

Bulletin

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 30, 2013

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OCR launches nationwide compliance review initiative to strengthen language access programs at critical access hospitals

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office for Civil Rights (OCR) today announced its national compliance review initiative, "Advancing Effective Communication in Critical Access Hospitals," to support language access programs in these hospitals. In concert with the [HHS Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities](#), this initiative will ensure that language access is provided so that individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English or are limited English proficient (LEP) can effectively participate in, and benefit from, quality health care services.

To lay the groundwork, in 2012, OCR piloted a ten-state, on-site examination of critical access hospitals (CAHs) located in each of the ten HHS regions to make certain that their programs comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in programs that receive federal funds. Further, Title VI requires recipients of federal funds, like critical access hospitals, to take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to their programs and services by LEP persons.

For each CAH in this compliance review initiative, OCR examined demographic data from the hospital's service area; conducted onsite visits; evaluated language access services policies and procedures; interviewed hospital staff and community stakeholders; and secured corrective action when compliance issues were discovered in the hospital's language access program.

OCR provided significant technical assistance to help CAHs audit and enhance their language access services. OCR is available to help all critical hospitals nationwide develop and implement a comprehensive language access program. Building on the success of the compliance reviews, OCR will continue the compliance review initiative by casting a wider net, conducting additional language access compliance reviews, and providing technical assistance to CAHs nationwide.

Critical access hospitals seeking technical assistance should consult OCR's report, "[Advancing Effective Communication in Critical Access Hospitals](#)," the HHS "[Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons](#)," or call OCR at 1-800-368-1019 (voice) or 1-800-537-7697 (TDD).

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