

May 7, 2001

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Thompson:

The undersigned health organizations urge the Department of Health and Human Services to continue its over 30 year history of enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and fully implement the Department's "Policy Guidance on the Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination As It Affects Persons With Limited English Proficiency (August 20, 2000)."

Medical errors based on language result in significant costs to providers and health care payors. The tragedy for patients is that they are misdiagnosed, receive wrong medications, don't understand instructions enough to comply with instructions, or receive no or inappropriate care. The results are health complications, unnecessary procedures, or tragic loss of function or life. Furthermore, in a time when the Nation is seeking to reduce health disparities, research by the Department's Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) has found that one-half to three-fourths of access barriers for Hispanics are associated with factors such as LEP barriers rather than income and insurance.

The importance of communication and trust in the patient-provider relationship is taught in every health professional program in the country and that is the basis of the Department's policy guidance. It is vital to the health of the Nation that DHHS enforce its decades long standard, including the most recent policy guidance, ensuring access for LEP persons. It is simply good clinical practice.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

AARP
American Association for Health Education
American Association for Respiratory Care
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Cancer Society
American Diabetes Association
American Heart Association
American Nurses Association
American Psychological Association
American Public Health Association
Easter Seals
Interamerican College of Physicians and Surgeons, Inc.
March of Dimes

National Alliance for Hispanic Health
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Hispanic Nurses
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems
National Mental Health Association
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Organization for Rare Disorders
National Perinatal Association
National Women's Health Network
Research!America
Society for Public Health Education

Sampling of State and Local Organizations

Arizona Hispanic Center of Excellence (AZ)

Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (GA)

Advocate for Families of Stroke and Other Traumatic Injuries (Idaho)

Maine Rural Workers Coalition (ME)

Alamance County Department of Social Services (NC)

El Pueblo, Inc. (NC)

Episcopal Hispanic Ministry (NC)

Legal Services of Southern Piedmont (NC)

New River Behavioral Healthcare (NC)

Wake County Human Services (NC)

Hispanics in Politics (NV)

R.E. Thomason General Hospital (TX)