

Working with Language Interpreters

Introduction

Welcome to Minnesota WIC's training module on Working with Language Interpreters. This training was adapted with permission from the Wisconsin WIC program.

Objectives

By the end of this training module, you will be able to:

- Identify when to utilize an interpreter;
- State the roles of an interpreter;
- Recall tips for effectively working with an interpreter.

Limited English Proficiency

WIC provides services to persons who, as a result of national origin, are limited in their English proficiency. In order to provide quality services, the use of language interpreters is necessary.

Limited English Proficient, or LEP, is a term used to describe individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have limited ability to read, write, speak or understand English.

In, Minnesota the main languages for which WIC uses interpreters are Spanish, Hmong and Somali. Persons who speak other languages will likely require an interpreter. Although an in-person interpreter is best, that is not always possible. Telephone interpretive services are available for use by all WIC staff when an in-person interpreter is not available. Currently, Minnesota Department of Health has a contract with the company LanguageLine to provide telephone interpretive services.

Always Offer an Interpreter

You may think that an individual speaks English well enough for a WIC appointment, but they may not understand some WIC-related concepts and procedures. **Therefore, it's important to always offer the services of an interpreter to anyone whose primary language is not English.**

Language assistance should be provided to participants at all times including, while scheduling appointments, during the application process, during the WIC appointment, and if there is a complaint process or an appeal.

By providing an interpreter, WIC staff provide equal and effective services to the participant.

Informing Participants

Local Agencies must actively notify WIC applicants, participants, and anyone coming to WIC about the availability of free interpreter services and also that accommodations will be made upon request for

anyone with a disability. The state provides a poster with these notifications in languages common to WIC participants. Display this poster in any place that the public goes, and display it where it can be easily read by applicants and participants. This includes the waiting area at a minimum, but also the WIC office. If your space is large, consider displaying the smaller poster in cubicles where staff meet with participants.

Posters and other written notification in various languages help inform participants that interpreter services are available for free, but do not take the place of offering interpreter services verbally.

What tools does your clinic use to inform participants that interpreter services are available and to identify what language is being spoken?

Imagine...

Sometimes WIC staff become so used to WIC procedures they don't necessarily see them through the eyes of a new participant, or even yet, a new participant that doesn't speak English.

Imagine this scenario:

At the scale, a Somali-speaking mom is holding her son waiting for instructions on what to do. The CPA does not speak Somali, so begins pointing to the scale and then to the boy's shoes, trying to indicate that she needs to remove his shoes and have him stand on the scale. Both mom and son look up confused.

Imagine how confusing and possibly scary this must be for the mom and young boy. This wouldn't be done with English speaking participants; verbal direction would be given. Also, this is one of the first things done at a WIC appointment and it sets the tone for the **entire** appointment. The use of an interpreter to explain the anthropometric and hematological procedure provides good customer service, and protects the right to equal access to WIC services.

Share Your Thoughts

Providing interpretive language services is a requirement, but let's think **beyond what is required**. Think about if you were to attend a WIC appointment where nobody spoke your language.

What WIC procedures would you find confusing if you didn't speak English? What things might be hard to understand? Write your thoughts in the box. When ready, advance to the next slide.

Discussion

What things did you write down?

Not only might weighing, measuring and blood draws be frightening -- think about if you are having health problems—will you be able to communicate your concerns to the staff? How about if you have questions? What if you are mixing formula incorrectly? Are you likely to discover this without an interpreter?

It might be tempting **to not use** an interpreter for scheduling an appointment, but what if the person doesn't understand what papers they need to bring, what appointment options are available, or when her appointment is really scheduled? This could result in missed appointments and needing to bring the person back sooner because they didn't bring some necessary information.

Finally, think about the shopping experience. It's difficult enough for English-speaking participants; imagine shopping without instructions in your native language AND your WIC benefits are in English.

Providing interpretive services is not only required, **it's just good customer service.**

Applicant Screening

When an applicant calls the WIC office and is a LEP individual, an interpreter should be utilized starting with the applicant screening. If a person speaks a different language, this should be noted in the Information System so that interpreter services can be arranged for, either in person or through the LanguageLine, for their next appointment too. The section of the Information System in which this information is recorded is pictured on the slide. Your agency may want to allow more time for appointments that will use an interpreter.

Processing Standards

WIC staff must follow standard procedures, including processing standards, when scheduling an appointment that requires an interpreter. Language assistance must be provided in a timely manner and should not delay services.

For applicants who request an appointment and who are at special nutritional risk (pregnant women, infants less than six months of age, and migrant families), offer them an appointment within 10 calendar days. For other applicants, offer an appointment within 20 calendar days.

For pregnant women who miss their first WIC appointment, contact them to reschedule the appointment. Use an interpreter when calling to reschedule appointments, because the appointment may have been missed because of a language barrier and a misunderstanding.

Scenario

Let's think about this scenario: Ms. Wong calls to schedule an appointment. Due to her heavy accent, you have a hard time understanding her. However, she is answering all your questions and seems to understand you. When you ask if she would like an interpreter present for her next appointment, she says it's not needed.

