

High-Quality Language Access Matters for Better Health Care



Community Leading the Way

Refugee Community Partnership (RCP) is an immigrant and refugee-led mutual aid network in North Carolina. To improve language access in health care, RCP set out to gain a better understanding of how patients with limited English proficiency navigate health care in their local communities.

Through forums, interviews, and post-appointment surveys, **community members shared what worked well for them when accessing health care and language services and what they found challenging.**

To gain an understanding of the broader policy landscape, the research team also reviewed language access policies of area health systems and those of the state and the federal government.



What Did This Research Reveal?

High-quality interpretation was not guaranteed and was often not present during all parts of a health care interaction. Other patient communications, such as appointment reminders and summaries, are rarely, if ever, translated. Additionally, dental health services often do not provide interpretation at all.



Participants shared their struggles to understand medical instructions when the interpretation was unclear or unavailable. **Some did not fully understand their diagnosis or treatment, eroding trust in their care. Others had difficulty accessing insurance or financial assistance.**

Why Do These Findings Matter?



Language barriers can make health care confusing and slower, and **miscommunication can lead to serious health consequences**, such as providers misdiagnosing a health condition or patients misunderstanding medication instructions, e.g., taking a pill three times a day vs once every three days.

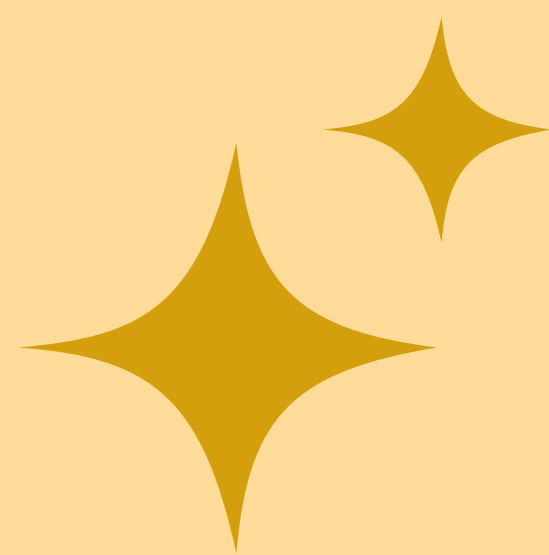
Better language support and good interpretation are important for quality care because they **help patients understand their health information, stay safe, and feel more supported.**





How the Research is Shaping the Future

By documenting the community's needs and experiences, Refugee Community Partnership was able to share evidence and recommendations with health care systems and providers, supporting efforts to improve interpretation services, while also empowering community members to share their voices.



Local hospitals and clinics have started reaching out to Refugee Community Partnership for information and training on how to provide better language access to communities.

RCP has been working with the Family Medicine Department at an area health system to improve language access across clinic operations - from staff and medical student training to interpretation equipment and check-in kiosks. RCP has also been working with another health system to provide language justice training to their Emergency Medicine Department.



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“I’m so very proud of the community members. They were able to participate, break their silence, and feel confident expressing themselves and the barriers we’ve been facing. And we were able to take those voices and affect change.”

— *Community research team member*



Learn More

AcademyHealth supports community-led researchers producing evidence for community-driven solutions. Learn more about all Community Research for Health Equity grantees at:

www.academyhealth.org/CRHE