

# Effective Communication in Hospitals Initiative

The Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights (OCR)

Access to health care, patient safety and quality of health care are directly dependent on effective communication. Today, hospitals face increasing challenges in meeting the communication needs of a diverse population, including persons with limited English proficiency (LEP) or who are deaf or hard of hearing (target populations). This initiative is designed to give hospitals the tools, information, and other technical assistance they need to meet these challenges, consistent with OCR's mission to ensure that all persons have access to health care without facing unlawful discrimination. To ensure success and achieve the greatest impact, OCR is partnering with the health care community both at the national level and at the regional and state levels.

**National level:** OCR and the American Hospital Association (AHA) and its affiliates will collaborate to exchange and broadly disseminate information and resource materials so that all hospitals can benefit from the information and best practices developed through this initiative.

**Regional/state levels:** OCR's ten regional offices and at least one state hospital association in each region are collaborating in development of a technical assistance program tailored to the needs of the individual association and its member hospitals. The four core elements of this collaboration are:

- *Assessment* of the issues and concerns of the state's hospitals regarding effective communication with the target populations;
- *Development and implementation* of educational and other activities to effectively and efficiently improve language access for the target populations;
- *Evaluation* of both the process and the outcomes of the collaborative efforts; and
- *Sharing the results* of these efforts in a manner that will assist other hospitals and state associations facing similar issues nationwide.

Seventeen hospital associations in sixteen states are now partnering with OCR regional offices:  
Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Washington.

**Consistent with these four core elements,** OCR will provide training and information related to legal responsibilities and best practices, as well as technical assistance, tailored to best meet the needs of the hospitals in the state. State hospital associations bring to the initiative leadership with member hospitals, expertise regarding state and local issues, access to their communication vehicles, and coordination of presentations where hospitals can share their experiences and success stories.

**Based on a shared commitment** to the principle that effective communication with patients and their families is critical to safe, quality health care, OCR and AHA are partnering to ensure that all hospitals have access to resource materials that will assist them in communicating with members of the target populations. AHA has shared information about the initiative with all state hospital associations through transmittal of a December 19, 2006 letter from OCR Director Winston A. Wilkinson. In addition, OCR has developed a dedicated webpage on "Hospitals and Effective Communication" (<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hospitalcommunication.html>).