How to work with interpreters and translators

A guide to effectively using language services

Health and Human Services

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Overview

These guidelines for working with interpreting and translating services are a practical accompaniment to the Department of Health and Human Services' *Language services policy* <https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/language-services-policy>.

They are designed to support funded organisations and departmental staff at all levels to provide quality language services for their clients – and thereby respond to the needs of Victoria's diverse community, including refugees and asylum-seekers, migrants and people using sign language.

> Effective communication between clients and service providers is critical to achieving positive health outcomes for clients, delivering quality health and human services, and meeting the department's commitment to person-centred care and client safety.

Funded organisations are encouraged to develop their own language services policies and procedures consistent with those of the department.

All staff should be made aware of these policies and procedures and trained in how to access and effectively use language services.

> Approach your manager for details regarding your particular program's process for booking language services.

Diversity responsiveness

Language services are only one component of diversity responsive service provision. For language services to be effective, they need to be provided in an organisational context where:

- cultural diversity policies and plans are in place, including equitable and responsive services and programs; a culturally responsive workforce; partnerships with diverse communities; and effective and evidence-based approaches
- service planning uses demographic data, including current and potential client base
- managing budget and procurement arrangements for language services is part of service delivery
- the availability of interpreters – at no cost to clients – is effectively promoted
- there is understanding that clients may have multiple compounding issues – such as language, visa status, disability, mental health issues, experience of trauma, socio-economic disadvantage, social isolation and geographic location – that may increase their vulnerability and ability to access appropriate services.

Resources

How to embed cultural responsiveness in your service planning, design and delivery

- Delivering for diversity - Cultural diversity plan 2016–2019 <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/policiesandguidelines/dhhs-delivering-for-diversity-cultural-diversity-plan-2016-19>.

Language services policies and procedures

- Department of Health and Human Services' Language services policy <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/language-services-policy>.
- http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/projects-and-initiatives/improving-language-services/standards-and-guidelines <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/projects-and-initiatives/improving-language-services/standards-and-guidelines>.
- Language services – health <http://intranet.health.vic.gov.au/resources-and-tools/guides-and-manuals/departmental-panel-guide/language-services-credit-line>.
- Language Services – human services <http://intranet.dhs.vic.gov.au/resources-and-tools/policies-and-standards/language-services>.

Find language service providers

- NAATI online directory <https://www.naati.com.au/Online/PDSearch/StartNewSearch>.

Code of ethics for interpreters and translators

- Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) Code of Ethics <http://ausit.org/AUSIT/About/Ethics___Conduct/Code_of_Ethics/AUSIT/About/Code_of_Ethics.aspx>.
- Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association (ASLIA) Code of Ethics <https://aslia.com.au/code-of-ethics/>.

Health Translations Directory

- Health Translations Directory <http://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/>.
- Find your language tool <http://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcht.nsf/pages/find_your_language>.

Interpreting services

Prior to booking an interpreter

Assessing the need for an interpreter

The need for an interpreter should be determined prior to an appointment, wherever possible.

Assessing how well a person can understand English is the first step in identifying the need for an interpreter.

Even when a client appears to have adequate proficiency in English, a stressful or unfamiliar situation may affect the client's ability to communicate effectively.

Engaging an interpreter is recommended if:

- requested by the client
- the client cannot comprehend or respond to basic questions in English
- you are experiencing difficulty understanding your client, or your client can only respond in a limited way
- the client relies on family or friends to communicate
- the client prefers to speak in his/her own language
- the client speaks English as a second language, and is in a stressful, complex or unfamiliar situation.

To determine a client's level of English language proficiency, the following questions may be useful:

- Why are you here today?
- Is English your first language?
- In which country were you born?
- How long have you lived in Australia?
- How long have you been learning or speaking English?

If the client cannot respond to these questions fluently, or if the responses are difficult to understand, an interpreter is recommended.

Determining the preferred language

A client's preferred language and dialect cannot be determined reliably from country of birth information.

The following steps may help to determine a client's preferred language:

1. If a client speaks sufficient English, it may be possible to ask for their preferred language and dialect, especially if they have used interpreters previously.
2. Use visual aids that list languages and dialects (see 'Resources' on page 6). The client may be able to point to the language they speak.
3. Contact a language service provider, which may be able to assist you to identify the language through a telephone interpreter.

If use of an interpreter is refused

The use of an interpreter is not just for the benefit of the client but also to assist the service provider in the delivery of quality health and human services.

