



WFD-WASLI JOINT STATEMENT ON ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES AND INTERPRETER OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH DURING THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) CONTAINMENT EFFORTS

The recent coronavirus (Covid 19) outbreak is of concern for healthcare authorities and citizens alike. Governments responses to this outbreak must be inclusive of all members of the public, including deaf people who use sign languages. The WFD and WASLI remind governments on all levels of their commitments under the Convention on the Rights of Peoples with Disabilities (CRPD) to ensure full access to information and accessibility to all services under CRPD Articles 9 and 21.

It is imperative that all public health announcements made by government officials are also done in the national sign language(s) of that country. Televised (whether live or prerecorded) announcements related to the coronavirus outbreak should be interpreted in real time into the national sign language(s) with sign language interpreters being on screen and clearly visible the entire time of the broadcast.

The WFD and WASLI join national associations of deaf people around the world in demanding direct access in their national sign language(s) to informational materials on the coronavirus. Information by national health organizations and government entities to the public should be distributed in their national sign languages. As per best practices under CRPD Article 21, governments have an obligation to provide information directly in sign languages and not solely via translation. Global health entities should also make their global information and public education materials directly accessible in International Sign, and if working in specific national settings, in relevant national sign languages.

WASLI and the WFD take the [health and safety of sign language interpreters](#) around the world very seriously and are committed to promoting professional standards in all work settings. The coronavirus situation reminds us of the need to ensure best practices in sign language interpreting access and in the health and safety of sign language interpreters as professionals working as integral parts of health care systems around the world.

WASLI and the WFD urge sign language interpreters and deaf people to work together to find solutions that ensures accurate access to information and healthcare without putting the interpreter and (often limited) interpreting resources at risk. Sign language interpreters who work in emergency and health settings should be given the same health and safety protections as other health care workers dealing with Covid 19. There maybe appropriate alternatives for optimum access, such as an interpreting wearing a transparent surgical mask or from behind a transparent screen, so that facial expressions and lip movement is still visible, as these are important grammatical elements in sign languages. If amenable to the deaf patient and in accordance with the practices outlined in the [WFD Position Paper on Accessibility: Sign Language Interpreting and translation and technological developments](#), remote/distance interpreting may also be feasible.

For further information on best practices in interpreting access, please refer to the [WFD Position Paper on Accessibility: Sign Language Interpreting and translation and technological developments](#).

The WFD and WASLI will monitor this situation and issue further guidance as becomes necessary.