Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Creating Bilingual Glossaries – A Tool for Researchers, Clinicians, and Public Health Professionals Working with Communities Who Speak Languages Other Than English

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In the United States, equitable research and health communication requires translation of words and concepts into languages other than English. This process often goes beyond using a translation dictionary, as common English words often do not have a “word-for-word" equivalent and the “right word” can often depend on the countries in which someone has lived, the extent of their exposure to the complex health care system in the U.S., and their educational background.

Our experts suggest that research and health communication teams create bilingual glossaries of key words and concepts before embarking on document translation or other activities that require communication in the desired language. These glossaries ensure all parties—those who speak only English and those who speak the desired language—have a shared understanding of the message they hope to convey.

In this toolkit, we share detailed guidance for one approach for creating bilingual glossaries. Our goal is to provide a step-by-step guide to help other research, health and public health teams implement this method in practice.

Authors: Mudenge NU, Dawson-Hahn E, Matadi A, Iqbal M, Melnik T, Al-Mudaris M, Ortiz P, Rodrigues KK, Ruckard B, Stubber P, Yun K

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