



The National CLAS Standards in Long-Term Care Settings

Tips for Communication and Language Assistance

Long-term care (LTC) facilities should strive to provide high quality, culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS) for all residents. Effective communication and language assistance services can improve quality of life and health outcomes for LTC residents. Informed by research and recommendations from stakeholder organizations, this Tip Sheet describes practical ways that LTC facilities can promote the National CLAS Standards to ensure that services and information are accessible to residents that have limited English proficiency,

are blind or have low vision, are deaf or are hard of hearing, or have other communication needs. These tips align with the National CLAS Standards for Health and Health Care.

While the National CLAS Standards are not themselves legal requirements, they support many aspects of CMS' mission, are a critical part of the CMS Framework for Health Equity, and provide a blueprint for health care organizations to provide effective, equitable, understandable, and respectful quality care and services.*

*The National CLAS standards are not themselves legal requirements. However, health care organizations are also subject to numerous legal requirements, not discussed herein, that may overlap with lessons or recommendations related to the National CLAS standards in some cases. For example, health care entities may be subject to Section 1557, the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Title VI, as well as their implementing regulations. This document is not intended to provide guidance on complying with these legal requirements.



Theme 2 Communication and Language Assistance: Standards 5 – 8

Standard 5: Offer language assistance to individuals who have limited English proficiency and/or other communication needs, at no cost to them, to facilitate timely access to all health care services.

Standard 6: Inform all individuals of the availability of language assistance services clearly and in their preferred language, verbally and in writing.

Standard 7: Ensure the competence of individuals providing language assistance, recognizing that the use of untrained individuals and/or minors as interpreters should be avoided.

Standard 8: Provide easy-to-understand print and multimedia materials and signage in the languages commonly used by the populations in the service area.

TIP 1

IDENTIFY COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE NEEDS

LTC residents may have different communication and language needs. To help facilitate access to high quality health care, LTC facilities can:

- **Update** the intake process to include a plan for identifying communication and language needs of all LTC residents, including those who are blind or have low vision or are deaf or hard of hearing or have another type of disability.
- **Determine** the most common languages spoken by LTC residents and develop resources in these languages.
- **Develop** policies to train staff to meet resident needs if English is not their preferred language or if they will need communication assistance.
- **Create** a process for LTC residents and their families to provide feedback on communication and language services.

TIP 2

USE CREDENTIALLED MEDICAL INTERPRETERS AND TRAIN STAFF

LTC residents may need assistance services to communicate. To ensure that all residents can communicate effectively, LTC facilities can:

- **Review** options for translation and interpreter services
- **Identify** services that meet the communication and language needs of LTC residents; these may include in-person, telephonic, or Video Remote Interpretation services.
- **Offer** a certified medical interpreter to LTC residents. Interpretation services should also be able to provide qualified sign language interpretation.
- **Provide** auxiliary aids and services, including telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD), closed captioning services, and auditory or visual alerts or cues for LTC residents who need hearing or vision assistance.
- **Train** all staff on how to provide communication assistance and to work with interpreters or provide support for using braille materials and accommodating those who are low vision or blind or hard of hearing or deaf.

TIP 3

PROVIDE PRINT AND MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES IN MULTIPLE FORMATS

Multilingual resources are essential for increasing access to and accessibility of information for LTC residents. When developing resources, LTC facilities can:

- **Use** multimedia formats including print materials, digital and visual aids, and audio.
- **Provide** larger print, braille materials, and alternate language forms of frequently used resources.
- **Create** resources for staff such as ‘language cards’ that include frequently used words or phrases in LTC residents’ preferred language(s).
- **Provide** augmentative and alternative communication resources (AAC) such as writing pads, communication boards, or assistive communication devices as needed.
- **Explore** city or state services to identify appropriate communication and language resources and consider adding to new staff orientation/onboarding materials.



REFERENCES

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- ² AMN Healthcare. Improve Language Access in Healthcare. Published May 3, 2023. <https://www.amnhealthcare.com/amn-insights/language-services/blog/5-ways-to-improve-language-access-in-healthcare/>.
- ³ CMS. Providing Language Services to Diverse Populations: Lessons from the Field.; 2022. <https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/OMH/Downloads/Lessons-from-the-Field.pdf>.
- ⁴ Spencer L, Lu K. Infusing Culture into the Long-Term Care Environment to Improve Public Health and Quality-of-Life Experience. Eur J Environ Public Health. 2021;6(1):em0091. doi:10.21601/ejeph/11336.
- ⁵ Karlner LS. When Patients and Providers Speak Different Languages. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; 2018. Accessed June 12, 2024. <https://psnet.ahrq.gov/web-mm/when-patients-and-providers-speak-different-languages>.
- ⁶ Wilson R, Small J. Care Staff Perspectives on Using Mobile Technology to Support Communication in Long-Term Care: Mixed Methods Study. JMIR Nurs. 2020;3(1):e21881. doi:10.2196/21881

RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

For further exploration of the themes discussed in this Tip Sheet, refer to the resources below.

[The Guide to Providing Effective Communication and Language Assistance Services](#)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health

A free, online educational program designed for health care administrators and providers to support the implementation of CLAS.

[Providing Language Services to Diverse Populations: Lessons from the Field](#)

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

An overview of how health care organizations across the country provide language assistance services to individuals with limited English proficiency.

[Limited English Proficiency Resources for Effective Communication](#)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

A list of federal resources that can be used to support individuals with limited English proficiency in effective communication.