



# **Health Connector Language Support**

## **Current and Future States**

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Health Connector Board of Directors Meeting, June 13, 2024

# Agenda

## **During today's presentation, we will review the following:**

- Overview
- Language support needs in Massachusetts
- Language support for services through the Health Connector
- Recent improvements
- Current state
- Navigators
- Accessibility
- Future improvement opportunities
- Moving forward

# Overview

Language access is a key factor in the Health Connector's equity goals as we aim to ensure that all populations receive the support they need to get covered and stay covered.

- Historically, populations that don't speak English as a first language have had inequitable coverage rates compared to the general population.<sup>1</sup>
- In November 2023, the Health Connector published the latest version of the Language Access Plan which can be found on our website:

<https://www.mahealthconnector.org/site-policies/language-rights>

## Massachusetts Health Connector Language Access Plan



November 2023

# Language Support Needs in Massachusetts

**The Health Connector serves a diverse public, including individuals, families, and small business owners who don't speak English as a first language.**

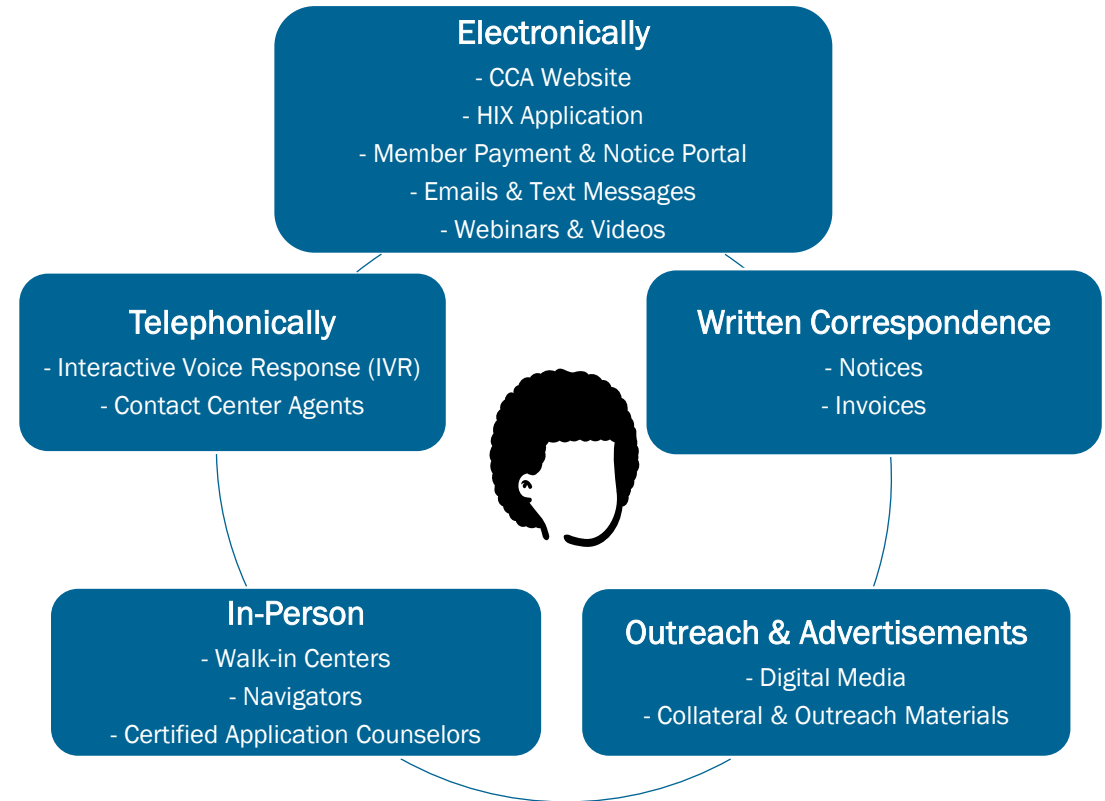
According to a 2023 report by the Massachusetts Immigration and Refugee Advocacy Coalition<sup>1</sup>, there are more than 850,000 foreign-born Massachusetts residents who are Limited English Proficiency (LEP) speakers. Of this population, the top 5 languages spoken are:

- Spanish – 30 percent
- Portuguese – 11 percent
- Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese) – 8 percent
- Haitian Creole – 4 percent
- Vietnamese – 2 percent
- Other – 45 percent

# Language Support

The Health Connector is dedicated to ensuring access to services for all people across the Commonwealth, including those with Limited English Proficiency (“LEP”).

