USING INTERPRETING SERVICES

Victorian Government Policy and Procedures

VICTORIAN
multicultural
commission

Victoria
The Place To Be

FOREWORD

The Victorian Government proudly supports cultural diversity and recognises the contribution that a diverse population makes to our vibrant, prosperous and successful state. Our commitment is enshrined through the All of Us Multicultural Policy (2009) and the Multicultural Victoria Act (2004).

People from our migrant and refugee background communities have transformed our society in every field of endeavour, delivering immeasurable social, cultural and economic benefits for all Victorians. This is not surprising given that nearly half of our community was either born overseas or has at least one parent who was born overseas.

We continue to encourage migrants to settle in Victoria and help them establish themselves, engage with government, get involved with the wider community, obtain information and access services.

For many people, the process of putting down roots in a new and unfamiliar environment can be both daunting and challenging. It is in all our interests to help our migrant and refugee communities meet this challenge and make the process as easy as possible.

Communication is a crucial element in this process and while the majority of Victorians who speak other languages also speak English, at least four per cent may not be able to communicate effectively in English. The Victorian Government is committed to assisting this section of our community to communicate through the provision of quality language services.

These guidelines are designed to provide the policy context and practical advice to Victorian Government service providers and their staff. They will assist them to recognise the need for language services as well as offer guidance on the best form of language services to use and how to work more effectively with interpreters.

Victorians come from an ever expanding list of countries and ethnic backgrounds, and speak an increasingly broad array of languages. Many languages were not recorded in Victoria at the 2001 census, yet by 2006 were spoken by many thousands of Victorians and continue to grow. In addition, more speakers of languages long-established in Victoria are accessing health and community services as they age, and are requiring language assistance.

These trends are set to continue in Victoria, meaning that the effective provision of language services must remain a priority for our service providers in the future. These guidelines will be the foremost point of reference for Victorian Government service providers in their efforts to ensure that they provide equitable services to all Victorians, regardless of their proficiency in the English language.

Hon John Brumby MP
Premier of Victoria
Minister for Multicultural Affairs

James Merlino
Minister Assisting the Premier
on Multicultural Affairs

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This manual is available for download from
the Victorian Multicultural Commission:
www.multicultural.vic.gov.au

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INTRODUCTION

Effective communication between service providers and clients is essential to delivering high quality services. The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that all Victorians have equal access to government services, regardless of their English language skills.

Interpreting and translating services are fundamental to good access to services. It is crucial that government departments and funded agencies are supported to ensure that language services are as widely available as possible, and are used as effectively as possible.

This is a practical guide to the use of interpreting services. It sets out the obligations of government service providers to provide language services and gives advice to assist in the practical planning and delivery of services to people with low English language proficiency.

The policy is relevant not only for the provision of language assistance for spoken languages, but also for Auslan, the language of the Australian deaf community.

THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED FOR:

- Government and funded agency staff who have roles involving direct client contact; and
- Managers and diversity/access and equity officers of government and funded agencies that are involved in service provision.

This guide focuses on the use of interpreting services. Both this guide and the companion publication 'Effective Translation Projects – Victorian Government Policy and Procedures' can be downloaded from the Victorian Multicultural Commission website at *www.multicultural.vic.gov.au*

WHAT IS 'LANGUAGE SERVICES'?

'Language services' is the term used to cover a range of measures that service providers use to facilitate communication with clients who have low English proficiency.

LANGUAGE SERVICES MAY INCLUDE:

- engaging an interpreter accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) to transfer oral information from one language into another;
- providing information in both English and languages other than English (LOTE) through publications translated by a NAATI accredited translator; or
- utilising multilingual staff to assist in simple communication encounters.

All forms of language services are used to make government services more accessible to people from non-English speaking backgrounds. They are employed to enable effective communication between two parties who use different languages.

WHY PROVIDE LANGUAGE SERVICES?

More than one million Victorians speak a language other than English at home. In some areas of Victoria over half of the local community speaks a language other than English at home. Many of these people are not confident communicating in English when accessing government services. All Victorian Government service providers need to be aware that their clients will include people who are not confident communicating in English.

