

UTMB Language Access Services Department Recognized

UTMB Snags Elite Award for Its Language Access Services Program. Graciela Zozaya, Language Access Expert in Houston, Wins Individual Award.

Houston, Dec 4, 2020 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - *UTMB received the 7th Annual Texas Star in Language Access award this week in a virtual ceremony at the 14th Annual TAHIT Educational Symposium, attended by industry experts from around Texas, across the US, and from 19 countries.*

- *UTMB is the first known Language Access Services department in the entire country to have all its spoken-language interpreters certified by both recognized national certifying bodies.*
- *Their partnership with departments throughout UTMB has resulted in a year-over-year growth of around 20% per annum of demand for interpreters and written translation services.*
- *Local expert, Graciela Zozaya is a Certified Healthcare Interpreter and Master Court Interpreter who works hand-in-hand with hospitals throughout the Houston Medical Center to provide language access solutions. She also teaches her 40-hour interpreting program at University of Houston-Downtown Campus.*

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Each year, TAHIT, the Texas Association of Healthcare Interpreters and Translators, doles out an individual award and an organization award for one person and one company that make extraordinary contributions to Language Access for patients in Texas who speak with limited English proficiency. The organization earning the Texas Star Award for 2020 was the Language Access Services department at University of Texas Medical Branch comprised of translators, Spanish and ASL interpreters, and administrative staff.

"This team has faced extraordinary adversity this year, but still they have worked tirelessly to improve the lives of patients across the region, from Orange to Galveston to McAllen," says Martha Livanec, Director of Patient Services at UTMB, who accepted the award on the team's behalf. "The team is small, but mighty!"

As the team recognized that the patient populations they serve were facing alarming disparate rates of COVID-19 infection, Sr. Business Coordinator Tammie Collins and other frontline staff brought together stakeholders throughout the Texas Gulf Coast region including trainers, epidemiologists, violence and social behavior experts, healthcare providers, local police, political figures, and of course, the Language Access team, in an effort to coordinate efforts to teach prevention, provide resources, and facilitate testing and treatment for the Hispanic community. Nearly one out of three patients at UTMB is needs to communicate in a language other than English. For Texas as a whole, that number is around 25% of patients.

Ms. Zozaya is a known pioneer in Language Access across Texas. She was involved in the founding of the TAHIT organization more than 15 years ago and has been an advocate for Limited English Proficient patients and the interpreters and translators who serve them for much longer.

"This is a lifetime achievement award, of sorts, for Graciela," said her colleague, Waleska Bonthrone. "She has been training and advocating for language access laws in Texas for as long as I can remember. Her passion is infectious and has spread to others, including me, as I am now an interpreter trainer. She keeps paying it forward."

At an event that was due to take place at the Hilton Dallas Rockwall in September, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the reception to be moved to a virtual format, along with the entire 2020 TAHIT Educational Symposium. The virtual event, though, allowed for a greater participation by language experts around the world with attendees from as far away as Peru, Jordan, and South Korea. Due to the rescheduled format, the event, if held in-person, is again slated to take place next year in Dallas.

The Texas Association of Healthcare Interpreters and Translators is a 501(c)(6) non-profit association made up entirely of volunteers whose mission is to promote equal Language Access for Limited English Proficient, Deaf, and Hard-of-hearing patients within healthcare by facilitating training, education, and communication between government, provider, and individual stakeholders.

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