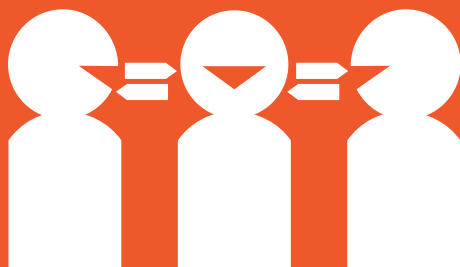


Working with patients when there are language barriers

A guide to accessing and using the Translating
and Interpreting Service for primary care health
professionals working in private practice



Using an interpreter

www.tisnational.gov.au

Why should I use an interpreter?

Using an interpreter is vital to ensure that all patients attending your organisation are able to access health care equitably, regardless of their English language skills. Using a qualified interpreter is required for:

- acquiring informed consent
- to meet your legal obligations around patient safety
- to meet your ethical and legal obligations around duty of care.

Using an interpreter provides clinical benefits:

- facilitating accurate diagnosis
- improving patient understanding
- enabling adherence to management plans
- offering health promotion information
- reducing unnecessary tests and procedures
- increasing patient satisfaction.

This is consistent with *Good medical practice: a code of conduct for doctors in Australia*

www.medicalboard.gov.au/codes-guidelines-policies/code-of-conduct.aspx

If a patient does not speak English (and you do not fluently speak their language) it is recommended that you use a qualified interpreter.

Bear in mind that some patients may speak a bit of English but may not understand a medical consultation – interpreters should be used in these cases too. It is best practice to ask all new patients what their language preferences are and record these on their file.

Why shouldn't I use a family member or friend to interpret?

Family members or friends may not have the required language competence or understanding of complex medical issues;

- they may lack impartiality
- they are not bound by the same standards of conduct as qualified interpreters, and
- patients may not wish to disclose/ discuss certain information in front of a family member or friend.

A family member or friend may be used on occasion, for simple day-to-day communication (such as booking an appointment), but a qualified interpreter for medical and/ or other complex discussions is strongly advised.

What is the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) National?

TIS National is an interpreting service provided by the Department of Home Affairs for people who do not speak English and for organisations that need to communicate with their non-English speaking clients.

TIS National provides:

- immediate phone interpreting
- pre-booked phone interpreting
- pre-booked on-site interpreting.

Phone interpreting is accessible 24 hours a day 7 days a week; for less common languages it is advised to book ahead. Availability of onsite interpreters will depend upon a number of factors; pre-booking is essential with as much notice as possible to increase the chances of an interpreter being available.

Doctors Priority Line

The Doctors Priority Line (DPL) provides priority access to TIS National, for people working in private medical practices. TIS National gives priority to DPL callers over other callers in the queue. A phone interpreter will generally be provided within a few minutes for common community languages.

Free Interpreting Service

Private medical practitioners (General Practitioners and approved Medical Specialists) and pharmacies are eligible to access the Free Interpreting Service through TIS National to assist in communicating with non-English speakers who have a Medicare card.

- Private medical practitioners can access the Free Interpreting Service when providing Medicare-rebateable services as can the nursing and practice support staff working with them. *For a list of approved Medical Specialists see: [Medical Board of Australia-Medical Specialties and Specialty Fields](http://www.medicalboard.gov.au/medical-specialties-and-specialty-fields)*
- Pharmacists and other pharmacy staff can access the Free Interpreting Service to provide community pharmacy services (including dispensing medication, providing general advice and delivering other general pharmacy services). In addition, the Department of Social Services is piloting a one year expansion of the Free Interpreting Service for pharmacies from 1 July 2018, to include all activities undertaken under the 6th Community Pharmacy Agreement including Medication Management Programs and Medication Adherence Programs.

Some PHNs have free interpreting programs for allied health professionals, please contact your PHN.

Please note: If you are not eligible for any free interpreting services, you can still engage interpreting services for a fee. Public organisations generally have their own arrangements for interpreters – contact the appropriate person in your organisation for more information.

Getting your organisation ready to use TIS National

Step 1: Register your organisation or clinician with TIS National

- Pharmacies register as an organisation and all staff use the one TIS National client code.
- Each medical practitioner must register for their own client code. Doctors need a client code for each practice they work in. Nurses and practice support staff use the code for the doctor they are working with.
- A Medicare provider number is required for the registration process.
- Access the online registration form here: tisonline.tisnational.gov.au/RegisterAgency
- When you register choose to **accept** calls to your agency initiated by your non-English speaking patients.
- Once registered, TIS National will email you your client code.
- It is also possible to register over the phone the first time you use the service, the code will be provided for immediate use.

