

Oversight of Multilingual Access Services: Unemployment Insurance

March 1, 2025

Annual Report to the Legislature



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Purpose

In accordance with Section 316 of the California Unemployment Insurance Code (CUIC), as amended by Assembly Bill (AB) 138 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 78, Statutes of 2021) in July 2021, the Employment Development Department (EDD) is pleased to provide a report to the Legislature regarding language accessibility efforts in the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program from January 2024 to December 2024, along with a review of the efforts from 2023.

Language Access Office

Established in May 2022, EDD's Language Access Office continues to lead the Department's language accessibility efforts. Notable accomplishments in 2024 will be detailed throughout this report.

Continued Efforts

In 2024, the following efforts by the Language Access Office continue to improve and advance its language accessibility mission.

- Develop and review of language accessibility policies and procedures to ensure equal access to the Department's programs and services.
- Conduct research, data analysis, and monitoring to determine the Department's accessibility needs to comply with federal and state laws, including AB 138.
- Address the Department's language accessibility requirements.
- Lead the Department's community engagement activities with limited-English proficient (LEP) communities to solicit feedback on EDD's language access initiatives.
- Hold bimonthly meetings with the Multilingual Access Advisory Committee, which continues to provide feedback on EDD's language access initiatives and also shares important EDD updates that impact LEP claimants with the members of the committee. The Multilingual Access Advisory Committee provides guidance and recommendations on matters related to multilingual access and language support within EDD. The Committee aims to promote language inclusivity, enhance accessibility, and ensure equal opportunities for individuals with diverse linguistic backgrounds, including people who are deaf and hard of hearing. The members represent various regions across the state through community-based organizations, which have experience in assisting LEP individuals in accessing EDD benefits and services.
- Lead the Department's internal Language Access Task Force, comprised of EDD employees who are actively engaged in Department's language access initiatives and work directly with LEP claimants to discuss essential policies, identify needs, recommend strategies, and raise awareness about language access initiatives that impact EDD claimants.

- Engage with state agencies and federal stakeholders on matters related to language accessibility.
- Develop staff training while providing technical assistance, and other educational initiatives, including delivery of culturally appropriate interpretation and translation services.
- Develop reports required by the Legislature on the status of the Department's multilingual access services and other activities, assist with responses to legislative inquiries, and support the Department's communications and public engagement activities.
- Provide oversight related to appropriate language access, including interpretation, translation, and multilingual web content services as state law requires.

Additional Enterprise Efforts on Language Assistance

In 2024, EDD made essential updates on a comprehensive suite of language access resources designed to enhance language accessibility within the Department and for the LEP community, including:

- Launching an electronic Babel Notice. EDD's Babel Notices are short notices included in documents that claimants receive in the mail. These notices inform readers about vital information explaining how to access language services to understand the form's information. This ensures legal compliance by providing details about no-cost interpretation services and information regarding liability on third-party translations on both English and in-language web pages. Now, EDD can conveniently provide a digital Babel Notice to claimants that prefer to receive electronic communications.
- Consolidating the paper Babel Notice into a single page to improve the user experience and reduce costs. This new, streamlined notice also includes updated contact information for EDD's dedicated UI language lines and a QR code for direct access to translated vital forms.
- Developing the Multilingual Interpreter Services Poster (DE 1210), which offers information on free interpretive services for LEP claimants in California's top 15 languages.
- EDD enhanced trainings for Public Contact Employees who serve LEP customers to highlight available resources.
- Preparing new telephonic interpretation services contract with *Focus Interpreting*, with nearly 200 languages available for interpretation in real time and on demand during calls. EDD has already adopted this vendor's services for specific languages of lesser diffusion or indigenous languages. In California, Spanish-speaking migrants have language variants that are particular to the geographical towns in Mexico and are commonly known as indigenous languages. Introducing Focus Interpreting's services will allow EDD to provide scheduled interpretation calls for California's Spanish-speaking

community in 16 additional language variants. Starting February 6, 2025, this contract will replace Language Line Solutions.

myEDD, Direct Deposit, and UI Online Unemployment Applications

On March 28, 2024, the Department's shared customer portal, myEDD, expanded its online language access options to include Armenian, Korean, and Tagalog. This is in addition to the existing Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Vietnamese, English, and Spanish options. These eight languages represent the top languages of working-age adults in California. This enhancement allowed claimants to also receive timely updates about claim status and payment notifications via email or text messages.

On June 17, 2024, EDD partnered with Money Network to give claimants another option to receive their benefit payments. EDD claimants receiving unemployment, disability, and Paid Family Leave benefits can now enroll in direct deposit. This benefit payment option is in addition to the prepaid debit card and mailed check options. As discussed later in this report, extensive communications and outreach to LEP communities were implemented to ensure this option was fully communicated.

On October 26, 2024, EDD enhanced and simplified the online application for unemployment benefits, now available in the top eight languages. Using a plain language approach, the new application has fewer questions, less jargon, and simpler instructions, creating a more positive and customer-focused application experience. Plain language improvements to vital forms directly impact translation efforts and ensure that EDD can deliver translations in a clear and concise manner.