If a client refuses the offer of an interpreter, it is important to clarify and address the reasons, which may include that the client:

- has misunderstood why an interpreter is needed
- may feel confident communicating in English
- may know the interpreter assigned to the interview and feel uncomfortable
- may be concerned that an interpreter could pose a risk to their right to confidentiality, privacy, or safety
- may be uncomfortable with the gender, religious or ethnic background of the interpreter
- may not know that the interpreting service will be provided free of charge to the client.

These concerns should be addressed, and the client advised that the interpreter is also for the benefit of the service provider as limited or incomplete communication may result in a compromised diagnosis or advice.

Choosing the mode of interpreting

There are three ways of providing interpreting services:

- onsite (face-to-face)
- telephone
- video remote.

The client's preference for an onsite, telephone or video remote interpreter should be respected, where possible.

Professional interpreters adhere to a code of conduct that includes strict confidentiality requirement and confidentiality requirements are the same for all three interpreting options.

Onsite interpreting (face-to-face)

Onsite interpreters attend in person and should be engaged for matters that are:

- complex
- legally binding
- lengthy.

Onsite interpreting facilitates better understanding of information by taking into account non-verbal communication (such as body language), and is therefore recommended in complex situations.

Generally onsite interpreting requires booking in advance. Most language service providers have a minimum fee for onsite interpreting, based on a 90 minute session.

In rural and regional areas the availability of onsite interpreters in some languages may be limited.

Telephone interpreting

Telephone interpreting is useful for:

- short, non-complex communication
- establishing the language spoken and nature of an enquiry before an onsite interpreter is booked
- accessing an interpreter in less common languages in which there are a limited number of accredited interpreters, in rural and regional areas, and when videoconferencing is not available
- situations when immediate assistance is required and before an onsite interpreter is booked.

As telephone interpreters cannot take into account non-verbal communication, they are not used for Auslan clients. However, calls to someone who is Deaf can be made using an ordinary handset through **the National Relay Service** on **133 677**.

Generally, pre-booking a telephone interpreter is not required, although this should be confirmed with the service provider.

Video remote interpreting

Video remote interpreting uses audio-visual technology – such as a video conferencing system, a laptop or tablet – to provide face-to-face communication between a client and an off-site interpreter. It can be used for Auslan and spoken languages.

Video remote interpreting is a potentially cost-effective alternative to onsite services. It is preferred to telephone interpreting – particularly in rural and regional areas or where local Auslan interpreters may not be available, or where any interpreter is required at short notice.

Although videoconferencing facilities are becoming increasingly available, this option is not always possible.

A good internet connection and suitable equipment is essential to provide the speed and data capacity required.

Understanding the role of family and friends

Family and friends should never be used to act in the role of an accredited interpreter as they:

- may not have the required language competence
- may lack impartiality
- are not bound by the same standards of conduct as accredited interpreters.

Family and friends can have an important and helpful role supporting and advocating for the client, which should be acknowledged, valued and understood as completely separate from and complementary to the role of an interpreter.

Engaging a qualified interpreter enables family and friends to focus on their advocacy and support role.

Most importantly, friends or family members, especially children, should not provide language assistance in critical situations as it will be difficult for them to remain impartial, maintain confidentiality and accurately convey information, which can compromise the duty of care to the client.

Children under 18 years of age should never be asked to act in the place of an accredited interpreter or to relay information between staff and a client.

In some instances – for example, in cases of family violence – using a family member to act in the role of an interpreter may further jeopardise the safety of the client.

Working with interpreters

Booking an interpreter

You will require the following information to book an interpreter:

- client's name (however consideration should be given to not disclosing the name of the client to protect confidentiality in small communities and around sensitive topics)
- language/dialect required
- preferred gender of the interpreter (if relevant)
- date and time the interpreter is required – ensure you allow time to brief the interpreter beforehand
- type of appointment – for example, a medical appointment
- address of the agency requiring the interpreter (for onsite interpreting services)
- name and telephone contact details of the staff member who will be conducting the interview
- nature of the matter to be discussed – for example, an aged care health assessment
- anticipated length of the interview.

the interpreter's name, if a specific interpreter is required for continuity of care reasons.

For some clients, the gender of the interpreter will be important. Prior to booking an interpreter, you should ask the client if he or she has a preference.

In some smaller communities the interpreter may be known to the client. This may present difficulties for the client and/or the interpreter, especially in sensitive situations.

Knowing the name of the interpreter prior to the interview is useful to identify any concerns the client or interpreter may have.

When booking a telephone interpreter, inform the language service provider about the telephone system that will be used – for example, is it a speaker phone, or will the interviewer and client be using a dual handset telephone?