Step 2: Inform all staff of your TIS National client code/s

- Ensure the staff in your organisation understand how to use your specific code to book an interpreter.
- Ensure all relevant TIS National numbers and client codes are readily accessible by staff because they must quote a code whenever they use the service.
 - TIS National phone number 131 450
 - Doctors Priority Line 1300 131 450 (for private medical practice staff only).

Staff booking onsite interpreters will need to have access to the TIS Online portal password. This is provided upon registration with TIS National.

Step 3: Provide your staff with training on how and when to work with interpreters

- This video provides hints and tips for working with interpreters: www.tisnational.gov.au/en/Help-using-TIS-National-services/Videos/Hints-and-tips-for-working-with-interpreters
- This short video is particularly useful for general practitioners, specialists or pharmacists: www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXy-QF9GHyM
- Face to face training may be available - contact your PHN for more information.



Step 4: Make sure your patients know your organisation can access an interpreter if required

Clearly display the National Interpreter Symbol in your organisation so that patients know they can ask for language assistance.



www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=76:national-interpreter-symbol-with-text&catid=22&Itemid=67

The TIS National products pictured below can be:

- ordered online www.tisnational.gov.au/en/About-TIS-National/Materials-to-help-you-access-an-interpreter/Ordering-TIS-National-promotional-materials
- or printed www.tisnational.gov.au/About-TIS-National/Materials-to-help-you-access-an-interpreter/TIS-National-promotional-materials-catalogue.aspx

Have this language card available (at reception, in clinical rooms) so your patient can point to their language, and you can arrange an interpreter:



Display these posters in your practice (they each contain different languages).



Once your patient's preferred language has been identified and recorded on their file, the patient can be given an 'I need an Interpreter' card that they can keep and present in future.



When referring your patient to another healthcare provider, inform the provider that your patient will need an interpreter.

Tips for working with interpreters

What kind of interpreter should I use?

Immediate access to a phone interpreter: Calling TIS National 131 450 (or the Doctor's Priority Line 1300 131 450 for private medical practice staff only) will connect you with an interpreter. The service has access to 2,500 interpreters speaking 160 different languages. You can do this during the consultation.

Pre-booked interpreting: Book an interpreter when the patient books the appointment. Pre-book in instances where the consultation may be complex, requires specialist knowledge or the availability of interpreters in a particular language is limited.

Pre-booked phone interpreting can be useful if the matter is sensitive and you can request an interpreter from another state.

Pre-booked on-site interpreting can be useful when the clinical concepts are complex and if there needs to be reading of any documents. On-site interpreting can be arranged for any location in Australia (subject to interpreter availability).

Note that some patients will prefer a phone interpreter for confidentiality, or a male or female interpreter. Always ask each patient their preference before booking an interpreter and record it on their patient file.

General tips for working with an interpreter

1. Ensure you have provided enough time for the consultation because using interpreters might require more time than normal. Remember using interpreters will save time in the long run due to fewer repeat visits for clarification or failure to adhere to care plans.
2. Introduce yourself to the interpreter and explain the nature of the consultation - your relationship with the interpreter is important.
3. Introduce the interpreter to the patient. Explain your role and that of the interpreter.
4. Face the patient and speak directly with them, rather than the interpreter. Say 'How can I help you today?' rather than 'How can I help the patient today?' You may wish to sit in a triangle formation.

5. Watch for body language clues and address any questions you may have about these to the patient.
6. Periodically check that the patient has understood what you have said. Utilise the teach-back method www.youtube.com/watch?v=d702HIZfVWs
7. Speak slowly and clearly, use short sentences and ask one question at a time.
8. Pause to allow time for interpreting.
9. Avoid using jargon, slang, idioms or proverbs.
10. Don't have long private discussions with the interpreter in front of the patient. You can also stop any private discussion between the patient and the interpreter. If an interpreter needs to clarify something with the patient they should inform you before doing so.
11. When establishing a patient's history, be sensitive to the patient revealing personal information through an interpreter, particularly if the interpreter is a member of their community. If the patient seems uncomfortable with a particular interpreter, assure them that an alternative interpreter can be requested.
12. At the end, summarise what has been discussed and check that the patient understands the next steps.
13. Consider the needs of the interpreter. They may have heard distressing information and may need to debrief with you after the consultation.

Working with phone interpreters

- Use a speaker phone if possible.
- If a speaker phone is not available use a hands-free phone if possible. Ensure the interpreter is aware that the handset will be passed between you and the patient. This will help ensure the message is not lost while passing the phone.
- Speak directly to the patient not the phone.