What things would you do or say to Ms. Wong? Write your thoughts in the box. When ready, advance to the next slide.

Discussion

What things did you write in the box? Let's discuss some important things to consider.

It is important to tell Ms. Wong that she does not have to pay for the interpreter and that arrangements will be made to get an interpreter for her. If a participant doesn't know this, they may refuse an interpreter. Make sure to ask her for the name of her native language to schedule an interpreter with the appropriate language skills.

Tell her it is important that we get accurate information from her to help her family. **You might tell her that while she seems to understand you, you are not sure that you clearly understand her** and you want to be sure to answer any of her questions.

Offer her an appointment when she and the interpreter are available and within the timeframes to meet processing standards. Schedule an interpreter for the day of her appointment. If the participant speaks an uncommon language, schedule an appointment ahead of time with LanguageLine.

Ask her if she can read English or her native language (if the documents are translated in that language). If not, let her know that the interpreter will read the documents to her in her native language during the appointment.

If materials have been translated in her native language, provide these to her during the appointment. If the materials are helpful to her before the appointment, such as an appointment reminder, mail that to her.

Enter any information that will be helpful for the upcoming appointment into an alert or a note in the WIC Information System.

Choosing an Interpreter

Choosing interpreters who have developed strong competencies helps to assure effective communication. What qualities should an interpreter possess?

- Effective interpreters are highly proficient in English and the other language for which they are interpreting;
- They know how to provide accurate and efficient interpretation;
- They have been trained in data privacy rules and maintain participant confidentiality, and they stay within the scope of their role;
- They also have an understanding of the culture of the participants for whom they are interpreting; and
- Finally, they are professional and respectful.

Cultural Competency

Understanding the culture of the participants for whom interpreters are interpreting helps bridge the gap between the staff person and the participant. Sometimes the culture may be different than the language spoken. For example, the Spanish speaking populations in Minnesota might be from different communities in Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, or Cuba. Each country has unique cultural perspectives. If

the interpreter is not familiar with the culture, it is helpful that they work towards learning more about it.

Family Members as Interpreters

It may seem convenient and faster to use family members or friends who speak the language for interpretation. And participants might offer, not wanting to be a bother, and assuming that the family member doesn't mind interpreting.

Using family members and friends is **discouraged and should not be done**.

Here are some reasons why. The person might not:

- Be sufficiently proficient in English;
- Understand WIC and medical terms;
- Interpret information accurately or completely or have the capacity to fully understand WIC-related concepts and procedures and convey them properly.

Also, the participant might not want to disclose personal information in front of a relative or friend.

Family Members as Interpreters cont.

Family members or friends may feel uncomfortable conveying embarrassing information and may have their own opinions about the content of the discussion and not convey the information accurately.

A number of studies have shown that family members misinterpreted or did not interpret approximately 30-40% of the questions asked by physicians. Therefore, **up to 40% of the information** you provided might not be interpreted.

A WIC agency that relies on family or friends to interpret **risks breaching the rights** of the participant for confidentiality, privacy, and other issues.

Exception

The only circumstances under which the use of family or friends to interpret may be justified is **at the direct request** of the participant, and **only after** the guardian/participant for whom English is not their first language is clearly told that interpretation services are available at no cost to them, and an interpreter is refused.

However,

- Agency staff should take into consideration issues of competence, appropriateness, accuracy, conflict of interest, ethics, and confidentiality when determining whether they should approve the request.

- Your Agency should have a qualified interpreter present to verify accurate interpretation. If the interpretation is not accurate, the trained interpreter should take over the interpretation.
- Clearly document in the WIC Information System if a family member or friend was used for interpretation.

Minor Children

Under NO circumstances should minor children be asked to interpret.

- A child does not understand fraud, health issues, or nutrition concepts and may not have the language skills to interpret these concepts.
- Some health issues are not appropriate to discuss with children, and they should not be put in this position.
- For some cultures, there is a level of respect for elders by younger relatives, and interpreting disrupts this hierarchy.

Finding an Interpreter

If you don't already know, check what interpreter services your agency uses. If needed, contact your State WIC Consultant or neighboring WIC Agencies for names of qualified interpreters or training on how to use telephone interpreter services.

It may be the case that your WIC Agency can collaborate with other agencies that have the same requirements for serving individuals for whom English is not their first language. This helps to provide cost-effective language services, especially for languages that are not common in the community.

WIC staff can arrange for services of voluntary community interpreters who are trained in the skill of interpreting and have demonstrated competence as interpreters. Additional training may be needed on the topics of maternal and child health, nutrition, and WIC.

If the interpreting skills of an individual are not known, **the agency should test the interpreter's competence.** This can be done through agencies such as the LanguageLine. This includes bilingual staff who may provide occasional interpretive services. Just because someone is bilingual **does not mean** they are competent interpreters.

Bilingual Staff

To provide interpreters in person at the WIC agencies, agencies can consider hiring bilingual staff who are trained in the skill of interpreting and demonstrate competence as interpreters. Also, they should be trained in WIC-related topics such as breastfeeding and basic nutrition.

