



THE OPA INSIDER

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MESSAGE FROM THE PATIENT ADVOCATE

It's that time of year when many of us are getting reminders from our health provider to come in for a flu shot. Taking preventative steps to stay healthy is important. Sadly however, there are many people who will avoid or delay seeing their doctor. While there are many reasons why, a language barrier should not be one of the reasons. For limited or non-English speaking people, a trip to the doctor can be a stressful event. California has required health plans to provide language services for over a decade. Yet, many consumers are not aware that interpreter assistance is freely available at hospitals and through most health plans.

More than ten years ago California put protections in place to improve access to care for those who need language assistance. In this edition learn more about this patient right and what resources are available. You'll also find an interview with one of our important vendors whose services allow OPA to provide accurate translations of our [Health Care Quality Report Cards](#) and other materials.

All of us at OPA wish you a happy and healthy holiday.

LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE IN HEALTH CARE BREAKING BARRIERS FOR HEALTHY OUTCOMES

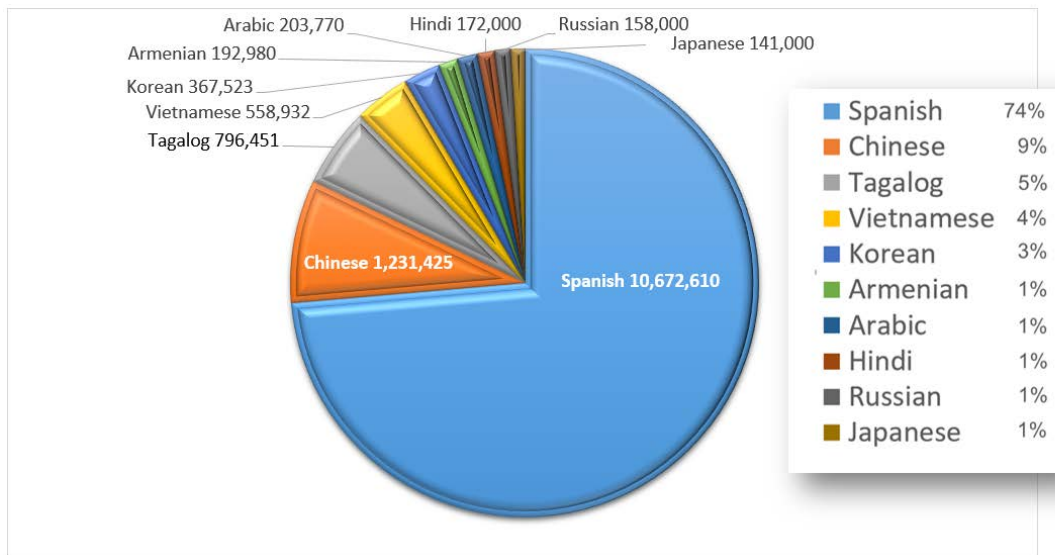
California prides itself upon the diversity of its residents. With that diversity comes a multitude of languages, such as Spanish and Chinese, which are the most spoken languages behind English. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2017, 44 percent of California residents, five years of age and older, do not speak English at home. Another 18.6% of Californians don't speak English "very well". In 2014, the California Department of Health Care Services reported that 40 percent of Medi-Cal beneficiaries statewide reported a language other than English as their primary language. With that in mind, there is a large population that, when seeking medical care, requires language assistance through translation or interpretation services.

OUR MISSION

To improve California health care quality and advocate for consumer interest by publicly reporting data for informed decision making.

CORE VALUES:

- Transparency
- Consumer – Oriented
- High Quality Information



*Number of Californians Who Identify Primary Language Spoken Other Than English
From WorldAtlas, March 22, 2019*

Though many non-English speaking people use bilingual family members or friends as their interpreters, there is a risk that these interpreters may not accurately translate medical terminology, symptoms or conditions which may result in interpreter caused medical errors. It is important that language assistance is available from a qualified medical language interpreter. According to the Journal for Healthcare Quality’s article titled Improving Patient Safety Systems for Limited English Proficient Patients, three common causes for medical errors attributed to insufficient patient language proficiency are:

- Use of family member, friends or non-qualified staff as interpreters
- Clinicians with basic foreign language skill who try to communicate without using qualified interpreters
- Cultural beliefs and traditions that effect health care delivery.

With these issue in mind, it’s imperative that qualified medical interpreters are available for the patients’ use.

Passed in 2003, Senate Bill 853, the Health Care Language Assistance Act, came into law. The Senate Bill, sponsored by health care advocates California Pan-Ethnic Health Network (CPEHN), requires health plans and health insurers to provide their enrollees with language services which include interpreter services and translated materials such as benefit handbooks and after-care instructions and forms such as intake or consent forms. SB 853 requires health plans to:

- Provide quality, accessible, and timely access to interpreters at all points of contact at no cost to the enrollee
- Translate vital documents into threshold languages
- Ensure interpreters are trained and competent, and that translated materials are of high quality
- Notify their enrollees of the availability of no cost interpreter and translation services
- Train staff on language access policies and procedures, as well as how to work with interpreters and limited English speaking patients.

