

Primary Healthcare Unit for Deaf people in Chile

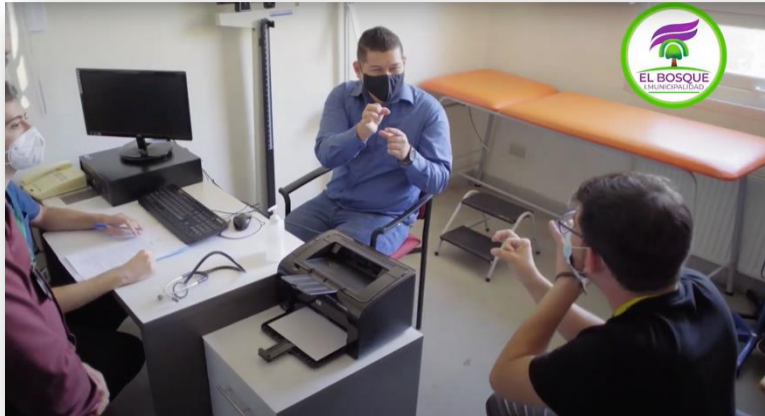


Geography and scale
Santiago, Chile; communal

Type of disability
People with hearing impairments

Involved actors

- Santa Laura primary health care center
- Municipal health department, El Bosque Municipality
- Deaf Chileans Foundation
- Deaf Chilean community



Best practice description

A health unit of Santa Laura primary healthcare center offers accessible and integral health services in sign language for people with hearing impairments. The team, consisting of a deaf mediator, a sign language interpreter and a service coordinator, receives between 5 to 6 people per day. The main services offered include:

1. Linguistic and cultural interpretation and mediation.
2. Patient education through workshops on health promotion and prevention.
3. Basic training of health professionals in sign language and inclusive health.
4. Research to identify and develop vocabulary in sign language about medical and health terms.

People must be enrolled at the healthcare center and registered in the unit. Appointments can be scheduled in person, by message or video call. Support is offered throughout the whole primary healthcare journey, as well as referrals and emergencies. The health unit is funded by the local government, through the El Bosque Municipal Health Directorate, which has an agreement with the Deaf Chileans Foundation for the provision of services.

Origin / impetus for best practice

- About 712,005 people (3.7% of the population) have some degree of hearing loss in Chile according to the National Disability Survey of 2015.
- Deaf people often have worse health outcomes than the general population and face communication barriers that prevent them from accessing health information and equal care.
- In 2017, the Deaf Chileans Foundation was trained in the French healthcare model for deaf people by doctors Alexis Karacostas and Jean Dragon. Moreover, the Foundation completed an internship at the Health Unit for the Deaf in Uruguay, who have been implementing the French model in Latin America since 2012.
- The Foundation promotes the right to health among the deaf community and in 2018 launched the first healthcare unit for deaf people in Chile in a primary care center covering a territory of more than 29,000 people in Santiago.
- Since 2021, sign language has been recognized by law as a natural, native language and intangible heritage of deaf people.

Impact / results of implementing best practice

- Reduction of gaps in access to information and communication, seeking to restore the right to health.
- Opening of a job field for deaf people as mediators in health care.
- Health personnel with basic training in sign language perform independent procedures (e.g. taking samples or blood pressure tests).
- About 170 people from different parts of the country regularly visit the unit.

Critical success factors for best practice

- Strong communication strategy and advocacy of the deaf community.
- Legitimation of the initiative by an organisation of and for deaf people.
- International collaboration for training in the model of healthcare for deaf people.
- Political will and funding from local government through a public-private partnership.

Impact statement

"The unit addresses the global phenomenon of health as a fundamental human right from an initiative that arises from the community, therefore legitimate, and that requires scaling up".
Sebastián Quiñones
Coordinator of the Unit, social worker and Chilean sign language interpreter.

Lessons learned

- It is essential to scale up and transform the initiative into an official service with greater coverage and scope of services.
- The initiative needs visibility at national level and greater political will from stakeholders, giving priority to the leadership and legitimation of the Chilean deaf community.
- Reliable statistical data and a communal census of deaf people are needed to facilitate the measurement of project impact.
- Mediators have had a stronger role in education and a code of ethics is being developed to strengthen their role in the direct provision of healthcare.

Sources

- Cesfam Santa Laura opens the first health care unit for deaf people in the country [[Link](#), in Spanish]
- Lissi, M. R., et al. (2021). The exclusion of the deaf community from the mental health care system [[Link](#), in Spanish]
- What is the Health Care Unit for Deaf People? [[Video in Spanish](#)]
- Linguistic - Cultural Mediation in Health [[Video in Spanish](#)]
- Sign Language Interpretation in Health Care [[Video in Spanish](#)]

Further links & information

- "Ceremony for the agreement signing between Cesfam Santa Laura and the Chilean Deaf Foundation" El Bosque TV [[Video in Spanish](#)]
- "Mediators help deaf patients at Cesfam San Laura del Bosque", MINSAL TV [[Video in Spanish](#)]
- Instagram [USSChile](#) / Facebook [USSChile](#)