Requests for a preferred interpreter

The use of a client's preferred interpreter aids the communication process by ensuring the client is comfortable with and trusts the interpreter. This is particularly important for ongoing or sensitive interviews, such as family violence counselling. A request for a particular interpreter can be made at the time of booking, noting they will need to have the required professional level qualification for the situation.

Preparing for the session

Brief the interpreter by providing general background information, such as the reason for the session, specific terms to be used and what needs to be achieved.

Consider incorporating a break for long sessions.

As with all interpreting, it is important to be patient and allow time for communication due to the delay between a message being spoken or signed and the interpretation.

- **Onsite:** ensure the room is set up appropriately. Consideration should be given to appropriate lighting, avoiding glare from windows, and seating arrangements.

  Ideally, seats will be arranged in a triangle with the service provider facing the client and the interpreter next to the client.

Avoid leaving the interpreter alone with the client, either in the room where the interview will take place or a waiting room.

- **Telephone and video remote:** ensure you have access to the appropriate technology and understand how to work the telephone/IT system.

  Telephone interpreting is more effective when a landline is used rather than a mobile phone.

  It is also recommended that a telephone with a speakerphone (or two handsets) be used where possible.

Working with Auslan interpreters

Auslan interpreters work in a similar way to other language interpreters. The interpreter will typically need to sit or stand next to the service provider and opposite the client. This allows the Deaf person to maintain eye contact with the speaker, read body language and engage with the person speaking whilst receiving the message from the interpreter.

Two interpreters may take it in turns to sign, depending on the length of the session.

As with all interpreting, the service provider should ensure they speak directly to the client and not the interpreter.

Because Deaf people generally use language services their entire lives, many are familiar and work regularly with Auslan interpreters. It is common for Deaf people to request a specific interpreter or agency, and this request should be accommodated where possible.

During the session

At the start of the interview:

- introduce yourself and the interpreter to the client
- explain the interpreter's role, noting that the interpreter's role is not to add to the communication, but only to interpret what is being said
- explain the purpose of the session and what you hope to achieve
- do not assume that the client knows what the interview is about. Explain to the client that questions or concerns can be raised at any time during the interview.

During the interview:

- talk directly to the client, not the interpreter, and maintain eye contact with the client
- use the first person when speaking to your client. For example, say 'What time did you arrive today?' instead of 'What time did she arrive today?'
- use clear language and avoid using slang, jargon, acronyms, colloquialisms and metaphors.
- make one point at a time. Pause until the end of a full sentence. Keep questions, statements and comments short. This allows the interpreter to understand and remember what is being said and to interpret in stages
- allow the interpreter to clarify information with you. If there is a need to clarify, ask the interpreter to explain this to the client first
- allow the client to ask questions or raise issues at any time in the interview
- if you have any questions about the client's cultural background, ask the client directly and not the interpreter
- summarise the discussion occasionally to ensure the client understands the information do not ask the interpreter to edit your information to suit the client's background.

At the end of the interview:

- summarise key points for the client
- check that the client understands any information you have conveyed and if there are any final questions
- allow the interpreter to leave separately to the client.

After the interview:

- debrief the interpreter and discuss any issues experienced in the interview that related to the role of the interviewer or the interpreter
- do not ask for or allow the interpreter to express an opinion about the client or what they have said

- raise any unprofessional or unsatisfactory practices directly with the interpreter at the end of the interview.

Complaints and feedback

Accredited interpreters are expected to comply with the code of ethics developed by the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) or Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association (ASLIA).

If an interpreter fails to comply with the principles outlined in the relevant code of ethics, complaints can be lodged with the language service provider.

If there are issues with the performance of an interpreter, discuss them with the interpreter in the first instance. If not resolved, contact the relevant language service provider to make a formal complaint.

Other issues – such as the interpreter not attending, charging incorrect fees or interpreters with inappropriate levels of accreditation – can also be discussed with the language service provider.

Translation services

Translated information is another tool for communicating with clients, their families and carers, providing them with information that they can refer to later. Translated material does not replace the need for interpreting services.

You may need to translate client-specific information, such as medical documents, or to distribute health and service information to a broader audience for information and educational purposes.

Prior to translation

Planning and consultation is integral to effective translations, ensuring the resource responds to the needs of the service area, meets timelines, remains within budget, avoids duplication and is delivered to a high standard.

It may be necessary to use multiple data sources (such as Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census data, the most recent settlement data, and service usage data) to gain an accurate picture of the diversity in the community and identify your target audience.

Preferred language

It is essential to consult with your target audience to determine their preferred language and level of literacy.

