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NIH/ORS/DATS

Sign Language Interpreting Services

Consumer Guide



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Introduction

As the nation's largest employer, the Federal government is committed to increasing and improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities and removing barriers that impede communication or deny equal access. Title 5 USC, Section 3102 authorizes Federal agencies to employ or assign others to provide communication services for employees who request a reasonable accommodation.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH), an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services is proud of its diverse workforce and strives to be inclusive of everyone. Toward that end, NIH provides centrally funded sign language interpreting services to its Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) employees, job applicants, patients, and visitors.

The Office of Research Services (ORS), Division of Amenities and Transportation Services (DATS) administers this program and developed this Consumer Guide. Please email us at InterpretingServices@ors.od.nih.gov or visit our [webpage](#).

We hope you find this Consumer Guide useful and we look forward to working with you.

Linda Kiefer
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NIH/ORS/DATS

NIH Interpreting Services Policy

In accordance with the Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), NIH provides sign language interpreting services to its workforce, job applicants, patients, and visitors, as a reasonable accommodation (Ref. [Manual 2204 Sections J and G](#)). These services are centrally funded to ensure that the Deaf and Hard of Hearing have equal access to the same benefits and privileges as the Hearing. Consumers pay nothing to receive services.

Services are provided under a performance based contract and include: American Sign Language interpreters (basic and scientific), Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), and Video Remote Interpreting (VRI).

How to Request Services

Sign language interpreting services are provided to NIH under a single contract with Access Interpreting.

Follow these steps to enter a request:

1. First-time users* create a user-profile by logging into the secure [Access Portal](#) and follow the prompts.
2. New requests for self or on behalf of others can be entered, edited or cancelled in the [Access Portal](#) or from any mobile device in the **uSked mobile app**. Download free from [iTunes](#) and [Google Play](#).
3. Fill in all required fields, specify personal preferences or special instructions for interpreters, upload flyers or other materials about your event.
4. Submit your request into the workflow or save it as a draft to finish up later.
5. Once submitted, you will receive a confirmation email with a unique job number.
6. For general technical support email support@ainterpreting.com. For VRI (AVIA) technical support email nih@ainterpreting.com

**Requires an active NIH email account for security purposes.*

Helpful Reminders

Enter requests as early as possible to ensure delivery of desired services. **NOTE:** *Requests made less than five (5) days before the scheduled event may not be filled as requested or may require your event to be rescheduled.*

PRIORITY scheduling is given to patients and their families. While we appreciate advanced notice when possible, we will fill requests for patients and their families first and [services are available to patients and families 24/7](#). See [Guidance for Clinical Staff](#).

Cancel existing requests as soon as possible to conserve federal resources. **NOTE:** *Cancellations made less than 48 hours from the event will be billed in full to NIH.* If you need help cancelling or changing your request, reach out to the scheduling team at coordination@deafaccess.com.

Recurring requests are entered the same way as one-time requests; remember to leave instructions to indicate the frequency, time, and location.

Fulltime Interpreters: Requests for interpreting services on a continuous basis for individual employees will be handled on a case-by-case consideration through the NIH Reasonable Accommodation process.

Provide your interpreter with links to your meeting agenda, handouts, slides or other meeting related materials, whenever possible.

Email confirmation will be sent after your request has been submitted. It will include the name of your interpreter and a unique job number. *NOTE: In some cases, interpreters may change due to last minute rescheduling.*

Making Urgent or After Hours Requests

Normal business hours are **6:30 AM – 6:30 PM, Monday – Friday** except *Federal holidays*.

On-call interpreters will be dispatched in emergency situations* to provide services outside of normal business hours.

Call 571-730-4330 (after hours only) to reach AI's emergency coordinator 24/7, who will take all the necessary information and dispatch a certified interpreter to arrive within 40 minutes.

**Defined as urgent/ critical issues between supervisors and employees, doctors and patients, involving Occupational Medical Services (OMS), Employee Assistance Program (EAP), police/fire/rescue, etc.*

Tips for Event Organizers, Speakers, Meeting Chairs, and Clinical Staff

Guidance for Planning Events

[NIH policy 2206](#)

Open/Public Events Policy: In accordance with [NIH Policy 2204](#) Sections J and G, sign language interpreting services are available UPON REQUEST for all events at NIH. In general, event organizers should wait for one or more D/HH people to confirm attendance before requesting services. Scheduled interpreters should be dismissed if no one needing services shows up within 15 minutes after the event begins. **NOTE:** *Unused services are billable to NIH; so we ask that you please CANCEL the request if no one requiring services confirms attendance within 48 hours.*

Announcements must include the following language:

Interpreting services are available upon request. Individuals who need sign language interpreting and/or other reasonable accommodations to participate in this event, should contact NAMEXXX, PHONEXXXX o the Federal Relay XXXX...Requests should be made five days in advance of the event.

Multimedia Requirements: If multi-media will be used for the event confirm with Events Management that a CLOSED CAPTION version is available. NIH policy requires all video media used be 508 compliant and Closed Caption.