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT POLICY

Clients who cannot communicate through written or spoken English should have access to professional interpreting and translating services:

- when required to make significant decisions concerning their lives;

or

- when being informed of their rights;

or

- where essential information needs to be communicated to inform decision making, including making informed consent.

There are a number of government policies and legislation that underpin the importance of providing access to services through the provision of language services,

including the *Multicultural Victoria Act (2004)*, Victoria's Multicultural Affairs Policy, *All of Us*, and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (2006)*.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR EQUITABLE SERVICE

Government agencies have a responsibility to ensure people with low English language proficiency have the opportunity to participate in decision making processes which have consequences for their lives. The failure to identify the need for, or in the absence of identification to promote the availability of, appropriate language services may have legal consequences.

Administrative Decisions

Government agencies, either directly or through funded service providers, routinely make decisions affecting the rights of members of the public and provide services to people that require their consent. The failure to identify the need for, or to promote the availability of, language services may lead to an allegation that a client was not afforded procedural fairness. Legal proceedings resulting from such a situation may result in decisions being overturned and/or sent back for re-consideration, as well as costs and delay to the government and others.

Duty of Care

The government and its funded agencies owe a duty of care to anyone who is reasonably likely to be affected by the government's or agency's activities. Loss or injury caused by a failure to satisfy a duty of care can expose the government or agency to a claim for damages.

In the context of the provision of language services, government and its funded agencies have a duty to ensure that members of the public understand the information that is being provided to them, and may need to provide appropriately trained interpreters in certain circumstances. The duty of care may be breached if a staff member unreasonably fails to provide or ensure a member of the public is made aware of the availability of language services, where appropriate. The potential for adverse legal consequences can be reduced by government agencies and persons taking steps to actively identify whether there is a need for appropriate language services and accede to any request for an interpreter from a member of the public. The steps set out at page 15 offer a practical guide to ensuring that these matters have been properly considered. Since 2006 departments have been required to develop Cultural

Diversity Plans to address the provision for culturally sensitive service delivery, involving three key aspects:

- Culturally appropriate training for staff;
- Information on services is readily accessible; and
- Assessment of effectiveness of service delivery to CALD communities.

Many Cultural Diversity Plans stipulate how the provision of language services ensures that information about programs and services are accessible in languages other than English.

DEPARTMENTAL LANGUAGE SERVICES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

This document provides a whole of government policy perspective for the use of interpreting services. Individual departments and agencies may have their own language services policy and procedure guidelines that fit within the whole of government policy framework but take into account more specific service contexts and procurement arrangements. Government departments may have specific requirements for interpreting and translating services, based on their client groups and the type of services provided. These may include:

- preferred language services providers for sourcing language services;
- methods of funding and purchasing language services; and
- preferences for face-to-face interpreting, telephone interpreting and/or video-conferencing.

Government departments that fund or provide direct care services should establish clear policies for funding and delivering language services. These policies should:

- be consistent with wider Victorian Government policy;
- be consistent with other relevant departmental policies;
- take into account relevant legal issues;
- acknowledge the need to use NAATI accredited practitioners where interpreters and translators are required;
- address the needs of current and potential clients; and
- seek to define situations where interpreters 'must', 'should' and 'could' be used.

You can access the language services policy and procedures relevant to you by contacting the Diversity Unit or its equivalent within your department.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

PURCHASING LANGUAGE SERVICES

Departmental Credit Lines

Some Departments have a credit line system with a particular interpreting agency. This means the department has a contract with a particular language service provider, and a budget for language services is allocated for your usage. More information and links to the Diversity Unit of your department can be found on *www.multicultural.vic.gov.au*

Developing a language services contract

Some departments and funded agencies, especially those with a significant volume of interpreter usage, have established formal contracts with a language services provider through a tender process. This can be more cost effective than purchasing interpreting services on an ad hoc basis and allows an organisation to include specific criteria about individual aspects of the service that are important to you eg. level of accreditation required, professional development for agency staff, required lead time for appointments etc.

