

# Evaluating Spanish Language Access on State and Territory Assistive Technology (AT) Program Websites

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## Background

Research reveals racial and ethnic disparities in knowledge of, access to, and use of AT services and devices.<sup>1-8</sup> Compared to non-Hispanic whites, Hispanics report lower rates of AT use.<sup>1,2,5,7-9</sup> These disparities have been attributed to language barriers, socioeconomic and sociocultural status, immigration status, cultural values and beliefs, attitudes, and discrimination, as well as the absence of culturally and linguistically appropriate service provision and resources.<sup>1,3,9-11</sup>

As with other populations, the internet remains an important source of information about health and social services for Spanish-speaking people with disabilities, as it is with all populations.<sup>4,12-14</sup> Given the limited comfort and training of physicians and other health providers assessing, selecting, or matching AT devices to meet the needs of people with disabilities, the internet becomes an even more critical information source.<sup>9,15</sup> Furthermore, for Spanish-speaking people with disabilities, and particularly those with one or more family members with limited English proficiency (LEP), web-based information is important since many providers do not offer culturally or linguistically accessible information.<sup>1,10,11</sup>

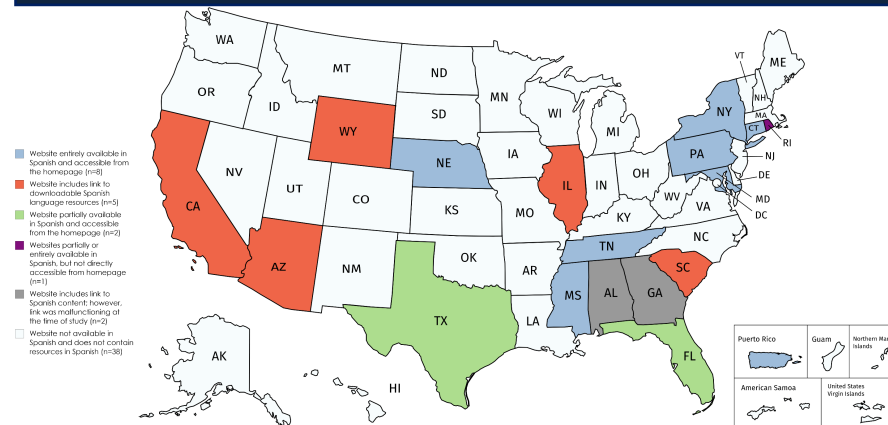
However, evaluations at the county, state, and federal level demonstrate how unevenly the government provides online access to materials other than English.<sup>16-19</sup> Even with the power of a federal mandate and guidance from the Department of Justice to provide equal access and services to individuals with LEP, little attention has been afforded to the cultural and linguistic access needs of disabled people who are LEP or part of a LEP family seeking information on disability services broadly, or AT in particular.<sup>20</sup> While the 2004 amendments to the *Assistive Technology (AT) Act of 1998* (P.L. 108-364) aim to ensure that AT is “equally available to all individuals with disabilities residing in the State,” there have not yet been any assessments of the linguistic accessibility of the public-facing state AT program websites.<sup>21</sup>

## Research Questions

1. Which state AT program websites, if any, provide online access to information about AT in Spanish?
  - How is the Spanish-language information on AT presented on these websites?
  - How is this access differentially distributed across states and territories?
2. How do state demographics and linguistic characteristics correlate with the presence and degree of Spanish language access in their AT program websites?

## Results

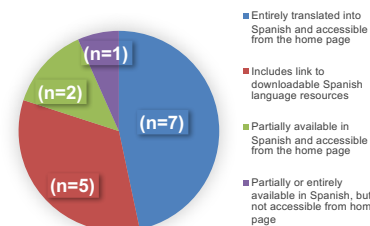
Only a small percentage (<30%) of state AT program websites provide access to Spanish-language AT information.



State program websites vary in how they offer access to Spanish-language AT information.

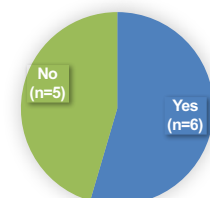
Neither state demographics nor linguistic characteristics predict state program website availability of Spanish-language AT information.

How is Spanish-language AT information presented on these websites? (n=15)

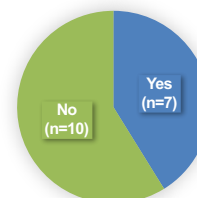


How many of the top-10 states provide online access to Spanish-language AT information when ranked by:

Hispanic demographics? (n=11)



Spanish language characteristics? (n=17)



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## Methods

We reviewed state AT program websites for Spanish-language content using a three part process:

- 1) scanning for Spanish content or link to Spanish content;
  - 2) digitally searching for keywords (Spanish, español, tradlat\*, select, language); and
  - 3) if no Spanish language content could be located on the website, contacting program personnel via phone or e-mail to confirm.
- We analyzed American Community Survey data to create ranked lists by state demographic (% of all US Hispanics living in the state; Hispanics as share of state population) and linguistic characteristics (% Spanish speaking and % Spanish speaking LEP households). We examined if state characteristics predicted state AT program website provision of online access to information about AT in Spanish.

## Discussion

Spanish-speaking people with disabilities with limited English proficiency (or in such families) face barriers to culturally and linguistically appropriate AT information. There is a need for a national coordinated effort to increase linguistic access to AT information for the 40 million U.S. Spanish speakers (13.3% of the population, aged 5 and older). Limited access to linguistically appropriate AT information contributes to differences in utilization, exacerbating health disparities.

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