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NORTH CAROLINA PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENTS DEPLOY "INTERPRETERS ON A STICK" TO ENHANCE PATIENT COMMUNICATION

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WHAT: Public health leaders in North Carolina have partnered with **AMN Language Services** to launch a new virtual interpreting program. The initiative utilizes specialized iPads equipped with external cameras and speakers, mounted on mobile stands, to provide real-time video and audio interpretation for patients. This program, affectionately nicknamed **"Interpreters on a Stick,"** is a direct response to the growing need for language services within the public health sector.

WHY: The deployment of these units addresses a critical need to ensure equitable healthcare access for all residents. **In North Carolina, over 1 million individuals speak a language other than English at home, with approximately 450,000 having limited English proficiency (LEP**). Within North Carolina's public health Region 2, counties such as Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, and Henderson are home to tens of thousands of adults with hearing loss, with Buncombe County alone having over 38,000. Statewide, **North Carolina is projected to see a 33% increase in its adult hearing loss population by 2030, reaching 1.65 million.** Without professional interpreters, including those proficient in American Sign Language (ASL), these individuals face significant barriers to care, which can lead to miscommunication, medical errors, and poorer health outcomes. Studies show that a lack of language proficiency can lead to a decline in self-reported health status, and deaf patients with direct ASL communication with their primary care provider are more likely to access preventive care. This initiative ensures critical information flows accurately, bridging communication gaps and giving patients the clarity they need during medical encounters.

WHO: This partnership involves public health leaders and **AMN Language Services**, a leading provider of language solutions. The technology is currently being deployed in public health departments within North Carolina's Region 2, with plans for potential expansion.

HOW: The program offers a wide range of language support, with **45 languages available for video interpretation, including American Sign Language (ASL)**, and over **200 languages available for audio-only interpretation**. The virtual technology allows for seamless, on-demand connections to interpreters, ensuring that language is no longer a barrier to care.