In some countries, several languages may be spoken and it is important to determine which one is preferred by the local migrant community. Dialect and regional variations should also be considered when selecting language/s for translation.

Be aware that different writing systems may be used within particular languages. For example, some Chinese languages use simplified character sets whilst others use traditional characters. Consult your target audience regarding the appropriate writing system for the target language/s.

Other communication options

Different communities may have particular preferences for receiving information. For example, communities with a strong oral language tradition may not be used to written communication. Some people – for example refugees and asylum seekers – may not be able to read or write as a result of limited or disrupted education opportunities. Written translation should be avoided for communities where the majority of members have low literacy levels.

Alternative ways of providing multilingual information include:

- information sessions, seminars or presentations using accredited interpreters
- audio information, such as podcasts, CDs or DVDs, or recorded messages
- storyboards, including images, photos, diagrams or charts
- easy English, which uses clear, simple language and possibly diagrams to make information as simple as possible without changing the meaning.

You may wish to consider a range of consultation methods to find the communication preferences of the target audience and the best way to disseminate your information. These could include asking focus groups, other service providers who work with the community, local committees and community groups.

Complex information such as medical advice, should always be delivered in person through an accredited interpreter.

Avoiding duplication

Prior to undertaking a translation project, first check the Health Translations Directory <http://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/> to ensure the translation does not already exist.

The **Health Translations Directory** is an online portal for health professionals and the community that provides access to high-quality translated health information.

As a guiding principle and to avoid duplication, translated resources should be shared across organisations and services.

Before making a decision to translate, check available translation directories or other organisations' websites to ensure a similar resource does not already exist.

If it does not, contact other organisations and explore developing the resource together. By sharing the cost, organisations can often develop a more comprehensive resource.

Writing for translation

Once you have identified the message to be conveyed to your target audience and confirmed that translated material is the best way to communicate, it is important to prepare the text prior to engaging a translation service.

Generally, the English source text will not be suitable for direct translation.

The following tips will assist in preparing a text for translation:

Clarity

- Use plain English and write in the active voice.
- Explain unfamiliar concepts and complex terminology.
- Do not use idioms, metaphors, acronyms, professional jargon, slang, colloquialisms, euphemisms and figures of speech.

Brevity

- Keep it short. Consider a summary version for translation rather than the full publication. This ensures the source text is easier to translate and comprehend.

Appropriateness

- Adapt the source text to each community group.
- Consider the level of pre-existing knowledge in the target group – for example, recently arrived communities may be less familiar with the service system than more established communities and therefore require more contextual information.
- Be alert to cultural sensitivities about particular topics.
- Consult the relevant community about the most appropriate way to deal with the topic.
- Ensure that any images or graphics used are culturally appropriate.

Accuracy

- Proof read the text prior to submitting it for translation and ensure it is final.
- Assume the translator will translate everything as provided. It is not their responsibility to correct errors.
- Consider using an editor to ensure the clarity and accuracy of the source text.

Arranging a translation

Before the language service provider can provide a quote for the translation, they will need the following:

- name of the organisation commissioning the translation
- purpose of the translation
- audience for the translation, including ethnic community, age and gender
- how the translated material will be published or broadcast (such as a brochure, website, media release, podcast)
- any technical requirements such as the computer operating system and software. Check with IT staff to ensure that uncommon language scripts and fonts are enabled on the system. If not, advise the language service provider to determine the best format (such as MS Word, PDF, Adobe InDesign) for receiving the translation
- additional information including any deadlines and copyright arrangements if applicable.

Once you have engaged a suitable translating service, the translator will require the following:

- the text to be translated, including a glossary of key terms
- the languages (including dialects) for translation
- the required accreditation level specialisation (such as health) of the translator
- the need for the translation to be typeset
- translation of the glossary of key terms for future reference
- certification of the translation if required (such as for legal purposes)
- confidentiality requirements

- any elements of the text that do not need to be translated (such as logo, names).

Finalising the translation

It is highly recommended that translations are independently checked by a different translator with at least the same level of accreditation as the original translator. The language service provider can arrange this for an additional fee. Independent checking ensures quality and accuracy and involves comparing the translation with the original text.

Depending on the document, the translated resource should also be reviewed by the community. This will help identify any particular words or expressions in the translated resource that are unclear or culturally inappropriate. Consider resourcing communities for their time.

