

LANGUAGE ACCESS

What are your rights?

This brochure is for people who have trouble reading, writing, understanding, or speaking English.

What does it mean to be Limited English Proficient, or LEP?

You might be LEP if you have trouble reading, writing, understanding, or speaking English. It is not easy for LEP people to talk in English with doctors, nurses, attorneys, judges, social workers, and other people. If you do not know English very well, you may not get the services you need. Sometimes, you might even get care or services based on the wrong information.

If I am an LEP person, do I have any special rights?

Yes. There is a law called Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (Title 6) that gives LEP people some special rights. This law says that certain agencies that get money from the federal government have to follow certain rules. These agencies must make sure that you can use their programs and services by having language services. If you cannot get benefits or services from one of these agencies because you are LEP, it could be a form of discrimination. Discrimination is when you are treated differently or badly because of the color of your skin or where you are from or because you have an accent.

3. What do these agencies have to do for me?

These agencies have to do their best to do three main things for LEP persons:

1. Provide free interpreters. These interpreters must have special skills in helping you talk to someone who speaks only in English;
2. Translate all important forms into your language, such as making an application in English into an application in Spanish; and

3. Make sure that you know that you can get interpreters and translated materials. This is done by having signs and telling the community about language access.

4. Who must follow Title VI?

Any agency that gets money from the federal government must follow this law. These are groups like the police; state agencies like Department of Social Services, Department of Health & Human Services, and Department of Disabilities and Special Needs; Legal Services; hospitals; nursing homes; schools; and domestic violence shelters. These groups cannot treat people differently based on where they are from or the color of their skin.

5. What should I do if an agency will not give me language services?

First, try to tell them what they should do to follow Title VI. If a caseworker or employee will not listen, ask to talk to his/her boss. If the agency still will not listen, call the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) at 1-888-TITLE-06 (1-888-848-5306) to make a complaint. OCR is the agency that deals with complaints about discrimination.

6. Can I use a family member or friend as an interpreter?

Yes. If you want to use family members/friends to interpret, you can. You should be very careful though. Family members/friends may not have the special skills they need to be a good interpreter. For example:

- They may not understand all the special words used in a certain area, like medical or legal words;
- You may not want your friends and family to know about your private health or legal problems; or
- Friends and family might be shy about telling you certain things or might be scared to tell you exactly what is being said.

You should be especially careful about using children as interpreters.

If you want a family member or friends as your interpreter, the agency should still offer the free interpreter. They should also make sure the family member or friend has the special skills that they need to be a good interpreter.