Digital-First Multicultural Healthcare

Improving Language Access Through Localization, Translation, and Interpreting

WHITEPAPER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Members are increasingly beginning their healthcare journey online. From researching doctors and hospitals to booking appointments, members may have multiple interactions with a healthcare organization before their first visit. At the same time, existing members may enjoy the benefits of online member portals, which give them access to health records, test results, and more.

This on-demand model empowers members to make more informed decisions about their healthcare options. However, members who have limited English proficiency (LEP) may not have access to these digital resources in their primary language. Healthcare organizations that serve multicultural member populations can improve access through a combination of localization, translation, and interpreting.

Developing a digital-first multicultural healthcare strategy begins with localization, which is the process of adapting the content of a website or app to a specific market. It may include using code to render special characters, modifying graphics, and changing color schemes—in addition to translating the content.

Translation makes up an important part of a member's offline experience as well. Print materials such as member forms, brochures, and educational information must be translated in addition to the provider's website. This not only makes registration more efficient but ensures members are better informed.

LEP members may also need a medical interpreter to help them schedule an appointment, register at the front desk, and communicate with providers. In some instances, remote interpreting serves as a more efficient alternative to onsite interpreting. An interpreting platform makes it easy to connect with an interpreter in seconds.

Members who receive the language support listed above will be more involved in their own care, which improves their outcomes. This whitepaper is designed to assist organizations with the complex process of developing a digital-first multicultural healthcare strategy that empowers LEP members to do so.