> The Australian Government provides fee-free interpreting through TIS National for certain situations. More information can be found at *http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/ help-with-english/help_with_translating/*

Staff training

All government and funded agencies responsible for delivering services and/or providing information to clients should provide staff with training on working effectively with interpreters. This training should be made available to all employees from direct service staff to senior management.

The Victorian Multicultural Commission designs and delivers a series of tailored training programs to the Victorian Public Service on how to work effectively with interpreters. These programs are designed to assist staff to identify when an interpreter is required, understand the role of an accredited interpreter, know how to book an interpreter and practice how to work with an interpreter to facilitate communication.

Information on the suite of training programs available to your department or agency can be found at *www.multicultural.vic.gov.au*

Data Collection

Effective collection of data allows government departments, program areas and funded agencies that regularly use interpreting and translating services to:

- improve their own understanding of the needs of their client group; and
- monitor the accessibility of the services they provide to people who speak other languages.

The Victorian Multicultural Commission has developed a set of standards for data collection on interpreting and translating services. The Standards cover four areas:

- client demographics
- expenditure on interpreting and translating
- in-house staff
- service provided by language services providers

The full Victorian Government Standards for Data Collection on Interpreting and Translating Services can be downloaded at *http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/ projects-and-initiatives/improving-language-services/ standards-and-guidelines*

ARRANGING
LANGUAGE SERVICES

ARRANGING LANGUAGE SERVICES

WHAT IS AN INTERPRETER?

An interpreter is a professionally qualified person who takes information from an oral or sign language and converts it accurately and objectively into another language to enable communication between two parties who do not share a common language.

A translator does the same with written information. This publication focuses on interpreting rather than translating. 'Effective Translation Projects – Victorian Government Policy and Procedures' provides information about commissioning translations for government, and can be downloaded at *www.multicultural.vic.gov.au*

The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) sets and monitors standards in Australia by accrediting translators and interpreters at different levels of competence.

It is Victorian Government policy that interpreters engaged by government and funded agencies must hold NAATI Professional Accreditation where possible. More information about interpreter accreditation can be found on page 10.

SOURCING INTERPRETERS

Interpreters can be sourced from a variety of language service providers. The following are some valuable starting points for arranging the provision of language services for your clients.

Language Service Providers

Interpreting and translation agencies can arrange the supply of accredited interpreters and translators. For some organisations engaging a language service provider on a casual basis is appropriate. For organisations with a higher demand for language services, these language service providers can be contracted to deliver services for specific purposes over a period of time.

A list of language service providers can be found online or via the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) Multicultural Resource Directory which can be accessed at *www.multicultural.vic.gov.au*

Directly employed interpreters

Some organisations directly employ full-time or part-time interpreters where there is stable and significant demand in a given language. You should check if your organisation has staff interpreters prior to making a booking through an agency.

INTERPRETERS – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

ROLE OF THE ACCREDITED INTERPRETER

Interpreters play a critical role in helping people with low English proficiency connect with government by facilitating communication between two or more parties at appointments with clients in schools, hospitals, courts, police stations and other agencies. Interpreter services can also be delivered via telephone interpreting or video-conferencing.

The interpreter acts as the 'voice' of both parties and for this reason will interpret using the first and second person rather than the third person. For example, when a client says "I have a sore foot", the interpreter will interpret by saying "I have a sore foot", rather than "she has a sore foot".

An accredited interpreter will act in accordance with the Australian Institute for Translators and Interpreters (AUSIT) Code of Ethics and interpret everything that is said. An accredited interpreter will not add, modify or delete information. This includes profanities and nonsensical mutterings. An accredited interpreter will remain impartial at all times and will not express an opinion or act as an advocate for the client.

INTERPRETER QUALIFICATIONS AND ACCREDITATION

It is Victorian Government policy that interpreters and translators be accredited at the Professional level where possible.

