

Overcoming language barriers

How preferred-language communication improves care and the patient experience



Clear patient-provider communication is essential to effective care delivery. But most healthcare organizations serve diverse populations—and if patients can't communicate with providers in their language of preference, it could jeopardize their safety, care quality and health outcomes over the long term.

Read on to see the disproportionate risks faced by patients with limited English proficiency—and discover four ways your organization can benefit by communicating with patients in their preferred language.

Millions of people in the U.S. have limited English proficiency (LEP)



1 in 5

speak a language other than English at home¹



>25 million

say they speak English less than "very well"¹

But most practicing physicians are not fluent in any languages other than English,² which can hinder their ability to engage with patients who have LEP.



When patients can't communicate in their preferred language, **their health outcomes may suffer.**

Compared to English-proficient patients, patients who have LEP are more likely to report:



Difficulty understanding a medical situation³



Trouble understanding medication labels³



Adverse medication reactions³



Adverse health events resulting in physical harm⁴



In addition to poorer health outcomes, language barriers have been shown to adversely affect:

- Access to care⁵
- Healthcare quality⁶
- Resource utilization⁷
- Follow-up visit rates⁸
- Patient safety⁹

No doubt, language barriers place undue burdens on patient care. But how can providers combat them?

Invest in technology that bridges the communication gap.

By implementing a digital intake solution that supports multiple languages, healthcare organizations can provide more inclusive care and equip all patients with the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to take an active role in their health.

Here are **four benefits** of communicating with patients in their language of preference:



Less room for error.

When providers and patients communicate through an ad-hoc interpreter, such as a friend, family member or an unqualified multilingual staff member, the risks of negative clinical consequences rise.¹⁰ By using a multi-language intake platform, healthcare organizations can gather vital health data directly from patients—including their demographics, contact information, medical history and social risks—to avoid miscommunication and minimize potential clinical errors.

Stronger regulatory compliance.

Under the Affordable Care Act, healthcare providers are required to provide "meaningful access" to language-assistance services to patients who have LEP.¹¹ Multi-language intake tools can help healthcare organizations meet that objective, adhere to federal nondiscrimination standards and ensure that patients of all backgrounds can access the inclusive, holistic care they need.

Greater staff productivity.

Administrative staff often bear the responsibility of translating for patients who have LEP, especially if a patient's family members aren't available. Preferred-language intake tools enable patients to communicate without an interpreter, which frees up staff to focus on more complex tasks and helps to prevent burnout.

Better patient experiences.

When patients have trouble engaging with their providers, they're more likely to feel judged, vulnerable, disrespected and powerless about their care.¹² By giving patients the ability to communicate in their language of preference, providers can create a more nurturing environment that improves the quality of patients' visits—and in turn, their satisfaction with their healthcare experience.

Ready to overcome language barriers and meet patients where they are? Visit phreesia.com to learn how we can help.

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