

**Providing Sign Language Interpreter Services  
(Issued April 2011)  
(Reviewed May 2014)**

**Purpose:**

To provide staff with the requirements and guidance for providing sign language interpreting services as well as best practices.

**Rationale:**

DVR is required to ensure, throughout the VR process, that information shared with the consumer is communicated in his/her native language and/or in the appropriate mode of communication. The appropriate mode of communication should be consistent with the informed choice of the consumer and enable the consumer to comprehend and respond to information that is being communicated. (361.5(b)(5), 361.48, 361.52, VR Program Policy Manual).

**Providing Sign Language Interpreting Services:**

When the appropriate mode of communication is sign-language interpretation, both the regulations and DVR policy state that this service must be provided by qualified personnel. In May of 2010, the State of Wisconsin enacted Wisconsin Act 360 requiring that sign language interpreters *receiving compensation* are to be licensed by the Department of Regulation and Licensing.

While DVR must make available sign language interpreter services from a licensed provider, through informed choice, the consumer has the option to choose an adult family member or other person to provide the interpreter service. DVR will not pay for interpreting services provided by a non-licensed interpreter.

If the consumer chooses to have an adult family member or other non-licensed person provide the service (for no compensation), DVR staff are encouraged to discuss with the consumer DVR's ability and the benefits of providing a third party interpreter to be present at the meetings. Staff are encouraged to have this discussion because of potential communication problems that can occur when a consumer chooses a family member or a non-licensed provider, such as:

- Potential miscommunications based on sign-language knowledge
- Potential editing of the consumer's or DVR's comments/input
- Potential for less engagement directly with the consumer
- Potential conflict of interest

**Best Practices:**

- DVR staff should check the application for requested accommodations. The consumer should be contacted through the appropriate mode of communication to discuss the consumer's needs and to arrange for an interpreter at the meetings.
- Depending upon the area and vendors available, it may be necessary to schedule meetings around the interpreter's schedule. This should be discussed as part of the process.

- Allow additional time at meetings. This will allow you to ensure information is being understood and to ensure the consumer feels comfortable.
- If a consumer uses a family member at a meeting as an interpreter, discuss the benefits and encourage the consumer to allow a third party interpreter to attend future meetings and contacts.
- If the consumer is deaf and his/her native language is a foreign language, a licensed deaf interpreter should be utilized or a licensed sign language interpreter along with a foreign language interpreter.
- If a consumer has difficulty utilizing a sign language interpreter they may need a licensed deaf interpreter in addition to more fully comprehend DVR communication.
- Consult with the SenseAbility team specialist in your area with questions you may have.
- To determine if a vendor is responsible for providing interpreter services please refer to the [Undue Hardship Policy](#).

A comprehensive listing of sign language interpreters and information about use of an interpreter can be found at:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/odhh/interpreting/index.htm>