



Valley Community Interpreters *Intérpretes Comunitarios del Valle*

Intérpretes Comunitarios del Valle - Valley Community Interpreters (VCI) is a community-based medical interpreter training and cultural competency program in New Mexico, designed to address the growing need for qualified English/Spanish bilingual interpreters in the healthcare system at the local and national level. The program provides the methodology for accurate and effective communication between underserved communities who have limited English proficiency (LEP) and medical services that improve their health and well-being. The goal of VCI is to improve and increase language access at all levels of the healthcare system by providing effective medical interpreter training.

VCI offers the industry standard Bridging the Gap medical interpreter training program to:

- bilingual community members interested in pursuing a medical interpreter career.
- healthcare professionals interested in improving their language and cultural competency skills when working with their Limited English Speaking patients.

In 2015 the **Intérpretes Comunitarios del Valle - Valley Community Interpreters** program received a seed grant from the WK Kellogg foundation through the Rio Grande Community Development Corporation (RGCDC) a tax exempt organization, as the program's fiscal agent. RGCDC provides a support infrastructure to community members in the areas of economic development, education, community health, and land use issues. RGCDC was initiated in 1986 by members of the Atrisco Land Rights Council and community members, to provide a vehicle for public and private resources to serve needs identified by residents and business owners of communities in the unincorporated South Valley of Bernalillo County.

STATEMENT OF NEED

Over the past twenty years, the changing face of immigration in the United States has had unprecedented impact on the healthcare system. Today, over 300 languages are spoken in the United States. Political, economic and social changes worldwide continue to add to the constant stream of immigrants into the country. According to the US Census Bureau there are over 7 million monolingual Spanish speakers living in the United States. The Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreter (CCHI) reports that over 75% of interpreter services requests are for Spanish speakers. Their immediate and frequently urgent health care needs do not wait for linguistic adjustment or cultural assimilation.

According to the 2010 US Census, LEP individuals account for 25.2 million or 9% of the U.S. population over the age of 5; they form nearly 21.7% of the uninsured population and 12% of the Medicaid population. In New Mexico over 9% of the population over the age of 5 is comprised of LEP individuals. 75% of LEP individuals living in the U.S. speak Spanish. In 2012 the Kaiser Family Foundation reported that the LEP population is more likely to be in low-wage jobs and industries that do not offer health coverage, and are more likely to face barriers accessing coverage and care. A large number of undocumented immigrants are not eligible for any health insurance coverage and remain unaccounted for in these statistics.

The function of interpreting in order to facilitate communication between a patient and a healthcare provider who do not speak the same language has been going on for a long time. In the past this function was performed mostly on an ad hoc basis. Calling on anyone who was available, a family member sometimes including a child, non-medical hospital staff and sometimes

other patients to assist in the communication. Such communication practices was and is high risk and inadequate, potentially resulting in misdiagnosis and/or inappropriate treatments that could, in a worst case scenario, result in the death of a patient. One of the unintended consequences of the Affordable Care Act, and one that many health care organizations have yet to fully prepare for, is the increase in the need for quality language access as more people acquire health care insurance. A strategy of the medical interpreter industry is to address this need by offering telephone interpretation nationwide, enabling interpreters to assist in communications from anywhere in the country.

New Mexico has been ranked by the U.S. Department of Labor as the second state with the highest unemployment in the nation. **Intérpretes Comunitarios del Valle - Valley Community Interpreters** addresses the pressing needs by preparing a skilled workforce, securing livelihoods in underemployed communities while providing a critical service to the underserved LEP population in New Mexico.

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS

New Mexico is in a unique position given the large English/Spanish bilingual population; a valuable resource in the medical interpretation field. Successful trainees may choose a path into remunerative employment and the medical interpreting profession. The **Intérpretes Comunitarios del Valle - Valley Community Interpreters** program will identify, assess and train bilingual community members who are proficient English/Spanish speakers to become trained medical interpreters using the industry standard training program Bridging the Gap (BTG). VCI offers BTG graduates assistance in finding contract work opportunities in the telephone interpreting industry and advances a professional career in medical interpreting for participants. To improve the interpreting skills for healthcare workers, staff trainings will also be offered to Albuquerque area clinics, hospital and community healthcare services. VCI's goal is to increase access to medical interpretation services at all levels of healthcare and to address these pressing needs in the LEP community.

Training for bilingual community members interested in pursuing a medical interpreter career consists of an extended 64 hour BTG course, including four hours of professional development training addressing the needs and requirements of working as an independent contractor in the medical interpreter telephonic industry.

For healthcare professionals interested in improving their language and cultural competency skills when working with their Limited English Speaking patients VCI offers a 40 hour BTG medical interpreter training course.

Intérpretes Comunitarios del Valle - Valley Community Interpreters has been developed by Cecilia Portal who has over 25 years of experience in non-profit management and program development. She has worked for diverse non-profit organizations offering social and educational services, as well as having managed private, state and federal grants and contracts. Ms. Portal holds a four year nursing degree from the National Autonomous University in Mexico City. In 2010 she completed the Bridging the Gap Medical Interpreter Training, and is certified as a Medical Interpreter by CCHI. She is fluent in English and Spanish and is currently working as a telephone interpreter for several national corporations. Ms. Portal has completed and is now a licensed Bridging the Gap program trainer.