

# Professional interpretation service accessible to all community specialists in BC

In professional interpretation, a skilled interpreter translates oral information from one language to another, reducing language barriers and enabling understanding between parties. Within health care, professional interpreters can both provide literal interpretation and incorporate cultural nuances in communications. At times, advocacy may also be integrated into the interpreter's role. Within BC, the Provincial Health Services Authority offers Provincial Language Services, which includes translation and interpretation in over 200 languages. Options for interpretation delivery include on-site interpreting (available only for Lower Mainland health authorities), virtual health visit interpreting, remote video interpreting, and over-the-phone interpreting.

Unaddressed language barriers are linked to reduced health care access for immigrants and refugees with non-English language preferences. With BC's growing immigrant and refugee populations, there is an increased need for interpretation services and greater responsibility to accommodate communication in health care settings. In parallel, there is also a need to promote interpretation services among health professionals; underuse and lack of awareness of such services have been noted in BC and other provinces.

In the 2019–2020 fiscal year, there was an average of 426 requests per day for medical interpretation in BC. Research has shown that the use of skilled interpreters reduces

the inequity that non-English-speaking patients experience in receiving health care. This is achieved through improved comprehension and clinical outcomes and increased patient satisfaction. Professional interpretation is also helpful for medical providers, as it can improve accuracy by reducing miscommunication and subsequent errors in diagnosis and treatment. The benefits of interpreters go beyond literal translation; interpreters can also contribute cultural understanding and enable providers to offer more culturally sensitive care.

However, providing adequate interpretation services is also associated with nuances and challenges. Using interpretation services can appear to be time-consuming and may cause frustration for both patients and providers. There is also a lack of knowledge about existing interpretation services and how to use them. In addition, due to the number of different languages spoken in Canada, it can be difficult to find an in-person interpreter. However, studies report that while in-person interpreter encounters were better perceived by patients and providers, there was no significant difference in overall visit satisfaction between different types of interpreters.

The spoken language interpreting service initiated by the Specialist Services Committee (SSC) is available to all specialists and office-based allied health teams (e.g., registered nurses, medical office assistants, respiratory therapists) at no cost. This telephone-based service is accessible through Provincial Language Services and provides professional interpretation in more than 200 languages, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In 2022, when the SSC pilot program was initiated, community specialists from

19 specialties used the service for approximately 50 hours per month.

There is clear evidence of demand for such services from both specialists and the communities they serve. This is a significant step in providing equitable, high-quality medical services to all residents of the province, regardless of their preferred spoken language or background.

Previously, Provincial Language Services was available only to community-based family physician offices through Divisions of Family Practice. With the introduction of this service through SSC, skilled language interpretation is now accessible across a broad spectrum of health care in BC.

Short videos and interviews are being created to promote and educate staff on the importance of professional interpretation and the availability of such services. To support widespread ease of access to Provincial Language Services, the goal is to produce additional outreach materials such as easy-to-follow instruction sets for medical offices. On a broader scale, the implementation and promotion of this service can be accelerated with increased government and committee funding. In the future, development of training programs for staff can also help educate them on the appropriate use of such technologies. Community specialists throughout BC can incorporate this service into their practice to provide more equitable care to all patients in a highly efficient manner. ■

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with schizophrenia and can highlight the importance of health checks<sup>9</sup> during hot weather. In-person or virtual checks can be used to assess how an individual is coping with extreme heat, encourage them to take protective cooling measures, and initiate assistance if needed.

People with schizophrenia are particularly susceptible to extreme heat, as demonstrated by the 2021 heat dome in BC. Although the side effects of antipsychotic medications can increase risk, the pathway between heat and health outcomes among people with schizophrenia is complex. Antipsychotic medications are lifesaving therapies, and they should not be discontinued or modified to reduce risk during extreme heat. Instead, those treating and supporting people with schizophrenia should focus on other risk factors associated with the condition, particularly social isolation and lack of access to air conditioning. By identifying, counseling, and checking in on those

at highest risk, we can reduce morbidity and mortality during future extreme heat events. ■

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