

MOVE INTERPRETER TESTING OUT OF DSHS!

✓ Support SB 5995 Interpreter Licensing – Spoken Languages

Language equity in Washington and health outcomes for Washington's limited English proficient population depend on it.



Under DSHS DEI's management, Washington state has lost more than 1/3 of its medical interpreters.

Interpreter Credentials ¹	Dec 19, 2019	Jan 4, 2024	Decrease
DSHS Social	989	757	-23%
DSHS Medical	2,825	1,731	-39%
DSHS Medical Recognized	N/A	101	

DSHS Language Testing and Certification has publicly admitted in writing that:

DSHS LTC is neither trained, funded, staffed, nor equipped to develop and update tests. DSHS does not have the technology to deliver online tests nor the resources to build, establish, maintain, and routinely update the technology to put in place a virtual testing and certification system with a viable support process.²

Licensing is DOL’s core business. The Department of Licensing provides testing and issues licenses for a broad spectrum of professions.³

Background

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) has been testing interpreters for Social Services since 1993 and for medical services since 1995. The DSHS Language Testing and Certification (LTC) unit was created in response to lawsuits and Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act complaints. Reyes et al. was a class action by Limited English Proficient plaintiffs brought against DSHS for not providing equal access to its Economic and Medical Field Services. As part of its Agreement of Settlement and Consent Order, DSHS agreed to develop and administer oral and written tests to ensure the quality of contracted interpreters for medical and social services.

Changes in Testing

Due to the pandemic, DSHS stopped all testing in March 2020 and resumed in April 2022. In August 2022, DSHS decided to stop offering its own medical interpreter exams and instead accept more expensive and less rigorous private third-party testing (DSHS Medical Recognized) over which it has no jurisdiction:

- 1) By a private for-profit company, ALTA, that also sells interpreter services in violation of RCW 74.04.25(9), and that does not test in the sight translation mode; or
- 2) The written exam in English □ without requiring an oral exam of interpreting skills in the consecutive and sight translation modes □ from the two national healthcare interpreter certification bodies, CCHI and NBCMI, both private entities whose main source of income is testing interpreters and over which WA State has no jurisdiction. DSHS’s rationale for not requiring that oral transfer skills be tested is that CCHI and NBCMI pre-requisites include proof of language proficiency even though this “proof” ranges from living in a country where that language is spoken to actual testing.⁴

Transfer Skills

Language proficiency in two languages is prerequisite to any interpreting task, but it is not sufficient by itself and testing it has limited value in assessing interpreting ability. The interpreter must be able to (1) comprehend two languages as spoken and written if the language has a script, (2) speak both languages, and (3) have good transfer skills to choose an expression in the target language that fully conveys and best matches the meaning of the source language.

Footnotes

¹ Some interpreters are credentialed in more than one language. Some interpreters hold both CCHI and NBCMI credentials.
² DSHS’ Response to Draft Recommendation 13, October 10, 2023.
³ <https://professions.dol.wa.gov/s/license-lookup>
⁴ CCHI Candidate’s examination handbook, page 19, CCHI_Candidate_Examination_Handbook.pdf (cchiinterpreters.org)
⁵ Federal Interagency Language Roundtable, Interpretation Performance, govtilr.org



Oral exams for certified languages			
	DSHS medical	NBCMI	CCHI
Sight translation	1 passage EN > LOTE 1 passage LOTE > EN 100 – 140 words each	2 passages EN > LOTE	3 passages EN > LOTE 11% total score
Consecutive interpreting EN < > LOTE	350 - 400 words dialogue	12 scenarios	4 vignettes 70% total score
Simultaneous interpreting	n/a	n/a	1 vignette EN > LOTE, 1 vignette LOTE > EN 17% total score
Pass score	75% for each mode	Pass/Fail, unknown score, and weight All sections combined into composite score. ⁶	All sections combined with distribution scaled of 300 to 600, pass score at 450 ⁷ , ⁸

Oral exams for non-certified languages			
	DSHS medical	NBCMI	CCHI
Sight translation	EN > LOTE 10 unrelated sentences 250 words	n/a	n/a
Consecutive Interpreting	LOTE > EN Back translation of sentences in sight translation section 250 words		n/a
English Language Skills	Oral memory retention 10 progressively longer unrelated sentences 210 words	n/a	Listening comprehension (14%), Shadowing (13%), Memory capacity (24%), Restating the meaning (21%), Equivalence of meaning (19%), Reading comprehension (9%) ⁹
Pass score	70% oral English skills 70% Sight translation and consecutive interpreting combined		Unknown
ONLY DSHS EXAMS TEST ORAL LANGUAGE TRANSFER SKILLS FOR ALL LANGUAGES			

COST	DSHS	CCHI	NBCMI
REGISTRATION FEE		\$40	\$35
WRITTEN EXAM FEE	\$30	\$191	\$175
ORAL EXAM FEE	\$45	\$302	\$275
RENEWAL FEE		\$300	\$300
TOTAL	\$75	\$833	\$785

Footnotes

⁶ NBCMI_Handbook.pdf (certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org)
⁷ 2% written translation EN to LOTE, 1 multiple choice question
⁸ 2023 CHI Examination Outline.pdf (cchiinterpreters.org)
⁹ 2023 ETOE Examination Outline.pdf (cchiinterpreters.org).
Speaking skills in LOTE are not scored.