- Individuals may not be able to speak, read, write, or understand the English language at a level allowing them to interact effectively with our organization. It may also include people with impaired physical capabilities who need visual and audial assistance in communication
- Individuals requiring language support interact with the Health Connector in many ways, including:
  - Electronically
  - Written correspondence
  - Telephonically
  - In-person
  - Outreach & Advertisements



# Recent Improvements

In the past year, the Health Connector has made the following improvements to the language support we provide to our members and the public:

Channel	Description	Date Implemented
HIX Application and HIX-generated Notices	HIX application and HIX-generated notices are now available in Portuguese.	July 2023
Interactive Voice Response (IVR)	Welcome messages added in the top 5 preferred languages (Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Mandarin, and Vietnamese) which allow callers to quickly bypass the IVR and speak with an agent who can support them in their language (Spanish only) or quickly connect with an interpreter.	July 2023
Contact Center-generated Notices	Contact Center-generated notices now available in Portuguese.	February 2024
Enrollment and Billing Emails	Enrollment and Billing emails now available in Portuguese.	February 2024
Mass Relay Services	Now forwarding calls that come into the existing TTY number (1-877-623-7773) to 711 Mass Relay Services which allows callers who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech disabled to have the best customer service experience available.	April 2024

# Current State of Language Support



	Online	Notices & Invoices	Contact Center (inbound/outbound)	Email	Text	Navigators	Marketing / Outreach
<b>Individuals and Families (Non-Group)</b>	<b>HIX:</b> ✓ English ✓ Spanish ✓ Portuguese <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Five additional languages currently available on the Health Connector website</li> </ul>	✓ English ✓ Spanish ✓ Portuguese	✓ English ✓ Spanish <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpreter services available in 290+ languages</li> <li>IVR introduction available in Top 5 languages</li> </ul>	✓ English ✓ Spanish	✓ English ✓ Spanish	✓ 29 languages spoken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See next slide for more details.</li> </ul>	✓ English ✓ Spanish <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ad-hoc messaging in other languages depending on the campaign</li> </ul>
<b>Health Connector for Business (Small Group)</b>	✓ English	✓ English	✓ English <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpreter services available in 290+ languages</li> </ul>	✓ English	N/A	N/A	✓ English ✓ Spanish

# Navigator Language Support

Through our Navigator program, individuals have access to local support within their community from staff that speak their language.

- Navigator staff provide support in 29 languages across 22 organizations:

Albanian	Amharic	Arabic	Berber
Bulgarian	Burmese	Cape Verdean Creole	Cantonese
Dari	French	German	Greek
<b>Haitian Creole</b>	Hindi	Italian	Kaba
Khmer	Lao	<b>Mandarin</b>	Nepali
Pashto	<b>Portuguese</b>	Russian	Sango
Serbian	Somali	<b>Spanish</b>	Urdo
<b>Vietnamese</b>			



# Accessibility

The Health Connector Contact Center also provides the following support for individuals who are hearing or visually impaired:

Type	Description
American Sign Language (ASL)	When agents receive a request by phone for an ASL interpreter meeting for a member at a walk-in center, Agents are trained to inform the member the service is available upon arrival and no appointment is needed.
Video Relay Service	Members can call in using a VRS or visit one of the walk-in centers. Those calling in with VRS are assigned a TRS operator “communications assistant” who communicates with the member via signed conversation as the agent proceeds with the call.
Assistive Listening Device	Agents inform callers of the walk-in centers that have Pocket Talker Amplifiers available to assist individuals.
Braille Printed Materials	Agents can request relevant eligibility documents in Braille via the reasonable accommodation functionality.
Large Font Printed Materials	Agents can request relevant eligibility documents in Large Font Print via the reasonable accommodation functionality.
711 Mass Relay Services	Callers use their own personal equipment to communicate with contact centers when seeking auditory communication assistance.
Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD)	Agents are trained and assigned to support TDD callers during regular business hours.
Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)	Agents are trained to advise callers that walk-in center agents have VRI and can assist customers by communicating via text.

# Future Improvement Opportunities

As the Health Connector continues to strive to provide high quality and accessible customer service, we have identified the following additional opportunities for improvement, including:

Improvement Opportunity	Target Timeline
Solicit feedback from members and advocates regarding language support priorities.	3 – 6 months
Benchmarking against state programs (including MassHealth), State Based Exchanges (SBEs), and other healthcare organizations (including carriers).	3 – 6 months
Improving our data collection and analytics related to enrollment, retention and overall customer experience of individuals who need language support.	6 – 9 months
Establishing a data-driven process and methodology for evaluating the current experience and making decisions regarding additional changes needed.	6 – 9 months
Updating the Health Connector for Business experience to meet the language needs of employers, employees and brokers.	12 – 18 months
Update the online, notice and customer service experience to fully support the top 5 preferred languages for our members.	~ 3 years

# Moving Forward

**The Health Connector looks forward to receiving feedback from Board members regarding our focus on language support.**

- The Health Connector will provide timelines and status updates of our progress related to the language support improvements identified with the next version of the Language Access Plan (LAP) which is expected in Fall of 2025