



The Independent Voice for Kentucky's Children

KENTUCKY  
YOUTH  
ADVOCATES

**For Immediate Release**

August 27, 2009

**Contact:**

Patricia Tennen  
502-895-8167 x120  
ptennen@kyyouth.org

**LANGUAGE ACCESS SERVICES IN HEALTH CARE STILL LACKING IN KENTUCKY  
Improved Statewide Coordination Would Improve Care, Save Money**

**Louisville, KY** – One of the most basic requirements of high quality health care is the ability for health care professionals and their patients to be able to understand and communicate with each other. Despite federal law which requires health care providers to offer language access services to individuals who are learning English, many providers fall short, according to a report released today by Kentucky Youth Advocates. The report suggests that a statewide focus on improving interpretation and translation services would lead to significant improvements in health outcomes for children and families in Kentucky.

“Effective communication between health care professionals and their patients is absolutely necessary for high quality care,” said Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. “Language access barriers can not only lead to dangerous errors and increased costs, but keep parents from making informed decisions about the health of their families.”

Because Kentucky’s population of people who are learning English is on the rise, communication between health care providers and clients is of growing importance. In order to assess current language access services, Kentucky Youth Advocates conducted more than 30 interviews across the state with community-based advocates working with people learning English, as well as health care providers, including hospitals, health departments, and clinics.

The main findings from those interviews include the following:

- Health care providers realized the importance of language access for their patients, but the extent and scope of the policies they developed varied greatly.
- Language access services lack consistency and often do not follow the provider's stated policy.
- Language access services fall short on quality and breadth.
- Information is not readily available to patients to explain the language access services providers are required to offer.

Research indicates that there may be a net savings produced by providing language services to all patients in the health care setting. The report offers recommendations for improving language access in Kentucky including improving statewide coordination of services; evaluating and improving language access policies; educating patients on what services they should receive and the risks of using untrained interpreters; and developing a reimbursement mechanism for language services.

"We have an ethical and a legal responsibility to ensure that Kentuckians who are learning English get the same high quality health care as the rest of us," said Brooks. "It's that simple."

Access the full report, [Language Access Services Translate to High Quality Health Care: Findings from Interviews on Language Services in Kentucky](#), or view the [Executive Summary](#) at [www.kyyouth.org](http://www.kyyouth.org).

###

***Kentucky Youth Advocates*** is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.