Seating and Lighting: Consider where D/HH persons may be seated in the room. Check the lighting to ensure that the interpreter can be easily seen by the D/HH participants and arrange for additional lighting on the interpreter if the room will be darkened for any reason. While no one can dictate where they sit, provide the interpreter with a chair.

Tips for Speakers:

Speak in a conversational tone and pace using everyday speech patterns. Avoid over enunciating or over simplifying words. Pause at the end of a main idea. Remember the interpreter's role is to facilitate communication, not to participate in the meeting. DO NOT talk to the interpreter while he/she is working. Keep in mind that interpreters interpret everything heard and seen within the room; so if you don't want something interpreted don't say or sign it.

Tips for Meeting Chairs: Encourage participants to speak one at a time and refrain from engaging in side conversations. This will minimize distraction and make it easier for the interpreter to accurately facilitate communication. Speak directly to the D/HH person, not the interpreter.

Guidance for Clinical Staff

Patients and Families: Priority is given to patients and their families. Requestors should identify the patient or accompanying family member by name requiring services to participate in a consultation or medical procedure with a description for the interpreter to be assigned. **NOTE:** According to <https://clinicalcenter.nih.gov/participate/pdf/NIH-2753.pdf>, there are certain statutory exceptions that do not require prior approval to release patient PII to contractors providing a service to patients (see #9 listed).

Clinical Trials that requires extensive and ongoing interpreting services should factor in the cost of these services in the study budget before the trial begins. The sponsoring IC is encouraged to consult with the [Interpreting Services program office](#) to discuss this arrangement prior to requesting services for trial participants.

Tips for Supervisors

Personal Preferences: This contract offers multiple communication services to the Deaf and hard of hearing to ensure everyone's needs can be accommodated: ASL interpreters, CART, and

video remote interpreting. All services are centrally funded and should be an option for anyone to choose.

Sharing Interpreters: If two or more D/HH persons work in close proximity, discuss with them the feasibility of sharing one or more interpreters throughout the day by forming a “cluster group.” **Note:** *This arrangement requires coordination, cooperation, and flexibility from all involved, including supervisors and co-workers.*

Events Outside the Workplace: NIH will provide an interpreter for a deaf or hard of hearing employee to attend a work-related meeting/event outside the primary workplace and for work-related travel, if the hosting agency where the event is scheduled to occur, does not provide an interpreter.

Interpreters Make Communication Possible

Highly Skilled Professionals

Sign language interpreters facilitate communication between the hearing and the Deaf or hard of hearing communities. Interpreters must be able to listen to another person’s words, inflections and intent and simultaneously render them into the visual language of signs using the mode of communication preferred by the deaf consumer. The interpreter must also be able to comprehend the signs, inflections and intent of the deaf consumer and simultaneously speak them in articulate, appropriate English. They must understand the cultures in which they work and apply that knowledge to promote effective cross-cultural communications. Interpreters under the NIH Interpreting Services contract are experienced practitioners nationally certified by the [National Association of the Deaf \(NAD\)](#) and/or the [Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf \(RID\)](#) and bound by the [NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct](#).

Beyond Proficiency

While proficiency in English and sign language is necessary, language skills alone are not sufficient for an individual to work as a professional interpreter. Becoming an interpreter is an art that requires a high degree of linguistic, cognitive and technical skills; commitment to enhancing the quality of interaction between the Deaf and hard of hearing communities. Practitioners must not only achieve certification but maintain it and grow new skills. It requires physical stamina, the ability to speak clearly, and convey the feelings and emotion of the speaker.

Specialized Expertise

Some interpreters have gone on to take advanced technical training in one or more fields (i.e. legal, medical). Interpreters with advanced certification have demonstrated specialized knowledge, developed expertise, and experience in their chosen fields.

The Practice of Interpreting

Sign language is no more universal than spoken languages. **American Sign Language (ASL)** is the language used by a majority of people in the Deaf community in the United States, most of Canada (LSQ is used in Quebec), certain Caribbean countries and areas of Mexico. Other areas of the world use their own sign languages, such as England (**British Sign Language**) and Australia (**Australian Sign Language**).

American Sign Language (ASL) is a distinct visual-gestural-kinesthetic language. While it borrows elements from spoken English and old French sign language, it has unique grammatical, lexical and linguistic features of its own. It is not English on the hands. Because ASL is not English, educators have developed a number of signed codes which use ASL vocabulary items modified to match English vocabulary using English grammatical rules. These codes have various names including **Signed Exact English (SEE)** and **Manual Coded English (MCE)**. Additionally, when native speakers of English and native users of ASL try to communicate, the “language” that results is a mixture of both English and ASL vocabulary and grammar. This is referred to as **PSE (Pidgin Signed English) or contact signing**.

Sign language interpreting is a rapidly expanding field. Schools, government agencies, hospitals, court systems and private businesses employ interpreters. Interpreters work in a variety of settings including **medical, legal, religious, mental health, rehabilitation, performing arts and business**. The increased demand is due in part to the emergence of mobile technology: **Video Relay Service (VRS)** and **Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)** offer consumers access to real-time visual communication with the hearing community.