In Australia the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) is responsible for maintaining the quality of interpreters available to government service providers. NAATI accredits interpreters at a number of levels, according to their proficiency and skill. Of relevance to government service providers are the following levels:

Professional Interpreter

This represents the minimum level of competence for professional interpreting. Interpreters at this level are capable of interpreting across a wide range of subjects involving dialogues at specialist consultations. They are also capable of interpreting presentations by the consecutive mode.

Paraprofessional Interpreter

This represents a level of competence in interpreting for the purpose of general conversations. Paraprofessional interpreters generally undertake the interpretation of non-specialist dialogues.

Recognition

Recognition is an award in a totally separate category from accreditation. It is granted only in languages for which NAATI does not test and it has no specification of level of proficiency.

Recognition is intended to be an acknowledgment that the candidate has had recent and regular experience as an interpreter, but no level of proficiency is specified. A Recognised person has reasonable proficiency in English and has completed basic preparation training.

You should use NAATI-accredited professional interpreters where possible. When accredited interpreters are not available at this level, a NAATI-accredited paraprofessional or NAATI-recognised practitioner can be used. Paraprofessional and recognised interpreters may be the only practitioners available for less common languages. The language services provider may ask if this is acceptable to your client and you may need to assess whether your client's needs will be adequately met.

MULTILINGUAL STAFF

On occasions when a client requires language assistance and the risk to the organisation or the client from miscommunication or misunderstanding is minimal, it may be appropriate for a staff member who speaks a language other than English to provide assistance.

> Multilingual staff should only be used where the outcome of a situation has no risk of adverse effects for either the client or the organisation.

LANGUAGE AIDES

A language aide is an employee who uses English and a language other than English (LOTE) to fill simple communication gaps in the workplace. Language aides may be called upon to assist colleagues who need assistance communicating with clients whose preferred language of communication is that spoken by the language aide.

TERMINOLOGY

A range of terms are used to describe 'language aides'. Terms such as 'bilingual worker' and 'multicultural education aide' can also be used to indicate that a staff member uses his or her skills in a LOTE to assist clients.

There are a number of important differences between the role of staff with multilingual skills and accredited interpreters, such as qualifications and skills, accountability and professional standards, and language proficiency.

It is important that the language skills of language aides are verified in both LOTE and English, often through a NAATI Language Aide or Interpreter test, so that clients and colleagues can have confidence that the staff member's language skills are sufficient for the role. For more information on language verification please refer to *www.naati.com.au*

Organisations should maintain a database of language aides within their departments so staff can access their language skills quickly and easily when necessary.

Multilingual staff may also use their LOTE in the course of their normal work. In these cases, the agency and the worker should be aware of the limits to the worker's

fluency and seek the assistance of an accredited interpreter if the communication has become complex or potentially risky.

Staff with fluency in a LOTE can also be specifically recruited for roles that involve frequent communication with speakers of a particular language. This can provide an effective means of engaging with migrant communities. Bilingual health educators, for example, are able to use their knowledge of the culture and language of both their employer and the target audience to convey a message to best effect. As part of the recruitment process it is important to verify the language proficiency of the applicant.

> Staff with multilingual skills cannot be used to communicate information that is legally binding or puts at risk either the organisation or client.

For example, asking a client to sign a consent form is simple but the consequence of poor communication is high – an accredited interpreter should be engaged in this instance. However, giving instructions directing a client to a clinician's room in a large building may be complex but the risk of a serious adverse effect is low if the information is incorrect – a language aide could be used in this situation if available.

LANGUAGE ALLOWANCE

The Victorian public service provides a language allowance to staff of some government and funded agencies.

To be eligible, staff must undertake work involving direct contact with speakers of the language other than English (LOTE) spoken by the staff member on a regular basis and have passed the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) Language Aide Test, Paraprofessional Interpreter or Professional Interpreter test.

More information on the Language Allowance program can be found at *www.multicultural.vic.gov.au*

PREPARING FOR INTERPRETING SERVICES

PREPARING FOR INTERPRETING SERVICES

ASSESSING THE NEED FOR AN INTERPRETER

Assessing how well a person can understand information in English is the first step in identifying the need for an interpreter. Even when a client has a reasonable proficiency in English, stressful or unfamiliar environments may affect the client's ability to communicate effectively in English.

