CALIFORNIA’S
LATINO
PHYSICIAN
CRISIS
A policy series
generously
supported by
AltaMed

California’s Language Concordance Mismatch:
Clear Evidence for Increasing Physician Diversity

PAUL HSU, YOHUALLI BALDERAS-MEDINA ANAYA, LESLIE ANGLIN, AND DAVID E. HAYES-BAUTISTA

SEPTEMBER 2018
In California, nearly 44% of the population speaks a language other than English at home, and about 19% of the total state population can be categorized as Limited English Proficient "LEP" (State of California, 2018). The Institute of Medicine has noted that the Limited English Proficiency of some patients may have effects on health status, access to care, health outcomes and patient safety (2009). The purpose of this study is to identify how well California’s physician workforce meets the linguistic needs of California’s LEP population and present a handful of policy solutions to close the language concordance gap to improve health outcomes.

**METHODOLOGY**

“Language concordance” occurs when a patient and a physician speak the same language. We report the language concordance of the top 8 languages, plus Thai/Lao,* as a rate: physicians who speak a language per 100,000 population (over five years of age) that speaks the same language.

To do this, we used the U.S. Census Bureau data file from the 2015 American Community Survey for California. First, we rank-ordered the state's languages by the number of people who spoke them. Table 1 shows the top eight languages spoken in California, plus Thai/Lao.*

**Table 1. Top Languages Spoken in California (Total Number of Residents)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language spoken [general version]</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>20,321,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>10,637,225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1,176,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino, Tagalog</td>
<td>866,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>532,312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi and related</td>
<td>519,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>381,885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian, Iranian, Farsi</td>
<td>199,592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai, Siamese, Lao</td>
<td>87,683</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey. 2015
**FINDINGS**

Figure 1 provides the physician per 100,000 rate for each language group. The baseline comparison rate is the 344.2 physicians who only speak English per 100,000 population that only speaks English.

**Figure 1. MD/100,000 by Language, California (2015)**

Source: U.S. Census, 2015

---

**Well-Represented Language Groups**

Some language groups are well-represented in California’s physician workforce. For example, the physician/100,000 population rate for Farsi is 1,627.7 and for Hindi-speaking physicians, the rate is 1,267.9. California is also well-represented with respect to two East Asian languages: Korean (614.7 ratio) and Chinese (570.5 ratio).

**Under-Represented Language Groups**

Some language groups are under-represented in California’s physician workforce. With respect to Southeast Asian LEP Californians, the Vietnamese-speaking physician ratio is 320.4 and the Thai/Lao speaking physician ratio is 293.9. Additionally, the Filipino-speaking physician ratio is 229.8. Significantly far behind California’s primary languages is Spanish. Spanish-speaking physicians are the most under-represented at 62.1 per 100,000 Spanish-speaking population.
POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Nearly 20 million Californians age five and older speak only English at home, which means that nearly 16 million speak some other language. Some of these language groups are well-represented in the physician workforce, yet some are severely under-represented. Notably the first, third, and fourth most-spoken non-English languages in California are underrepresented by California's current physician workforce. This is especially concerning for Spanish speaking Californians, who suffer from the lowest physician population ratio in the state (62.1).

There are 12.1 million people in California who speak Spanish, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Thai/Lao at home.

To address this critical gap in care, we recommend an emphasis on language ability in medical school admissions to increase physician language concordance with: Spanish, Filipino, Thai/Lao, and Vietnamese. Increasing the physician supply in those languages will help reduce the negative effects of being an LEP patient seeking medical care from a physician in California.

CITATIONS


*Even though the Thai/Lao language group ranked 16th in the state, it was included because of the unique health problems endured by that population. See Smalkoski K, Herther NK, Xiong AB, Ritsema K, Vang R, Zheng R. Health disparities research in the Hmong American community: Implications for practice and policy. Hmong Studies Journal 2012; 13(2) 1-31.