

Best practices for using an interpreter with Indigenous language speakers:

- Do not assume that a patient speaks Spanish, even if they are from Latin America and speak a few words in Spanish.
- Request an interpreter who speaks a language variant from the patient's municipality of origin within their home country.
- Speak directly to, and look at, the patient, not at the phone or at the interpreter. Do not say "tell the patient X."
- Begin each consult by assuring the patient that their conversation will not be shared outside the consultation.

Keep in mind when working with Indigenous language speaking patients:

- Not all body parts or medical terms have specific translations into Indigenous languages. Even the word "health" may have different meanings.
- When talking about pain or discomfort in the patient's body, point or touch the area to assure that you and the patient are talking about the same thing.
- Even with an interpreter, use the "teach-back" method to assure that the patient understands your recommendations.



LANGUAGE
ACCESS
FLORIDA



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Serving Farmworker Patients who Speak Indigenous Languages

A Guide for Health Care Practitioners

The clinic visit was uncomfortable. The doctor assumed I spoke Spanish. When I said Tzotzil, they still spoke to me in Spanish.

When I said I speak Tzeltal, they got an interpreter to help on the phone.

They gave me written instructions in English and I had no way to ask questions after the visit.



Lessons from the community



Providers need to help with the interpretation process by following best practices.
 ☯ -K'iche speaker



Ask me to show you where I have pain or discomfort. Sometimes words can't explain what I feel or the spot where I have a problem.
 ☯ -Q'anjob'al speaker



The doctor is in such a hurry and doesn't listen to my questions. They need to schedule more time with those of us needing interpretation!
 ☯ -Mam speaker



Some words, like "health / salud" do not have direct translations in my language.
 ☯ -Nahuatl speaker

We have so much to learn from our Indigenous patients about how we can be more effective.



Sometimes I'm uncomfortable talking about my woman's health issues with male doctors or interpreters.
 ☯ -Mixteco Bajo speaker



My language has many different variants. The interpreters should be from my same municipality so that I can understand.
 ☯ -Zapoteco speaker



Give me visual notes to help me remember our conversation. My language is both written and oral, so images help.
 ☯ -Tzeltal speaker

I like when the clinic send a Promotora to follow-up after my appointment. She speaks my language and is patient.
 ☯ -Mam speaker



These recommendations come directly from Indigenous patients and their multilingual interpreters from Guatemala and Mexico who speak variants of K'iche, Zapoteco, Mam, Tzeltal, Q'anjob'al, and Nahuatl. They offered these recommendations to improve the patient experience of other Indigenous speakers.

This is the *tlatolli*, an Aztec symbol for the Nahuatl word that means "language" or "to speak".

