



Barnsley Healthcare Federation

Better Health, Better Care, for a Better Barnsley

Deaf patients in Primary Care

The Deaf health charity [SignHealth](#) “use Deaf with a capital D to refer to people who have been deaf all their lives, or since before they started to learn to talk. They are pre-lingually deaf. It’s an important distinction, because Deaf people tend to communicate in sign language as their first language. For most Deaf people English is a second language, and understanding complicated messages in English can be a problem.” Data from the [GP Patient Survey](#) suggests that 0.44% of the adult population in England are Deaf and use British Sign Language (BSL). In this article Deaf with a capital D is used to refer to the signing Deaf community.

Health Literacy & Health inequality - Deaf people do not have the same access to information about health issues, discussed on Radio and TV programs as hearing people. According to the [2011 Census for England and Wales](#), 65% of people who use BSL as a main language cannot speak English or cannot speak English very well. Many public health campaigns haven't been accessible for Deaf people. Consequently Deaf people are at an increased risk of a “low knowledge fund.” A [study](#) based in Cheshire found that Deaf women faced a lack of information on such matters as sex education, contraception, and childbirth. The [DeafHealth Study \(2014\)](#) found Deaf people in the UK were twice as likely as hearing people to have undiagnosed high blood pressure and they are less likely than hearing people to be adequately treated for chronic conditions such as diabetes.

Healthcare is a devolved issue. But relevant legislation includes the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (UK wide), the Equality Act 2010 (UK wide), The British Sign Language Act 2022 (England, Wales and Scotland), The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015, The Irish Sign Language Act 2017 and the Section 250 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (England).

The **Accessible Information Standard** (England) defines:

- **‘Accessible Information’** (‘information which is able to be read or received and understood by the individual or group for which it is intended’); and
- **‘Communication Support’** (‘which is needed to enable effective, accurate dialogue between a professional and a service user to take place’).

How to comply with the Accessible Information Standard

ASK patients what their preferred method of communication is **and** ensure the patient's access needs are clearly marked on their file.

Implement their request **and** share their access needs when referring the patient to other parts of the NHS. E.g. *Profoundly Deaf, BSL user, requires a BSL interpreter present at all appointments, is not able to hear telephone calls.*

Protect yourself and your patients, always use interpreters; don't take the risk!

Pen and Paper and Lipreading - In 2013 the Scottish public services ombudsman ruled that ["using lip-reading and pen and paper is not likely to be an adequate or reasonable response to the needs of a BSL-user"](#).

Longer appointments with pen and paper - In 2014 the [Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman](#) found that an English GP practice and the PCT that had refused to provide a Deaf BSL user with a BSL interpreter, had acted in an unacceptable manner and £3,000 in compensation was paid.

Daughter informally interpreting - In 2021 the [Equality Commission for Northern Ireland](#) supported a daughter in bringing a case against her late Mum's GP practice for the lack of BSL interpreters, the Surgery has paid over £4,000 in compensation.

All **healthcare professional bodies** also require their members to use interpreters when needed to deliver safe patient care and gain informed consent.

Training your team

- [Learning for Health](#), free, Accessible Information Standard & Deaf Communication.
- [University Collage London \(UCL\)](#) offer online accredited CPD [Deaf Awareness training for Doctors](#), [Nurses](#) and [Administrative staff](#) £39 per module.

Contacting your surgery- Desktop text messaging and email services are widely available. UK Relay App is a free service where the Deaf person types their message which is then read out to you and vice-versa. BSL video remote interpreting (VRI) is now widely used by the Deaf community. It requires the Practice to have signed up in advance with a provider.

Working with BSL interpreters

- Protect yourself and your patients by always using an interpreter. The Deaf community is small and so the patient may want some influence over who interpreters as someone they see regularly in a personal / professional setting may not be ideal.
- Remote video BSL interpretation can be used for unscheduled care, if the organisation has a prearranged contract with a video relay interpreter (VRI) provider.
- We all occasionally nod even though we're not quite followed everything that has been said. Deaf people are not exempt from this so it's worth double checking.

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- BSL interpreters can be found by searching the National register at [NRCPD.org.uk](https://www.nrcpd.org.uk).

Specialist services

- NHS England has funded Talking Therapies in BSL through SignHealth, refer [here](#).
- [NHS 111](#) can now be accessed 24/7 using video call interpreters, ideal for safety-netting, medication enquires and questions after the appointment.
- SignHealth offer specialist domestic violence support in BSL, refer [here](#).