Engaging interpreters: Tip sheet for receptionists

Identify if a patient needs an interpreter

Often patients will attend with a friend or family member who can communicate on their behalf for simple communications. However they shouldn't interpret medical and/or complex information. A qualified interpreter should be used, including when completing practice forms.

Find out all new patients' preferred language (e.g. via registration form), and if they prefer a male or female, face to face or phone interpreter.

***Use:** Language card to determine patient's preferred language.



Record these preferences in the patient's record

Add language spoken and tick 'interpreter needed' in patient details. Ensure this is clear on front page of record.

Provide: 'I need an interpreter' card that the patient can keep and show next time.

www.tisnational.gov.au/en/About-TIS-National/Materials-to-help-you-access-an-interpreter/TIS-National-promotional-materials-catalogue



If you need interpreting at reception

Call TIS National 131 450 or Doctors Priority Line 1300 131 450 (for private medical practice staff only). Explain your role, that you are with a patient and the language you need interpreted. Quote your TIS National client code.

***Refer to:** 'Tips for working with interpreters' sheet (page 4).



Book an appointment for the patient

You may wish to book a longer appointment if the patient requires language assistance. Ensure the clinician knows about the patient's language needs.

***Refer to:** 'Tips for working with interpreters' sheet (page 4).



Make sure an interpreter is used for the consultation

The receptionist can either pre-book an interpreter (phone or onsite), or the clinician can seek a phone interpreter when the patient attends for their consultation.

To pre-book: Go to www.tisnational.gov.au and click on link to the right hand side of page. You will receive a booking confirmation including appointment details.

Ensure clinician is aware interpreter is booked and that these details are documented in the patient's record.

If you have not pre-booked, make it clear to the clinician that they'll need to access an interpreter by phone during the consultation.



After the consultation

Remember to organise a subsequent appointment before the patient leaves. You can use the Appointment Reminder Translation tool www.swslhd.nsw.gov.au/refugee/appointment

Engaging interpreters: Tip sheet for clinicians

Receptionist has pre-booked an interpreter

The receptionist should have provided a booking confirmation including appointment details.

Follow the instructions on that confirmation.

The interpreter may be on phone or on-site.

If the interpreter hasn't arrived when the appointment is about to start, contact TIS National.

Keep the documentation related to interpreter use (including the reference number) for medico/legal reasons even if the interpreter does not arrive.



I need to organise an immediate phone interpreter

Call TIS National: 131 450 or
Doctor's Priority Line: 1300 131 450
(for private medical practice staff only).

Explain your role, that you are with a patient, and the language you need interpreted.

State your TIS National client code.

Keep the documentation related to interpreter use (including the reference number) for medico/legal reasons even if the interpreter does not arrive.

***Use:** Language card to determine patient's preferred language if not known.



Brief the interpreter

Introduce yourself and let the interpreter know the nature of the discussion to be had.

***See:** Tips for working with interpreters sheet (page 4).



During your consultation

Phone interpreter: Use a speaker phone if possible and let the interpreter know they are on speaker. Speak to the patient directly, in the first person. Let the interpreter know if other people are in the room e.g. family members.

On-site interpreter: Sit in a triangle formation, but face and speak directly to the patient in first person.

Speak slowly and clearly, use short sentences and use the teach-back method to check understanding.

***See:** Tips for working with interpreters sheet (page 4).

More information

TIS National Website

Go to www.tisnational.gov.au for a range of information about the service.

See the 'Contact us' page for the most appropriate phone number to call.

TIS National publications/resources are available at www.tisnational.gov.au/en/About-TIS-National/Materials-to-help-you-access-an-interpreter/TIS-National-promotional-materials-catalogue.

Free Interpreting Service information

www.dss.gov.au/free-interpreting

Health Translations Directory

Go to www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au for relevant and accurate translated health information.

Refugee Health Resources

www.refugeehealthnetworkqld.org.au

www.refugeehealthguide.org.au

Appointment Reminder Translation Tool

www.swslhd.health.nsw.gov.au/refugee/appointment/

Contact your PHN:

Brisbane South PHN: 07 3864 7555

Brisbane North PHN: 07 3630 7300

Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN: 07 4615 0900

Gold Coast PHN: 07 5612 5408

This resource has been adapted from 'Working with patients when there are language barriers' by North Western Melbourne PHN. Copyright NWMPHN 2016

'While the Australian Government Department of Health has contributed to the funding of this material, the information contained in it does not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government and is not advice that is provided, or information that is endorsed, by the Australian Government. The Australian Government is not responsible in negligence or otherwise for any injury, loss or damage however arising from the use of or reliance on the information provided herein.'