Language Preference Identification

Since January 2023, the Language Access Office has continued to research, collect, and analyze data on the language preferences of EDD claimants, including both their preferred spoken and written languages.

The Language Access Office has completed its required triennial evaluation, as specified in Section 316 of the CUIA, to determine additional languages to support. EDD reviewed, evaluated, and updated the list of seven primary languages and an additional eight languages for translating vital information. In determining which languages to include, the Department considers a range of data sources, such as the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, feedback from community-based organizations, and internal data tracking.

Comparing the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2019 and 2022 data, California's LEP population contracted slightly from 18.41 percent to

18.33 percent. In terms of language coverage, the top 15 languages already supported by EDD accounted for 94.96 percent of the state's population in 2019, and this proportion slightly decreased to 94.27 in 2022. Based on this information, the initial languages identified by the Legislature continue to best represent those requiring EDD support.

The Department will continue to use this data to refine its language access strategies and ensure that vital information is available to the state's diverse population in their preferred language.

Data Collection and Monitoring

EDD is committed to gathering and monitoring data to ensure effective oversight of multilingual program access for LEP claimants. As part of this initiative, EDD is continually refining its data collection and monitoring strategies to evaluate the accessibility and effectiveness of its language services. This ongoing evaluation is crucial to ensuring that LEP claimants can fully engage with and benefit from EDD services.

In calendar year 2024, EDD received 30,501 requests for third-party telephonic interpretation services, a significant increase compared to the 13,977 requests in 2023. This represents an increase of 16,524 requests, or 118 percent. Spanish was the most commonly requested language, followed by Punjabi, Korean, Mandarin, and Farsi. This increase reflects the growing demand for language access services.

Throughout 2024, EDD also responded to 557,650 calls through its dedicated unemployment language lines for LEP claimants. These lines are available in seven languages: Spanish, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Korean, and Armenian. In 2023, the total call volume was 554,628, an increase of 3,022 calls, or 0.5 percent, compared to 2024. The monthly average for calls in 2023 was 46,219, while the 2024 monthly average rose to 46,471, marking a slight increase of 252 calls per month year-over-year. EDD continues to serve all LEP UI claimants via dedicated phone lines or third-party interpretative services.

To further improve language accessibility services, EDD continues to closely monitor data metrics to support California's LEP population better, ensuring all claimants can access the full range of services available. This ongoing data collection and analysis is vital in addressing language barriers and ensuring equitable access to EDD programs and resources.

Community Outreach

The Language Access Office established the Multilingual Access Advisory Committee with its inaugural meeting on January 18, 2023, and continues its

goal to optimize EDD's partnership with language advocates and conduct meetings every two months, with the most recent meeting held on November 19, 2024. Members of the Multilingual Access Advisory Committee, representing diverse regions across the state through various community-based organizations, possess substantial expertise in facilitating access to EDD benefits and services for LEP individuals. These meetings are vital for maintaining ongoing communication and effectively addressing this demographic's needs.

EDD's staff also connect with diverse communities across California through community events. In 2024, EDD employees shared information about their programs and services at events attended by nearly 650,000 people. These events took place across the state, including Sacramento, the San Francisco Bay Area, Central California, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Community members were excited to see EDD's presence, whether learning about the Department for the first time or reconnecting as past customers. Meeting people face-to-face helps build trust and strengthens EDD's direct connection with the communities it serves.

Throughout 2024, EDD conducted non-paid media outreach targeting diverse communities, including African American, Hispanic, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Filipino media outlets. This outreach resulted in approximately 200 media placements, including print and digital articles, and TV news announcements, with an estimated 25 million impressions. That's in addition to the impact of EDD's current paid advertising campaign about the Department's modernizing services to the state's multi-cultural audience – creating more than 230 million impressions throughout the year. Much of 2024's outreach focused on increasing awareness of a new EDD direct deposit option for benefit payments. This included an in-language news release, "*EDD Announces Direct Deposit Option for Faster Benefit Payments*," to various media partners across California.

EDD also provided updates with news releases announcing valuable resources to EDD's LEP customers:

- [California Celebrates 20 Years of Paid Family Leave with Families and Community Partners](#)
- [EDD Simplifies California's Unemployment Application](#)
- [California Invests in Employment and Training Services for People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing](#)
- [Direct Deposit is Now Available for Unemployment, Disability, and Paid Family Leave Benefit Payments](#)
- [EDD Announces Workforce Training Grants to Help Young Adults](#)
- [In Recognition of Mother's Day, EDD Highlights California's Paid Family Leave Program](#)

- [EDD Online Application Now Available in Top Eight Languages](#)
- [EDD Benefit Payments now issued on new Money Network prepaid debit cards](#)

[EDD's Language Resources webpages](#) and social media channels include information promoting EDD's language resources, free interpretative services for over 200 languages, including for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, and other important Department updates.

Conclusion

EDD's commitment to demonstrating significant improvements and enhancements in language accessibility supports the Department's mission to strengthen California's economic growth by delivering valuable and innovative benefits and services. The Language Access Office continues to actively implement the provisions of AB 138 to meet the needs of California's diverse language populations.



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