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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **New Report Finds Millions in Los Angeles County Face Language Barriers Release Coincides with Los Angeles County's Expansion of Healthcare Interpreters**

LOS ANGELES, CA – A new report released today by the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC) found that over 2.5 million residents throughout Los Angeles County face language barriers that may jeopardize their access to critical services. According to the report, *L.A. Speaks: Language Diversity and English Proficiency by Los Angeles County Service Planning Area*, a majority of Los Angeles County residents speak a language other than English at home, while roughly one in three are limited English proficient, or experience some difficulty communicating in English. *L.A. Speaks* features information on the number of foreign-born, the number of languages spoken, and the rates of limited English proficiency (LEP) by Service Planning Area (SPA), geographic regions created by the County to better target the delivery of social and health care services to County residents. SPA 3 in the San Gabriel Valley is home to the County's largest number of LEP persons, while SPA 4 in metro Los Angeles has the highest rate of LEPs among SPAs. A copy of the *LA Speaks* report can be found at [www.demographics.apalc.org](http://www.demographics.apalc.org)

To complement the data provided in *L.A. Speaks*, PALS for Health also released a compilation of personal stories from limited English speaking Los Angeles residents, which illustrate the impact of language barriers on access to health care. *In the Absence of Words* contains ten stories of "language ambassadors," participants in the PALS for Health Speakers' Bureau who have experienced first-hand the need for assistance from trained healthcare interpreters. "Everyday we receive calls from LEPs seeking care at County health facilities, but who are often not provided the language assistance they need. These are some of their stories," said Veronika Geronimo, Program Director of PALS for Health.

The report and the stories illustrate the extent of language diversity and challenges in Los Angeles County and their release coincides with recent action taken by the County to address language barriers in health care.

Last year, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved the hiring of nine full-time healthcare interpreters and the implementation of Video Medical Interpretation (VMI) technology, which uses videoconferencing to instantaneously connect off-site interpreters with patients and doctors in County hospitals. The four Los Angeles County Hospitals which will use VMI are Rancho Los Amigos, LAC+USC, UCLA-Harbor and Olive View County Hospitals. The nine full-time healthcare interpreters will be hired for Spanish, Korean, Mandarin and Cantonese languages while interpreters hired for the VMI project are for Armenian, Russian, Farsi, Korean, Mandarin, Cantonese and Spanish languages.

“After many years of working with the County, it is tremendous that the County is taking important steps to meet its legal obligations to provide language assistance to the diverse residents of Los Angeles County – but we see this as a first step and we encourage the County to continue to grow this program to address more languages in the future,” says Doreena Wong staff attorney from the National Health Law Program.

“Although we are thankful that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors have approved the hiring of nine healthcare interpreters and funded the implementation of videoconferenced interpreting, we need the entire community – including doctors, hospital staff, patients – to help monitor whether these changes successfully meet the daily crush of language needs at County hospitals. Right now, there is little to no outreach to inform the community and the County hospital staff about the hiring of the trained healthcare interpreters or the implementation of the VMI system. There is also no system in place to provide feedback to County about problems the community may encounter when requesting interpretation,” states Wingshan Lo, Health Policy Advocate at APALC.

Advocates are urging the community to report their experience with the new healthcare interpreters and videoconferencing system by calling PALS for Health hotlines at 213-627-4850 (Spanish) or 800-228-8886 (English, Armenian, Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Thai and Vietnamese). The information from these hotlines will provide critical feedback in regards to whether the County is meeting the significant needs highlighted in the new reports.

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