Some WIC agencies have bilingual WIC staff who are Competent Professional Authorities (CPAs). Being bilingual is different from being an interpreter. Training in interpretation should be provided to any staff

who will be asked to serve in this role, and the individual should demonstrate competence before they actually interpret.

In some cases, agencies contract with an outside interpreter service for trained and competent interpreters. However, it is preferable to hire those **who understand WIC** and can interpret terminology used in WIC. If the interpreter does not have this knowledge, basic training in WIC can be provided to them.

Sometimes WIC staff know a little of another language and try to get by using their limited knowledge for brief communications, such as scheduling an appointment. **This does not provide equal services**, or allow them to engage in a more complex conversation, particularly if there are questions.

Roles of the Interpreter

The primary role of the interpreter **is as a conduit**, or a channel in which information is interpreted and transmitted from one language to another **with no omissions, additions, subtractions or other changes**. Think of it as water running both ways through a pipe. The interpreter **should speak in 1st person**, and use similar tone, volume and inflection as the speaker.

The interpreter also acts as the clarifier, checking for and promoting understanding, reducing the complexity of the speech if necessary, and intervening to clarify when necessary. To do this, the interpreter should pause and request information be clarified. The interpreter does not clarify on his own. The roles of Conduit and Clarifier are used about 90% of the time.

Finally, a smaller role of the interpreter is as a Cultural Broker. To be a cultural broker, they must be objective and nonjudgmental. The interpreter explains cultural-specific issues, attitudes, or other concepts to promote understanding. They act as the bridge between the family and the WIC counselor. Taking time to educate an interpreter to the purpose of the appointment helps with this role.

Tips for Working with an Interpreter *before* the Appointment

In this section, we will go over some tips for working with an interpreter.

An effective session working with an interpreter **begins before the appointment**.

First, make sure to allow sufficient time for the appointment. Because information must be transferred back and forth between you and the interpreter, it will take longer, and you don't want to feel rushed. Second, take time to brief the interpreter about the purpose of the appointment and what will occur, if the interpreter is not familiar with WIC. Let the interpreter know about any WIC specific language or other information that might be important. Allow time for the interpreter to brief you on any culturally important information if it is a culture that you may not be familiar with.

Tips for Working with an Interpreter *during the session*

During the session, arrange yourself so you **are visible to the participant and the interpreter**. Make eye contact and talk **directly to the participant**, *not* the interpreter. Pay attention to body language and other non-verbal cues. This will help you determine if the participant is understanding you.

Use the interpreter as the Conduit and the Clarifier. Speak in a normal voice, expressing **one idea at a time** and **pausing** so that interpretation can occur. **Avoid jargon** and unnecessarily complicated explanations.

Use PCS skills such as **open ended questions**, **affirmation**, and **reflections**, just as you would with any other appointment. It may be necessary to brief the interpreter on these skills so they understand why you are using them and so she feels comfortable with interpreting them in the way they are intended.

Tips for Working with an Interpreter *after the session*

Remember to use the interpreter to schedule the next appointment, explain when they will be returning to the clinic, and what they need to bring. Confirm through the interpreter that the participant understands. Explain the food package and shopping procedure if they are new. Ask about their shopping experience and whether they had any questions about shopping, even if they are not new. Remember that the shopping experience is **even more complicated for LEP individuals**.

Provide written materials, including the Rights & Responsibilities, **in the language spoken if available** (and if the language is read). If not available, use the interpreter to go over any written materials and check for understanding.

After the session is over and the participant is gone, if you or the interpreter are new to your role, take some time to discuss what went well and what each of you could do to improve the interpretation session. This helps each of you work effectively as a team.

Training Resources

The handout *11 Helpful Tips for Working with an Over-the-Phone Interpreter* provides some written tips for when you are working with an interpreter. Look it over and print it **or save to your desktop** - and consider reviewing it before you work with an interpreter, especially if you are new to working with an interpreter or don't work with one often.

Telephone Interpreters

An alternative to an on-site interpreter is to use a telephone service for language interpretation. This is especially helpful for languages that are not commonly spoken in the community, or if an interpreter cannot be found in the area.

You can find resources on how to use LanguageLine and helpful hints for working with a telephonic interpreter in the LanguageLine Tools section of our Interpreters website linked on this slide. If you have any questions on how to utilize LanguageLine services or need to obtain the access code for your agency, talk with your supervisor or State WIC Consultant.

If you have never used the LanguageLine before, consider practicing with a coworker so you feel more comfortable with it in the event that you need to use it.

When using the language line, **request a medical interpreter**. Remember to take a few moments to brief the interpreter as to the purpose of the appointment and other necessary information before you begin the session.

Summary

This concludes the information about working with interpreters. As a review of some of the information covered, please watch the short cartoon clip linked on the slide entitled *Tips for Working with Interpreters*.

What will you focus on?

Now take a moment to think about the tips and other information covered in this training. What things would you like to focus on the next time you work with an interpreter?

End

This completes the *Working with Language Interpreters* training module. Thank you for your time and attention and your dedication in providing quality WIC services to individuals with Limited English Proficiency.