

The Right to Health Interpreting in New Zealand

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The right to health interpreting under international law can be considered “an outlier in the field of Human Rights”, for both translation and interpreting enjoy a long history in an international context across various legal settings (Dalton-Oates, 2017: 230). Research shows that divergent views from international legislators on the subject of health interpreter services have resulted in nations, regions and health providers having great differential power in deciding which patients are provided with an interpreter (ibid.). Against this background, this paper examines the right to health interpreting in New Zealand, where government-funded interpreter services are available in most areas for hospital and primary care visits. It first shows that despite the availability of statutory obligations concerning the legal requirement to provide translation and interpreting services across the New Zealand public sector, several barriers continue to affect access to health services for people with limited English language proficiency. The paper then reviews these barriers against a specific policy frame involving an initiative launched by central government agencies to improve equitable and fair access to public services in New Zealand, known as the Language Assistance Services (LAS) Project. Notwithstanding the significant value and benefits of this Project, the authors suggest that similar barriers will still be likely to affect health equity and access in New Zealand, and present the design of a research project aimed to alleviate problems identified with said barriers. This research was only recently approved at one of the three Auckland-based District Health Boards (DHBs) and represents the first of this kind in New Zealand.

References

Dalton-Oates, Bradley. (2017). Medical translation: the neglected human right. *International Journal of Human Rights in Healthcare*, 10(4), pp. 228-238.