



Health Providers

American Sign Language Interpreters in Telehealth Appointments: What Providers Need to Know

Patient Rights and Interpreters

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Section 504, and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act are some of the federal laws designed to protect individuals with disabilities, including individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind. Most organizations, businesses, and service providers are required by law to secure and pay for interpreting services, when necessary, to ensure effective communication.

Interpreting services may also need to be provided to communicate with a patient's parent, spouse, or companion who have communication disabilities.

HIPAA and Interpreters

- Interpreters are considered “business associates” under HIPAA when hired by providers. For more information, please go to [Healthcare Information Portability and Accountability Act](#).
- Since interpreters are business associates, a provider can share information about a patient with an interpreter. Interpreters need information about a patient to appropriately prepare for an interpreted appointment to ensure effective communication. For more information about establishing a business associate contract with an interpreter, go to [HIPAA Business Associates](#).
- For more information on finding and working with interpreters, go to “[Sign Language Interpreting Services](#).”

What to Expect When Working with the Interpreter

- Interpreters cannot be experts in all areas of healthcare and some terminology may be new to them. Be prepared to spell medical terminology, procedures, and pharmaceuticals. Interpreters will ask for clarification as needed.
- Speak directly to the patient, not the interpreter. You may speak at a normal pace but be prepared to give the interpreter ample time to fully interpret your message.
- Interpreters are professionals who will interpret the appointment but will not interact with the patient outside of the appointment. Interpreters will not prep the patient prior to an appointment or follow-up with the patient after the appointment.
- Be prepared to give the interpreter information prior to the start of the appointment to ensure the interpreter has ample information for effective communication.
 - “This is Bob, he’s got congestive heart failure, and he’s had some falling episodes. We’ve recently increased his medicine, so we’re going to talk about how things are going.”

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Platforms and Technology

- When choosing a platform ensure that an interpreter can be added, so that you, the interpreter, and the patient can all see each other on the screen. For more information about available platforms, see the [Matrix of Accessibility Features for Videoconferencing Platforms](#).
- The movements of sign language require a high internet speed so that the interpreter and the Deaf signer can be clearly seen.
 - Provide real-time, video and audio over a dedicated high-speed video connection or wireless connection that delivers high-quality video images that do not produce choppy, blurry, or grainy images, or irregular pauses in communication.
- Provide adequate training to users of the technology so that they may quickly and efficiently set up and operate the equipment.
- Effective communication needs vary from person to person. It is always best to ask the consumer what would work best for them.



Deaf patient signing with a physician and an American Sign Language interpreter through a video call.

For additional guidance or information, please contact the [NC DSDHH Regional Center](#) near you.

This document is not legal advice and is intended as informational guidance only.



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This document was developed through a collaborative process involving the National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers.

