



# Health Care Change in California: What It Means to You **YOUR RIGHT TO AN INTERPRETER**



California health care laws protect your right to a medical interpreter.

## ► **The right to an interpreter each time you get health care:**

- You have a right to a medical interpreter when you see your doctor or a specialist.
- You also have the right to an interpreter when you talk with your child's doctor.
- Ask for an interpreter when you get any kind of services, such as lab tests, screenings, or counseling.
- Ask for an interpreter when you call to make an appointment.
- Interpreter services may be provided in-person or by phone- or video-conferencing.
- Health plans cannot charge you for the interpreter services.
- Hospitals must have interpreters available 24 hours a day.

## ► **What is a medical interpreter?**

- A medical interpreter speaks your language and English.
- Medical interpreters are trained to interpret health information accurately.
- Medical interpreters are required, by law, to keep your information private.



When your child is sick, you need to understand her care. When Mariana called her daughter's doctor, she asked for an interpreter.

## ► **The right to written information in your own language:**

Health plans must provide written materials in many languages. These materials include:

- Plan policies and contracts.
- Notices about changes to your plan.
- Letters saying the plan will not cover a service you want (denial letters).
- Complaint and appeal forms to use if you have a problem with your plan.

If written materials are not available in your language, ask for an interpreter to help.

## ► **The right to an interpreter if you are deaf or hard of hearing:**

You have the right to a sign language interpreter. California law and the federal Americans with Disabilities Act protect this right.



### **Do Medi-Cal and Medicare provide interpreters?**

Yes. Health plans and providers in Medicare and Medi-Cal must provide interpreters. Medi-Cal provides information in 13 languages.

### **Do all health plans have to provide interpreters?**

Most health plans have to provide interpreters. Self-insured plans do not. If you work for a large employer, ask if your plan is self-insured.

### **Can I ask a family member to interpret for me?**

You can have a relative or friend with you for support, but you can also have an interpreter. The friend or relative may not interpret correctly and you may want your care to be private. Do not use a child to interpret.

### **I was asked to sign a form, but I couldn't read it. What should I do?**

Ask for the form in your language. Or ask for an interpreter to help.



### **Ask your health plan.**

- Ask your health plan to put your interpreter request in your file.
- Ask for a list of doctors who speak your language.
- Ask for clinics that have office and nursing staff who speak your language.

### **Ask each doctor's office.**

- Ask your doctor to put your interpreter request in your chart.
- Ask for an interpreter when you make your appointments.
- Ask for information written in your language, such as consent forms and papers that tell you how to prepare for a medical test or surgery.

### **Ask your pharmacy.**

- Ask for information in your language. Some pharmacies can provide this.
- Ask the pharmacy to put your language request in your file.

**Go to [OPA.ca.gov](http://OPA.ca.gov) to watch a video on your right to an interpreter.**

## **Consumer Assistance Program**

Free help in many languages

**1-888-466-2219**  
**HealthHelp.ca.gov**

