

# Health Equity and Justice for the Voiceless & Vulnerable

## Ensuring Equitable Vaccine Distribution: In Their Own Language

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**Over the past year, COVID has placed an unprecedented burden on the health care system, as hospitals struggle to care for the most vulnerable and severely affected.** Now, with the availability of long-hoped-for vaccines, we face the additional challenges of distribution and acceptance. The question is... how do cities and states get COVID vaccines to the more difficult to reach communities — those often more skeptical of vaccine safety and efficacy?

Spread across both rural and inner-city locations are over 65 million residents of this country who communicate in a language other than English and, commonly, share a different cultural tradition. These heritage community ‘bubbles’ nurture the language and culture of their shared ethnic experience and include, to name a few, second generation and recent immigrants, refugees, and members of the Deaf community. These communities are often overlooked or poorly serviced in the large scale COVID effort to test, diagnose, contact trace, and disseminate vaccines.

### The Problem

**Language and culture barriers have created extraordinary impediments for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and Deaf populations -- nearly a quarter of the country’s population:**

- Limited access to information about the COVID infection spread. Delayed, limited or incorrect understanding of COVID symptoms and preventive measures result in a disproportionate increase in infection and death among LEP and Deaf citizens.

- Inadequate testing for COVID. The lack of awareness around the significance of testing when symptoms surface results in less COVID testing and thus more community infection for LEP citizens.
- Miscommunication of symptoms. Language discordance is one of the leading causes of misdiagnoses and mistreatment, resulting in a cascade of poor outcomes including slower recovery, more readmissions and recurrence.
- Mistrust of information and treatment protocols. A communication barrier precludes a complete understanding and can foster fear and uncertainty among patients, particularly those culturally predisposed to mistrust government proclamations.

Clearly, if LEP and Deaf people cannot understand the information that is disseminated around the safety and efficacy of the vaccine, they are less likely to get it. If they cannot understand how and where to get the vaccine, they are less likely to get it. If they do not trust their caregivers, the medical system or the news, they are less likely to get it.

In sum, language is a major barrier preventing communication and understanding around precautions as well as treatment of COVID. With the development and rollout of vaccines, there is hope of ending this crisis, but only if all Americans can be vaccinated, regardless of the language they speak. The good news is that language need not remain a barrier to health equity. Patient literacy and trust between healthcare providers and vulnerable communities can be achieved through modern and effective language support services.

## The Solution

### States across the country need a 3-pronged response to this problem:

**First:** On-demand interpreting must be made available to caregivers, medical facilities, LEP and Deaf citizens at all times throughout the process of dealing with COVID, from information gathering through vaccine acceptance. This requires an interpreting service that is:

- Accessible: available on common technology, such as smartphones, tablets and computers.
- On-demand: access to an interpreter in under a minute.
- Mobile: live interpreting on mobile devices that travel with caregivers wherever tests and vaccines are being given — from clinic, to testing center, home visit, hospital, parking lot, etc.
- Easy to use and hassle-free: no logins, account IDs, operators and wait times.
- Able to accommodate the Deaf and hard-of-hearing using American Sign Language (ASL).

**Second:** A statewide call center that can:

- Accept incoming calls from LEP, Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons in need of information.
- Make outbound calls to limited English-speakers persons in order to provide information on testing, contact tracing, vaccines, and other relevant information.

**Third:** Distribution of materials and webinars in multiple languages. This might include:

- Having live interpreters join community webinars to ensure LEP and Deaf citizens understand the information and can ask questions.
- Translating written materials or public announcements into multiple languages for optimal access by the community.

Almost a quarter of U.S. residents require access to interpreting services to have fair and equitable access to health care in this time of COVID. Without this language support, many communities will continue to experience the highest infection and mortality rates—an unacceptable yet all too common characteristic of our marginalized and underserved populations.

No one can afford to remain unconcerned. That many of the people in these vulnerable communities serve as the essential workforce upon whom we collectively depend should be reason enough.

### About Jeenie

*Jeenie is a mobile platform that connects you to a video or audio call with a live interpreter for on-demand language assistance on your smartphone, tablet, or computer. Jeenie's mission has been to bring a more modern and affordable solution to the antiquated, capital-intensive language services industry.*

*The company's "dream of Jeenie" is to make language help accessible to everyone — right at their fingertips — giving voice and understanding to the most vulnerable. Today, Jeenie is particularly focused on partnering with free and charitable community clinics around the country, those that serve as hospital alternatives to underserved communities. The platform was built specifically to provide mobile, on-demand, language support to these communities.*

*Jeenie's low-cost, user-friendly and culturally-attuned interpreting service can be delivered on any device, putting the power of language and culture in the hands of the patients and caregivers both inside and outside of the examination room. Unlike other interpreter tools, Jeenie is designed not only for enterprise but also for individuals who need to share information and understanding among a wider network of family, friends, neighbors, and workplace peers.*

See more @ [Jeenie.com](https://www.jeenie.com)