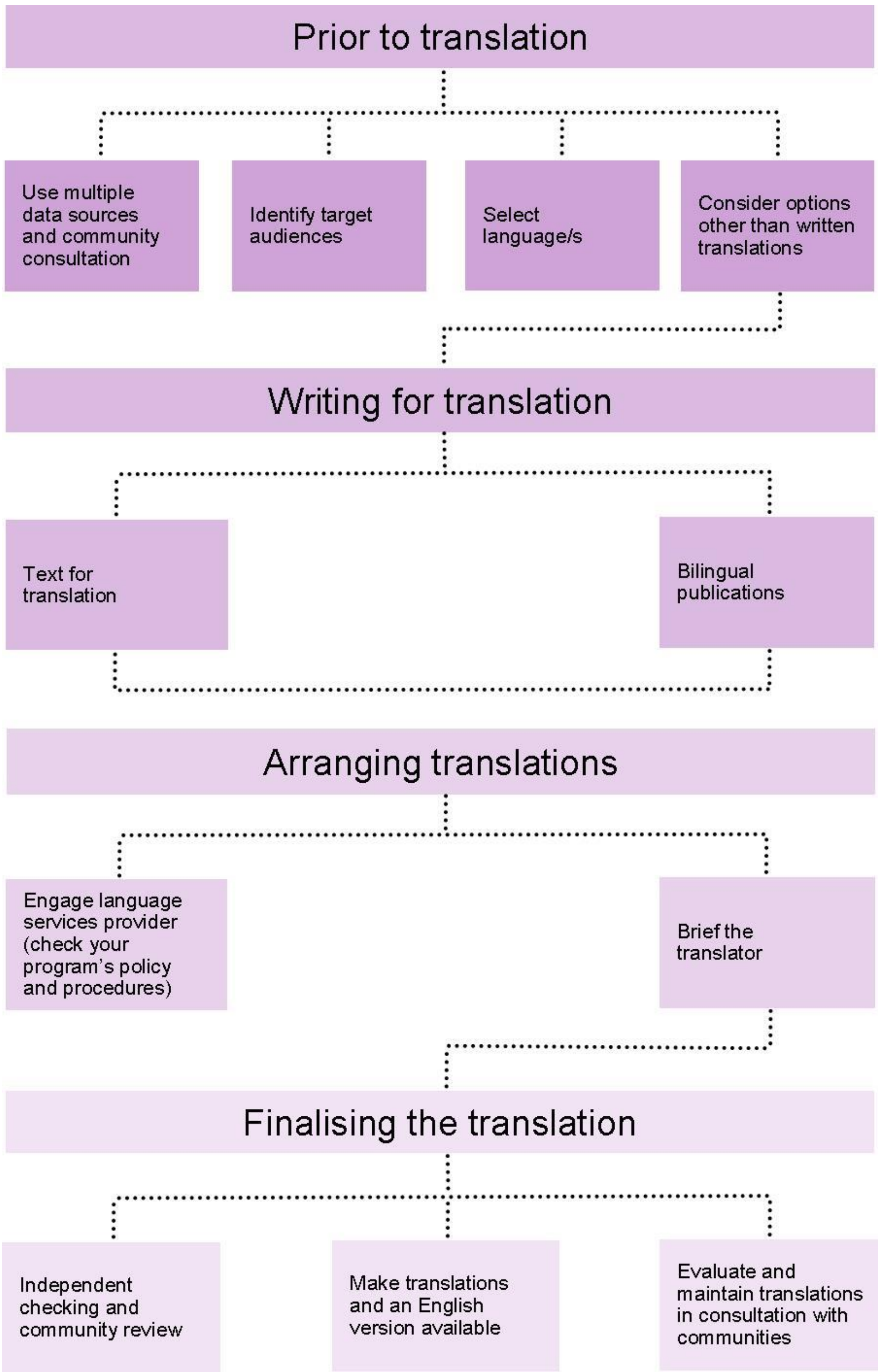
Always publish online the translated version alongside the English version – or print both together. This allows an English-speaking user to refer to the translated version with a non-English speaking client.

Consider a periodic maintenance schedule for translated material to ensure relevancy and currency. Make sure the translated information is updated if the original English version changes.

Also consider ways to assess the effectiveness of the translated publication. This might include consulting with target communities and specifically requesting feedback on the form or publication, and/or conducting surveys of the target audience and relevant service providers.

Appendix: Overview of the translation process[1]

The typical translation process, whether for print, web or other media, involves:



[1] Adapted from [Effective translations: Victorian Government guidelines on policy and procedures](http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/projects-and-initiatives/improving-language-services/standards-and-guidelines) <http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/projects-and-initiatives/improving-language-services/standards-and-guidelines>.