

Health Care Interpreter Qualification and Certification in Oregon

What is Certification and Qualification?

The certification/qualification of health care interpreters in Oregon is a state accreditation standard for the professional quality of interpreters working in a medical setting. The Oregon Health Authority Office of Equity and Inclusion oversees the application and registration process for becoming certified or qualified.

Why Get Certified or Qualified?

Besides the reasons of meeting Oregon state standards, interpreters report earning a higher hourly rate and being more in demand. Oregon legislation requires health care providers to work with certified or qualified interpreters whenever possible, so hospitals and clinics are increasingly looking for interpreters who are qualified or certified.

Certification

Certification is only available for seven languages: Arabic, Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. This limitation is because these languages are the only ones that currently have a standardized oral interpreter exam available.

To become certified, you must complete three main objectives:

- Complete an Oregon Health Authority approved 60 hour health care interpreter training
- Work or volunteer at least 80 hours as a health care interpreter
- Pass a written exam and an oral exam with either the National Board for Certification of Medical Interpreters (NBCMI) or the Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI)

The order you accomplish these objectives is not important, with the exception that you must complete at least 40 hours of training before registering for the NBCMI or CCHI exams.

Certification Exams

The NBCMI and the CCHI are national organizations that offer similar written and oral exams for health care interpreters. For both, the written exam is a multiple choice test in English that reviews the skills and knowledge required of a health care interpreter. Also for both, the oral exam is a computer test where you are recorded on your interpreting skills.

The NBCMI offers testing only for Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

The CCHI offers testing only for Arabic, Mandarin, and Spanish.

The cost for the written and oral exams varies for NBCMI and CCHI, but is typically \$400-500 total if you pass the exams successfully the first time.

Learn more about the exams online:

NBCMI website: <http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/>

CCHI website: <http://www.cchicertification.org/>

Qualification

Qualification is available for all languages (including American Sign Language). The purpose of qualification is to provide a level of accreditation even if your language is not certifiable.

To become qualified, you must complete three main objectives:

- Complete an Oregon Health Authority approved 60 hour health care interpreter training
- Work or volunteer at least 40 hours as a health care interpreter
- Prove your oral language proficiency in English and your target language by a high school/GED or college diploma, or by an oral proficiency test

The order you accomplish these objectives is not important. For proving your oral language proficiency in English, you must have a high school/GED or a higher education degree from an English speaking country (an overseas American high school or an overseas higher education institution instructing in English also counts), or else you must take an oral proficiency test for English.

For your target language, you must have a high school or a higher education degree from a country that speaks that language, or higher education degree with your major in that language. Otherwise, you must take an oral proficiency test for that language. All non-English transcripts must be translated into English by a translation company.

If you have questions about whether your transcripts count for language proficiency proof, contact the Office of Equity and Inclusion at hci.program@state.or.us.

Acceptable oral proficiency tests are available through Language Line University (877-351-6636) and Language Testing International (800-486-8444).

Costs range from \$70-145 depending on the company and the language.

Note: Interpreters who speak certifiable languages (Arabic, Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, or Vietnamese) can choose the path of getting qualified instead of certified in that language, but they will have to become certified when renewing their credentials.

Other Requirements

In addition to the three main objectives for certification and qualification, you must meet the following requirements:

- You must have a valid state ID or passport to prove your identity (check with the Office of Equity and Inclusion if you have questions on your form of ID)
- You must not be on the Medicaid Exclusion List (this is for individuals who committed Medicaid fraud in the past)
- You must have a high school diploma/GED

When do I have to renew my certification/qualification?

Every three years. The exact requirements for renewal have not yet been made clear by the Office of Equity and Inclusion.

If I am certified or qualified as a health care interpreter in Oregon, does that mean I am certified or qualified in other states as well?

No, Oregon accreditation is valid only in Oregon. Each state has its own specific requirements.

If I pass the written and oral exams with the NBCMI or CCHI, does that mean I have a national certification as a health care interpreter?

No. When you pass NBCMI, you receive the title of Certified Medical Interpreter (CMI), and when you pass CCHI, you receive the title of Certified Healthcare Interpreter (CHI). However, these don't give you any national or state accreditation (nor do they automatically make you a certified health care interpreter in Oregon). There is no official national certification. Instead, each state has its own standards.

Once I complete my main objectives for certification or qualification, how do I submit my application?

When you have completed your three main objectives, you will want to review the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI) health care interpreter application and start to gather all the documented proof you need to submit your application.

See the application on their website:

<http://www.oregon.gov/oha/oei/Pages/hci-certification.aspx>

Additionally, contact the OEI with any questions you may have: hci.program@state.or.us