



LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES: GUIDE FOR PROVIDERS

Language access services include interpretation and translation for people with limited English proficiency and communication services for individuals who are blind or have low vision and/or are Deaf or hard of hearing.

Training staff to properly access and use interpretation services reduces the risk of miscommunication, builds trust and engagement with consumers, and supports informed consent.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

What is LEP?

People with LEP do not speak, read, write, or understand English well.

What are behavioral health providers required to do for people with LEP?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office for Civil Rights ensures that people have equal access and opportunity to participate in HHS-funded programs.¹ Providers are required to offer language access services free of charge to people with LEP.²

Blind, Low Vision, Deaf and/or Hard of Hearing

What services are available for people who are blind or have low vision and/or are Deaf or hard of hearing?

The Americans with Disabilities Act requires providers to communicate effectively with people who have communication disabilities, including those who are blind or have low vision and/or are Deaf or hard of hearing. This includes using auxiliary aids and services.³

What are auxiliary aids and services?

For people who are blind or have low vision, auxiliary aids may include services such as a

¹ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office for Civil Rights. (2025, July 18). *Limited English Proficiency (LEP)*. HHS.gov. <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/limited-english-proficiency/index.html#lep-resources>. Accessed October 24, 2025.

² U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office for Civil Rights. *Know Your Rights Language Access in Health and Human Services*. HHS.gov. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/hhs-ocr-language-access-know-rights-english.pdf>. Accessed November 3, 2025.

³ U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. (2020, February 28). *ADA Requirements: Effective Communication*. ADA.gov. <https://www.ada.gov/resources/effective-communication/>. Accessed November 4, 2025.



qualified reader;⁴ information in large print, Braille, or electronically for use with a computer screen-reading program; or an audio recording of printed information.

For people who are Deaf or have hearing loss, auxiliary aids may include services such as a qualified interpreter,⁵ real-time captioning, or written materials.

What interpretation services does BHSB offer for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing?

Gateway Maryland, formerly HASA, is a nonprofit organization that provides specialized language and communication services for children and adults who are Deaf, Deaf-blind, hard of hearing, late-deafened, or have other communication-related disabilities. A deep understanding of Deaf culture and the nuanced variations of sign language enables Gateway Maryland to deliver these services effectively and respectfully.

With funding from BHSB, Gateway Maryland provides interpretation services to ensure low-barrier access to mental health (MH) and co-occurring mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) treatment services. Services include:

- American Sign Language (ASL)
- Visual Language Interpretation (VLI)
- Tactile interpreting
- Cued speech transliteration
- Signed Exact English (SEE)
- Pidgin Signed English (PSE)
- Interpreting for Deaf-blind - which often requires specialized skills to communicate through touch or other visual cues depending on the level of vision impairment

To access these services, please complete the [BHSB Gateway Referral Form](#).

Other Resources

- The 988 Helpline provides emotional support services. Callers should press 2 to be connected to services in Spanish. Individuals who call from a videophone will be connected to a counselor who communicates in American Sign Language. All other callers with language needs should stay on the line and ask for an interpreter.
- Maryland Department of Health, Office of Equal Opportunity Programs, [Interpretation and Translation Services](#)
- [Governor's Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)

⁴ Someone who can read effectively, accurately, and impartially using any necessary specialized vocabulary.

⁵ Someone who can interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, both receptively (i.e., understanding what the person with the disability is saying) and expressively (i.e., having the skill needed to convey information back to that person) using any necessary specialized vocabulary.