INTRODUCTION

Evaluating current provider
6%

Validating provider
23%

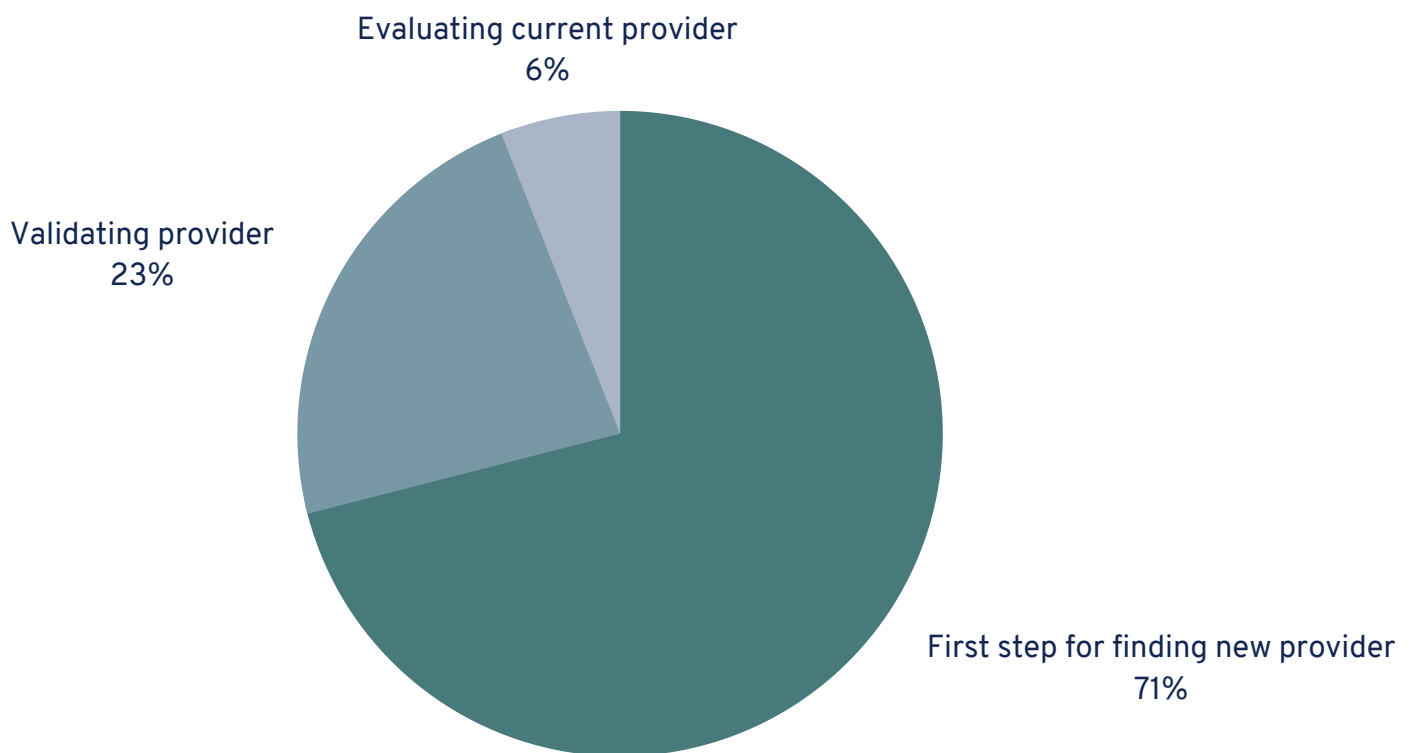First step for finding new provider
71%

CHART 1: WHEN MEMBERS USE ONLINE REVIEW SITES

Digital-first models are transforming the healthcare landscape. Members increasingly start their healthcare journey by researching providers — with 71% reporting that they read online reviews before choosing a doctor.[1]

When it comes to booking an appointment, 70% prefer to do so online, if the option is available.[2] At the same time, existing members benefit from websites with member portals that offer access to health records, test results, and information about health conditions.

While this on-demand model empowers members to take more control over their care, it can neglect a major demographic. Approximately 25 million people in the U.S. claim to have limited English proficiency (LEP), which means they speak English "less than very well."[3]

These members may struggle to navigate the healthcare system due to language barriers. Healthcare organizations that serve LEP communities can improve both online and in-person experiences through a combination of website localization, translation, and interpreting.
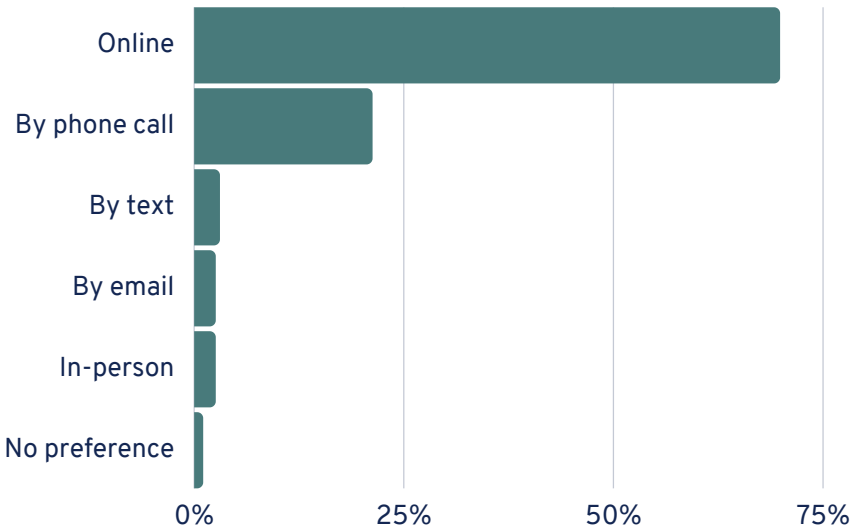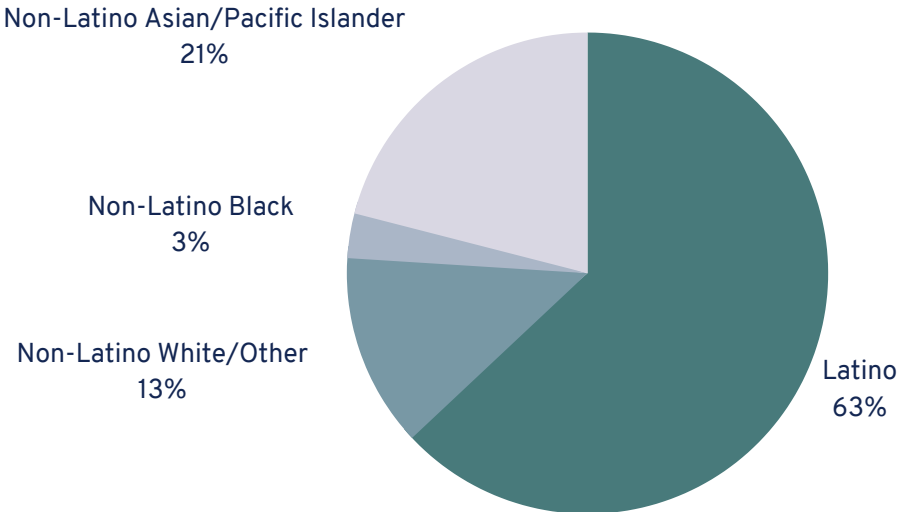