A limitation to the rights provided by SB 853 is that it does not apply to all California residents nor do they apply to all languages.

One caveat of SB 853 requires health plans and insurers to collect data on race, ethnicity and language. This data is vital when addressing health care inequities. The collected data, including complaint data, is forwarded to California's Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC). In addition to collecting vital statistics, DMHC monitors health plans and insurers' language assistance plans and efforts for compliance with language assistance laws.

In an effort to bridge language barriers in California's public health agencies, California State departments and offices have developed their own language assistance plans to assist limited English speaking consumers seeking health care services. For example, DMHC's language assistance plan provides services to resolve health plan and care complaints in a multitude of California's threshold languages.

The Office of the Patient Advocate (OPA) recognizes the need for language assistance when providing health plan and medical group information to all California consumers as they search for quality of health care information when choosing or comparing health plans and medical groups. OPA's language assistance plan includes:

- Providing translation of OPA's website pages through Google translation services in over 100 languages
- Translating its annual Report Card pages into Spanish through a translation services company to ensure accuracy of medical language and terminology
- Helping people understand their rights regarding language services by publishing enrollees rights on OPA's website Know Your Rights page
- Directing website visitors to proper language assistance resources such as the Department of Managed Health Care. DMHC's language assistance page, <https://www.dmhc.ca.gov/HealthCareinCalifornia/YourHealthCareRights/LanguageAssistance.aspx>, which informs enrollees of their rights, provides translated forms, and advises on how to ask for language assistance before doctors or hospital visits
- Providing accessible compliant content on its' website which meets ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards.

Additionally, OPA provides language statistics in its annual Health Care Complaint Data Report collected from Covered California, Department of Managed Health Care, Department of Health Care Services and California Department of Insurance. Born from a legislative mandate to provide a standardized and consolidated complaint report, OPA's annual Health Care Complaint Data Report provides demographic statistics including how many health care complaints were made in languages other than English. In 2017, the data showed that 2,004 complaints, roughly four percent of all complaints, were made in Spanish. Another 1,188 complaints were made in languages other than English. To read more about California health plan and care complaint data, go to OPA's complaint reports at <https://www.opa.ca.gov/ComplaintsReports/Pages/AnnualComplaintReports.aspx>.

There is always room for improvement when it comes to the access to language assistance, but with full compliance by health plans and providers, and culture advocacy groups advising their clients of their rights to language assistance, the best care can be given to non-English speaking patients for healthier outcomes.

OPA PARTNER INSIGHT

Avantpage is a translation service provider with a goal of delivering quality translation and interpretation service to clients in the healthcare, government and education sectors. With the capability to translate over 150 languages, Avantpage connects people and cultures through a mutual understanding.

In OPA's outreach efforts of providing health data information to California health care consumers, we find their work invaluable in reaching those with limited English proficiency. For the past three years, Avantpage has translated our annual Report Cards on our website www.opa.ca.gov into Spanish, the second most spoken language in California. OPA has at times required translations in Chinese. While we haven't recently had the need, we have full confidence that Avantpage could effectively meet this language service need.

We had a chance to sit down and speak to Avantpage representative, Director of Business Development Joanna Oseman and asked her a few questions about working with OPA and how their services benefit California health care.

What types of material do you translate for the health care sector?

This varies a lot depending on the type of organization, but we do see patterns in the types of requests we receive from our healthcare partners. Just like with OPA, our linguistic teams often work on translating web content, in tandem with our specialist localization team. Then more broadly speaking, our government health agency partners send a lot of forms for translation, as well as outreach materials such as brochures, handouts, etc. Avantpage also works with a number of health plans at the state and national level, and for these partners we translate individual member correspondence, as well as large volume documents such as Annual Notices of Change, EOCs (Evidence of Coverage), and provider directories.

What are the challenges of interpreting medical terminology and how do you overcome these challenges?

Medical terminology is obviously very specific, and we understand that the work we do has a very direct impact on the limited English speaking communities served by OPA and other groups we work with. We see this as a great responsibility and take the need for accuracy very seriously. Our Provider Network team leads the recruitment and training of the best linguists for our clients' specific needs, which we see as the first important step in quality assurance. We have core groups of linguists (translators, editors, and proofreaders), who go through a rigorous hiring process and must demonstrate experience in the medical field before joining Avantpage. Translations always go through multiple rounds of QA, and we combine our human expertise with state of the art translation technologies. This means using client glossaries wherever possible, as well as translation memory, which is a client-specific database that stores all previous translations. These tools help ensure consistency as well as accuracy.

