives to be a fully integrated, equitable health system that meets New Yorkers where they are. As part of this commitment, interpretation services are integrated into our telehealth platforms providing immediate access to Over-the-Phone Interpretation and Video Remote Interpretation services during virtual consultations. Patients can also customize their MyChart patient portals in their preferred language.

To support effective communication with patients with Limited English Proficiency, Health + Hospitals has updated its System New Employee Orientation training modules, to include interpretation guidance and regulatory updates aligned with Section 1557 of the ACA. In addition, we have conducted a system-wide language proficiency assessment and require a 40-hour interpreter training for multilingual staff involved in patient care to ensure safe and effective communication. Health + Hospitals works closely with its vendors to ensure interpreter accreditations are up to date, and that those hired are meeting the standards of care necessary for medical interpretation.

NYC Health + Hospitals remains committed to advancing health equity through a robust language access infrastructure to support New York City's diverse populations. We recognize that clear communication is foundational to delivering high-quality health care. This means creating an environment where patients can seek care without fear, feel understood across languages and cultures,

and navigate medical information with clarity. We will continue to strengthen our language services to meet patient needs, uphold legal standards, and reflect best practices.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today on this critical topic. I'm happy to answer any questions.