CHART 2: PREFERRED WAY TO BOOK APPOINTMENTS

CHART 3: RACE AND ETHNICITY OF LEP AND ENGLISH-PROFICIENT POPULATIONS

CREATING CULTURALLY-RELEVANT ONLINE EXPERIENCES WITH LOCALIZATION

Members-provider relationships are built on trust. Today, that relationship often begins when someone visits the healthcare provider's website. From relevant information to doctor reviews, members of all ages are looking for confirmation that your organization is the right choice.[4]

Localization Involves More Than Translation

Recreating an identical website in another language may not be sufficient for LEP members. It may require localization to meet visitors' needs.

Localization is the process of adapting a website to a specific demographic. It includes:

- Coding a website to render special characters properly.
- Translating existing content into the target language.
- Adding culturally-relevant information.
- Changing images, graphics, and other design elements to reflect cultural norms.

Apps that provide access to your website or other proprietary tools should also be localized to offer LEP members the same mobile experience. As of 2019, 81% of U.S. adults have a smartphone,[5] and mobile users spend 88% of their time within apps,[6] instead of browsers.
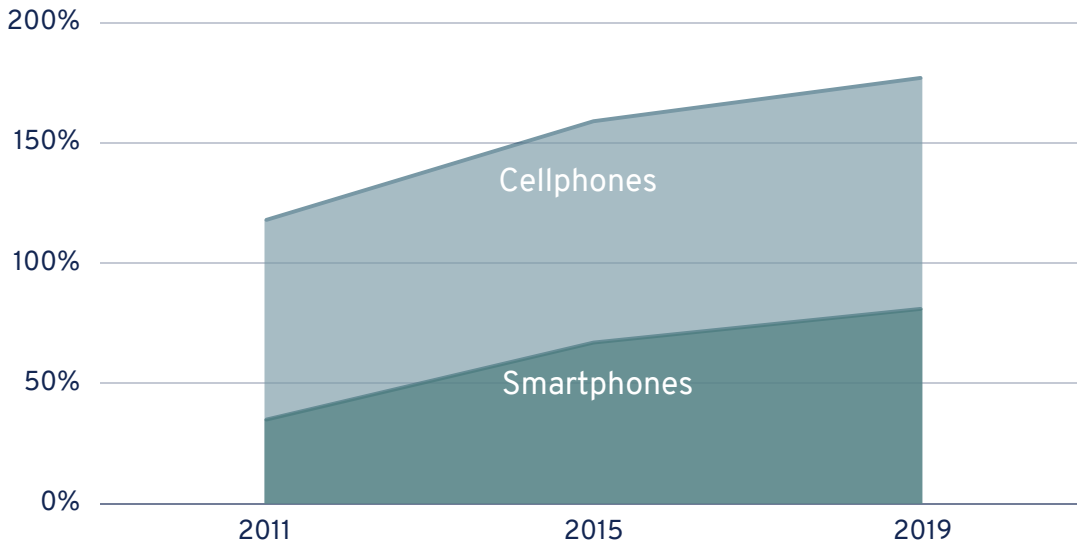
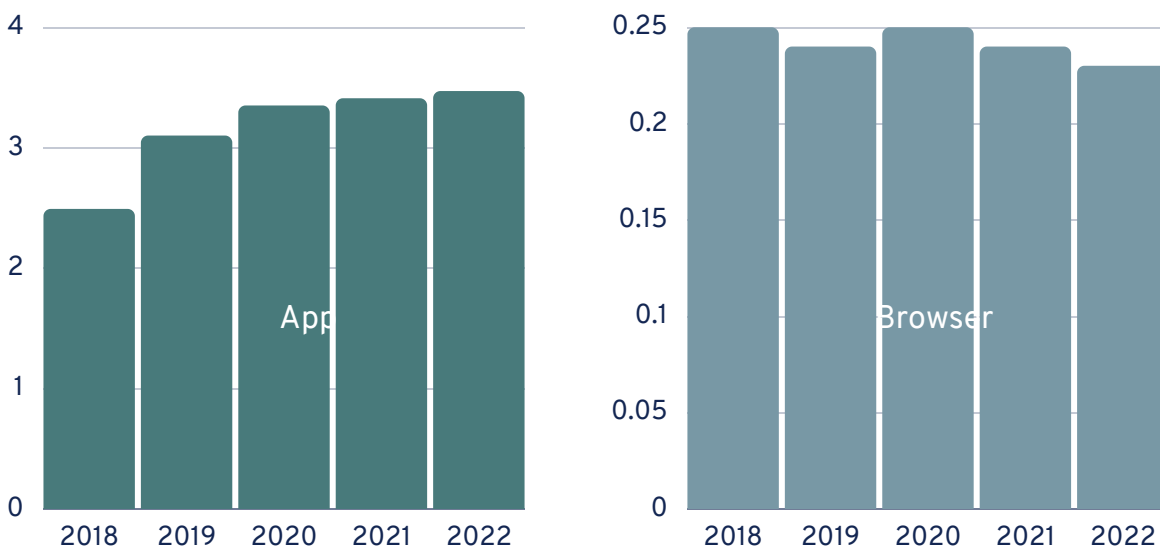**CHART 4: MOBILE PHONE OWNERSHIP OVER TIME**

