

**Date:** February 6, 2022

**To:** Executive Vice President  
Chief Technology Officer

**From:** Assistant to the Executive Vice President & Chief Technology Officer

**Subject:** CHNA 2019 Linguistic Disparities and Health Information

### **Purpose**

The 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) outlined major health concerns in Northern Virginia. Among the report's list of healthcare access issues, linguistic isolation is an ongoing problem which perpetuates disparity in our Fairfax community. According to the 2019 CHNA, Fairfax County reported a linguistically isolated population of 7.3%. This population subset experiences greater difficulty when operating in the healthcare system. Linguistically isolated individuals often don't culturally or linguistically align with providers, which can dampen treatment efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, linguistic isolation can nullify health information systems without proper translation applications in place.

The Inova Health System (INOVA) has made some effort to install translation services. The Community Themes and Strengths Assessment (CTSA) was a survey included in the CHNA. It was distributed both in-paper and online, and was made available in a multitude of languages for Fairfax residents. Translating health demographic surveys for non-english speaking residents is imperative, as low accessibility surveys would skew findings and lead to greater disparity. This is a minimal and necessary step, but is nonetheless a step in the right direction. In addition, surveying tools will become more and more paperless as technological disparity decreases. Information systems hold the key to major solutions for language barriers in healthcare. The purpose of this memorandum is to bring the disparities of linguistic isolation to light, and highlight directed spending toward health information systems as a solution.

### **Background**

Studies have displayed clear evidence that individuals who don't speak the local language are at a significant disadvantage in terms of receiving quality care service (Shamsi, 2020). In addition, linguistically isolated individuals have an increased chance to warrant increased spending in healthcare services. While employment of interpreters is the traditional solution for this problem, it has shown to significantly increase the cost and time of patient visits. Several information technology applications are being used as an alternative solution. Google translate is a popular and common translation tool utilized by providers in many hospital settings. Another tool, MediBabble, is a free translator with a deep specialization in medical terminology. These applications increased satisfaction ratings of both patients and medical providers by 92% (Shamsi, 2020).

As the assistant to the EVP and CTO, I recommend consideration for further evaluation of these applications. The Inova Health system would benefit greatly from a controlled initiative aimed at regulation and implementation of translation technologies. Most importantly, this strategy would help to reduce the percentage of linguistically isolated individuals.

## References

Fairfax County Health Department. (2019). *Inova Community Health Needs Assessments and implementation plans*. Inova. Retrieved February 6, 2022, from <https://www.inova.org/inova-in-the-community/community-health-needs-assessments>

Shamsi, H. A., Almutairi, A. G., Mashrafi, S. A., & Kalbani, T. A. (2020, March). *Implications of Language Barriers for Healthcare: A Systematic Review*. Oman Medical Journal-Archive. Retrieved February 6, 2022, from <https://dx.doi.org/10.5001%2Fomj.2020.40>