



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
Department of Public Health  
250 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108-4619

DEVAL L. PATRICK  
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

JUDYANN BIGBY, MD  
SECRETARY

JOHN AUERBACH  
COMMISSIONER

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
May 6, 2010

**FURTHER INFORMATION:**  
Jordan Coriza (617) 624-6063

**PATRICK – MURRAY ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES NEW CAMPAIGN TO  
ENCOURAGE USE OF MEDICAL INTERPRETERS AT HOSPITALS**

*Campaign addresses language barriers, health disparities and patient safety of non-English speaking individuals*

**BOSTON**— The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today launched *You Have the Right to an Interpreter*, a public awareness campaign aimed at promoting medical interpreter use among Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals seeking emergency medical care. The centerpiece of the campaign is a public service announcement informing residents that hospital emergency departments in Massachusetts are legally required to provide medical interpreter services upon patient request by relating the story of a patient who suffers an injury but does not seek emergency care due to her inability to speak English.

“One out of every five residents in the Commonwealth speaks a language other than English at home. Of these, more than forty percent speak English at a very basic level,” said Secretary of Health and Human Services Dr. JudyAnn Bigby. “Access to health information in the patient’s preferred language is a fundamental component for a successful doctor-patient relationship. This campaign reflects our continuing efforts to eliminate health disparities for all residents.”

*You Have the Right to an Interpreter* has been produced in the languages most commonly requested by Massachusetts hospital emergency departments, including Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese, Arabic and Russian. Campaign materials will be provided free of charge to multilingual media outlets and community-based organizations across the state.

The objective of the campaign is educating linguistically diverse communities about resources available to support communication during a medical encounter by:

- Encouraging patients who are LEP to ask for a medical interpreter
- Supporting patient autonomy and confidentiality
- Decreasing medical errors related to the use of untrained or lay interpreters
- Increasing positive health outcomes through direct patient to provider communication

Medical interpreters play critical roles in both language message rendering and brokering cultural issues that arise between provider and patient. Use of medial interpreters has also been shown to improve patient compliance and satisfaction rates by decreasing missed opportunities caused by language discordance. Medical interpretation is free of charge and made available through either on-site interpreters or via telephone or video connections.

“We know that inaccurate communication is all too often the root cause of adverse health outcomes,” said DPH Commissioner John Auerbach. “Residents need to know that medical interpreter assistance is available in the hospital emergency department, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.”

The Department of Public Health supports health services access by:

- Supporting hospitals in translation of vital documents, instituting interpretation policies
- Recommending guidelines for the continued integration of interpreters and compliance with the Emergency Room Interpreter Law (ERIL)
- Providing health servicing agencies with resources necessary for working with diverse audiences, and technical assistance through Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS)

“This campaign is going to reach those that need it the most, minority patients who simply are not aware of their right to access to health care in their language,” stated International Medical Interpreters Association’s President, Izabel Arocha. “Massachusetts leads the country in the number of professional medical interpreters hired by hospitals. Access is prevention.”

To listen to the recordings, please visit [www.mass.gov/dph/healthequity](http://www.mass.gov/dph/healthequity) and click on “Interpreter Services.”

-###-