CHART 5: AVERAGE DAILY TIME SPENT, APP VS. BROWSER (IN HOURS)

CASE STUDY #1

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) and Latino Outreach

While translating your website's existing content may seem sufficient, you could be leaving gaps in an LEP member's journey.

In 2015, nearly 1/3 of the ACA's media budget was spent on Latino outreach. Yet only 10% of those who enrolled through the federal exchange identified as Latino.[7]
Part of the campaign's failure can be traced back to the Spanish language version of the website, CuidadoDeSalud.gov.

Latinos reported that they:

- Found it too confusing to apply.
- Didn't understand aspects of the policy, such as the deductible.
- Needed in-person assistance to complete the application.
- Feared providing personal information could impact household members who were undocumented.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), which runs Healthcare.gov and CuidadoDeSalud.gov, has since worked to improve the website's user experience.[8]
This has led to an increase in enrolled memberships through the Spanish language website as of November 2020.

During the third week of open enrollment in November 2015, 50,224 people enrolled in a plan through CuidadoDeSalud.gov, with a total of 153,225 people enrolling since week one of the 2016 open enrollment period.[9] By November 2020, 95,353 people enrolled during week three of open enrollment and 273,776 had enrolled since the 2021 open enrollment period began.[10]

MAKING HEALTHCARE INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE WITH TRANSLATION

Translation is a major component of localization. Yet the benefits of healthcare translation go beyond attracting new members online. By providing educational materials and other documents in additional languages, healthcare providers can empower LEP members to make better decisions and improve outcomes.

Online Translation

Translating for the web presents some unique challenges when compared to print translations. Online healthcare translations must not only meet regulatory requirements, but the translator must consider:

- Space restrictions, especially within apps.
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO), including which keywords or phrases members use to search in the target language.
- Culturally-relevant messaging that will resonate with that audience.

Other aspects of a website that require translation include:

- Title tags and meta descriptions for web pages.
- Popup boxes with privacy and or/data collection information.
- Members portals and internal documents.
- Chat bots.

Print Translation

Once LEP members arrive for an office visit, they will review various print materials. To ensure they have a seamless online to in-office experience, healthcare providers need to translate:

- Office signs
- Member forms
- Brochures
- Video content
- And other materials

Translated versions of these materials will help members navigate the facility, register at the front desk, and better understand their diagnosis and treatment options.

CASE STUDY #2

Member Knowledge and Better Screening Rates

A community health center conducted a study to determine whether culturally tailored intervention would increase colorectal screening rates (CRC) among low income and non-English speaking members.**(11)**

The study was split into two groups:

- Control members
- Intervention members

Intervention members received an introductory letter followed by a phone call or in-person meeting with a language-concordant navigator.**(12)**

Navigators developed individually tailored interventions that included:

- Member education
- Procedure Scheduling
- Translation and explanation of bowel preparation
- Help with transportation and insurance coverage

Over a nine-month period, intervention members were more likely to undergo a CRC screening than control members (27% vs. 12% for any CRC screening and 21% vs. 10% for colonoscopy treatment).

This increase in screening rates shows how culturally appropriate translation, along with other services, plays an important role in improving health outcomes among LEP members.