What are the challenges when translating health care data and how do you ensure accurate translations?

Ensuring that our linguists are qualified and experienced, and providing them with the resources they need to fully understand the data is key - just as it is for the medical terminology discussed in the last question. Thinking about OPA's healthcare data specifically, I'd say that one of the challenges on your end is ensuring that translations are consistent year after year. While data changes, the core language presenting it is often the same or very similar. It would be problematic, both from a quality and budget standpoint, to start translations from scratch each year. You would end up with different ways of saying the same thing, and this can negatively affect the consumer experience. The fact that we've worked with OPA for so long, and that we

have built up a substantial translation memory for the Report Cards, allows Avantpage to overcome this challenge and provide consistent and accurate translation.

How does Avantpage use their expertise to help consumers understand health care quality information?

From a linguistic standpoint, our quality control and quality assurance processes are essential to ensure that the information made available to consumers is accurate, accessible, and culturally appropriate. But we believe that the partnerships we build with our clients is a vital part of this as well. Our Project and Account Managers work closely with client teams requesting translations, ensuring that we get as full a picture as possible of the audiences you're trying to reach. This understanding allows us to direct our linguists to translate using the appropriate tone, to use plain language as needed, and to tweak translations to the regional language variances required by some communities.

What would you say is the biggest issue facing Californians who require language assistance when it comes to their medical care?

While translation is widely available these days, I think there are still challenges related to providing top quality translations across the board. Many health plans and government agencies do prioritize translation, but not all organizations prioritize it enough to set aside adequate budgets and resources to work with qualified teams. There's a lot of machine translation being used to translate health information, for example. While this technology is rapidly evolving, the accuracy of these tools isn't there yet when it comes to important and sensitive content such as health information. We love working with OPA because we see how much you value translation itself, as well as the relationship with your translation provider. We see you constantly analyzing and tweaking the way in which you represent information to all consumers using your services, regardless of their background, and we're delighted to be part of this process.

OPA appreciates Avantpage's translation services as we strive to overcome language barriers in order to provide reliable health care data to all California health care consumers and advocates.

OPA's Avantpage Team



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NEW RELEASE: 2019-20 HEALTH CARE QUALITY REPORT CARDS

The California Office of the Patient Advocate (OPA) is pleased to announce the public release of the 2019-20 Edition Report Cards for Health Plans and Medical Groups - Commercial.

The Health Plan Report Card provides ratings on the 10 largest HMOs and 6 largest PPOs in California. The Medical Group Report Card for Commercial HMO Plan Member provides ratings for 197 medical groups from 39 different counties in California.

The latest Health Plan ratings can be found at https://reportcard.opa.ca.gov/rc/HMO_PPOCombined.aspx.

The latest Medical Group - Commercial ratings can be found at <https://reportcard.opa.ca.gov/rc/medicalgroupcounty.aspx>

To view other health care ratings, visit <https://www.opa.ca.gov/reportcards/Pages/default.aspx>.

Watch for OPA's 2019-20 Medical Group - Medicare Report Cards release in Spring 2020.

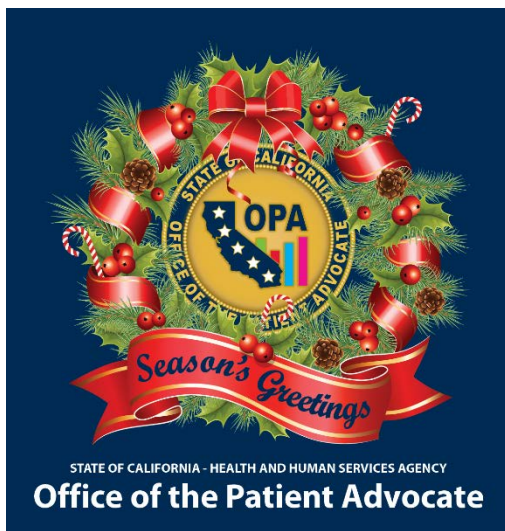
COMING SOON

The Plan Compare Tool

OPA is developing a new filter which allows website visitors to sort health plans and medical groups by ratings, counties, health plans and medical groups, and topics. This way, the consumer can focus on the medical issues which matter most to them when comparing medical groups and health plans. This feature will be available in 2020.

A new post on OPA's *Health Matters* Blog

OPA's *Health Matters* blog features a wide variety of health care topics that affect many Californians such as diabetes, heart care, and maternity care. Future posts will provide valuable information on topical issues such as vaping, timely access to care, and social determinants of health. OPA offers insight on these topics through our own report card ratings linked to every post. Visit OPA's *Health Matters* blog at <https://www.opa.ca.gov/Pages/BlogOPAHealthMatters.aspx>.



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