
**Interpreting services — Healthcare
interpreting — Requirements and
recommendations**

*Services d'interprétation — Interprétation dans le domaine de la
santé — Exigences et recommandations*



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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular, the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights. Details of any patent rights identified during the development of the document will be in the Introduction and/or on the ISO list of patent declarations received (see www.iso.org/patents).

Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

For an explanation of the voluntary nature of standards, the meaning of ISO specific terms and expressions related to conformity assessment, as well as information about ISO's adherence to the World Trade Organization (WTO) principles in the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), see www.iso.org/iso/foreword.html.

This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 37, *Language and terminology*, Subcommittee SC 5, *Translation, interpreting, and related technology*.

Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html.

Introduction

Healthcare interpreting services:

- a) enable safe communication mainly between healthcare providers and patients;
- b) provide linguistic access to healthcare services.

This document was developed in response to a worldwide growing demand to accommodate the interpreting needs of patients deprived of linguistic access to healthcare services and healthcare professionals, such as physicians, nurses, and healthcare administrative staff, as well as to strive towards patient safety, wellbeing, and dignity during interactions related to the provision of healthcare-related services. In those countries that do not have any recognized healthcare interpreting education in place, this document can serve as a guideline and basis for setting up a suitable legal, administrative and educational system for all healthcare interpreting stakeholders.

Healthcare interpreting is also referred to as medical interpreting.

The right to health services has been well documented in several international and national documents (see References [6] to [42]). Several countries have also enacted legislation, regulations, or guidelines concerning the provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate healthcare services. These require the provision of qualified interpreting services for linguistically and culturally diverse patients, see References [43] to [48]. Healthcare interpreting services need to be of a sufficiently high quality to ensure patient safety.

Healthcare interpreting is distinct from medical or healthcare-related translation. Translation involves the rendering of various forms of content into another language in written form, requiring a process and the allocation of a certain period of time for the task. Interpreting involves rendering spoken or signed messages from one language to another, either face-to-face or via distance interpreting. Some healthcare interpreters are qualified to provide medical translation while others are not. Likewise, some medical translators may or may not be qualified to provide healthcare interpreting services, as these activities require different skill sets. When documents are not translated, healthcare interpreters sight translate the document into the other language. The provisions herein meet additional requirements that are specific and unique to healthcare interpreting and the healthcare environment.

Healthcare interpreting takes place between three or more participants:

- 1) speaker(s) or signer(s) of a language other than the language the healthcare provider speaks or signs;
- 2) healthcare providers or staff;
- 3) healthcare interpreter(s).

Healthcare organizations procure interpreting services directly or via an interpreting service provider (ISP). Healthcare interpreters, who come into a healthcare organization to interpret for a particular case, whether face-to-face or via distance interpreting (see [Annex B](#)), limit themselves to engaging in the communicative events that require their services. Healthcare interpreters who work in an interpreter services department within a healthcare organization perform tasks and take on responsibilities beyond the act of interpreting in communicative events. These tasks can be related to bridging the cultural and linguistic gaps of the healthcare community, can involve intercultural inquiry, cultural or linguistic education of other healthcare staff, contacting patients, written translations, or addressing matters related to the administration and quality assurance of the interpreting department in question, or comply with patient safety responsibilities as required by their employer. Healthcare interpreters follow standards of practice (see References [49] to [54]) and relevant code of ethics.

The objectives of this document are:

- a) to promote market transparency in the field of healthcare interpreting;
- b) to provide information and clarification for users of healthcare interpreting services;

c) to establish professional working conditions for healthcare interpreters.

This document benefits all parties involved in the work of healthcare interpreting. They include:

- healthcare interpreters;
- interpreting service providers;
- patients and accompanying persons;
- interpreter departments in healthcare organizations;
- government agencies;
- non-profit organizations;
- community organizations that provide interpreting services;
- employees that provide interpreting services;
- professional associations;
- healthcare organizations;
- educators and researchers;
- healthcare providers and staff;
- healthcare policy writers.

Interpreting services — Healthcare interpreting — Requirements and recommendations

1 Scope

This document specifies requirements and recommendations for healthcare interpreting services in spoken and signed communication. It is applicable to all situations requiring healthcare interpreting, where the parties involved need to communicate using spoken or signed language, to treat a health-related issue. It is intended for interpreting service providers and healthcare interpreters.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1 Terms related to people involved in interpreting and to modes of interpreting

3.1.1

interpret

render spoken or signed information from a *source language* (3.4.6) to a *target language* (3.4.7) in oral or signed form, conveying both the *language register* (3.4.4) and meaning of the *source language content* (3.4.8)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2019, 3.1.9]

3.1.2

interpreting

interpretation

rendering spoken or signed information from a *source language* (3.4.6) to a *target language* (3.4.7) in oral or signed form, conveying both the *language register* (3.4.4) and meaning of the *source language content* (3.4.8)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2019, 3.1.10]

3.1.3

interpreter

person who *interprets* (3.1.1)

[SOURCE: ISO 20539:2019, 3.1.12]