PROVIDING LANGUAGE SUPPORT WITH REMOTE INTERPRETATION

Website localization can be considered a success if it helps bring new LEP members to the practice or members to an insurance provider. Yet without the proper language support, they may face additional barriers when they try to navigate the healthcare system. A remote medical interpreter can assist members at various stages — from the initial phone call to appointments and aftercare.

The Advantages of Remote Interpreting

Although remote interpreting services date back to 1973,[14] they're more relevant than ever. Advances in technology have made it faster and easier to connect with a medical interpreter either over the phone or via a video remote platform. Both options help providers reduce appointment times and lowers costs, as they no longer need to bring an interpreter onsite.

Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)

VRI provides an effective alternative to onsite interpreting in many scenarios. It works well for:

- Office visits.
- Telemedicine appointments.
- Emergency care, when no onsite interpreter is available.

More personal than over-the-phone interpreting (OPI), VRI allows the member and interpreter to see each other. This helps build trust and gives interpreters the ability to glean information from a member's facial expressions and body language.

Over-the-Phone Interpreting (OPI)

OPI works well for tasks that can be completed by phone. It's useful for:

- Making appointments.
- Providing assistance with registration.
- Members services.
- Billing questions.
- Appeals and grievances.

It's also more accessible for providers and members, as they don't need a high-speed internet connection to stream video.

Why Healthcare Providers Should Avoid Non-Professional Interpreters

In some instances, healthcare professionals rely on bilingual staff or member family members during an appointment. However, healthcare experts discourage this practice.[15] Staff members typically lack the linguistic training needed to accurately interpret.

Family members make an even poorer choice for interpreting. They not only lack training but may fail to disclose information or may misrepresent what a member is saying. Members may not be entirely open to with their provider in front a family member either — which may impact their ability to receive appropriate care.

A medical interpreter serves as a trained, neutral third-party who can facilitate communication between the member and the provider. They must adhere to privacy regulations such as HIPAA, and adhere to a code of ethics.

Additionally, interpretation platforms make it possible to quickly connect with remote interpreter, which reduces the need to rely on bilingual staff and family members.

CASE STUDY #3

Spanish-Speaking Caretakers and the Need for Language Support

During an academic pediatrics study, Spanish-speaking caretakers reported several reasons why they struggled to access healthcare. These include:[13]

- Difficulty making an appointment over the phone.
- Difficulty during registration, which included speaking with front office staff.
- Long wait times.
- Difficulty understanding a healthcare provider's recommendations for treatment and follow-up care.

Here are some examples of language-related barriers expressed during the study:

- Arrival and registration steps occur in English: "The only thing is that I speak Spanish and they are giving me something in English and I'm not going to understand very well what they're saying to me."
- Lack of bilingual personnel: "Yes, they need to have someone there who speaks Spanish in the check-out area because not everyone speaks English."
- Heavy reliance on interpreters: "…because when the interpreter leaves I can't say anything anymore, the doctor doesn't understand me and I don't understand the doctor either, so I have to be really sure that the interpreter is there so we understand each other."
- Long wait times: "Another person had to wait because the interpreter's office has a lot of work, too much, so then they make us wait a long time. Today I had to wait, I think, an hour and a half to have one come."

Caretakers reported that medical interpreters and bilingual staff helped them engage during appointments when they were available. One couple told researchers that they hire an interpreter prior to appointments, which highlights the need for more language support.

In conclusion, academic medical centers need multifaceted interventions that improve the availability of bilingual staff and interpreters and also address members' needs.

CONCLUSION

As more providers switch to digital-first models, LEP members need access to the same resources as their English-speaking counterparts. Healthcare organizations can ensure these members enjoy the same benefits through a combination of website localization, translation, and interpreting. This additional language support helps empower members to become more involved in their own care, which improves outcomes.

Since this process is complex, organizations should partner with a language services company that specializes in healthcare.

The right provider will develop experiences that allow members to seamlessly move through their healthcare journey.

To learn more about how LEP members and healthcare providers benefit from localization, translation, and interpreting, contact Avantpage today.

About Avantpage

Avantpage empowers immigrants to achieve their American dream through trusted language translations.

For over 20 years, we have specialized in translating, localizing, and interpreting media in more than 150 languages for a variety of clients, in both public and private sectors including healthcare providers.

We take great pride in the services we provide. But deeper than that, we're very proud to make it possible for people from different cultures to communicate effectively and respectfully.

We believe in showing "Empathy Beyond Words", in understanding the humanistic qualities of our audiences.

There is no language into which the American dream will not translate.

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