Using an interpreter is recommended if:

- The client demonstrates no understanding of English when asked basic questions that relate to the context of the discussion. For example, the client cannot respond in English when asked his/her name, address and date of birth;

- The client is only able to respond in English in limited capacity or presents with a level of English that is difficult for you to understand;

- The client relies on family and/or friends to communicate on his/her behalf;

- The client prefers to speak in his/her own language other than English; or

- If the client speaks English as a second language, and is in a stressful situation or in an unfamiliar environment.

To determine the level of English language proficiency of a client and his/her ability to understand information being presented in English, the following informal assessment tool may be useful;

- Conduct a short informal interview asking for basic details regarding the client's reason for attending and information about his/her background and English language proficiency. Questions may include;
  – 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/speaking English?

If the client cannot respond to these questions fluently, or you find the responses difficult to understand, using an interpreter is recommended.

For a more detailed assessment tool, see
http://www.ceh.org.au

IF THE CLIENT REFUSES THE USE OF AN INTERPRETER

A client may refuse the use of an interpreter. Under these circumstances, it is important to clarify the reasons why the client is refusing the use of an interpreter, and if possible, rectify the issue or reassure the client.

These reasons may include;

- Misunderstanding of your explanation that the interpreter is needed;

- The client may feel confident that he/she can competently communicate in English;

- The client may prefer a family member or friend to act as interpreter;

- The client may know the interpreter assigned to the interview;

- The client may be concerned that they will have to pay for the interpreter; or

- The client may be uncomfortable with the sex of the interpreter assigned to the interview.

Possible strategies for resolving the issue include;

- Explaining to the client that it is YOU that needs the interpreter, not them;

- If possible, speak with family members or friends as to the reasons for the refusal; or

- Using a telephone interpreter to assist you explore the issues and explain the need for an interpreter.

If the client continues to refuse the use of an interpreter, you may choose to;

- Continue with the interview and document your concerns relating to the language barrier; or

- Suspend or reschedule the interview.

CASE STUDY

An older person who spoke Vietnamese as his first language presented to the counter of a police station to report an accident. An unknown person had run into his parked car and left the scene without leaving his personal details. The police officer at the counter was having difficulty understanding the Vietnamese man's reason for presenting to police, and suggested he use an interpreter to ensure that all details relating to the accident were accurately recorded. The client refused the use of an interpreter because he thought that he would be charged for this service and he had a limited income.

The Police Officer, not knowing why the client was refusing an interpreter, asked the man to wait and got an interpreter on the telephone. After a brief conversation with the assistance of the interpreter, the Police Officer understood why the offer of an interpreter had initially been refused and was able to assure the man that he would not be charged for the use of an interpreter. With the help of the interpreter, the client was able to file his complaint and the Police Officer was able to collect the information necessary to apprehend the offender.

USING FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Family members or friends of a client are not to be used as interpreters.

Friends and family can have an important and helpful role supporting and advocating for a client. This role ought be acknowledged, valued and understood as separate but complementary to the role of an interpreter. Using a qualified interpreter enables family and friends to focus on their advocacy and support role.

Friends or family members may not have the required language competence, may be emotionally involved, may lack impartiality and are not bound by the same standards of conduct as qualified interpreters. Using a family member or friend to interpret can have a detrimental effect on the integrity of the communication between you and your client, and potentially undermine your duty of care to the client.

Using an accredited interpreter ensures the competence, impartiality, accuracy, confidentiality and professionalism of the interpreter.

QUESTION

Q. As a District Nurse, I occasionally visit clients with limited or no English language skills. Just last week, I was visiting a client who is able to speak a limited amount of English and we are usually able to understand each other quite well. On this particular day, it was clear to me that there was a problem that caused my client great distress and he was not able to use enough English for me to understand. His 11 year old daughter was home, and although I knew she could speak English, I chose to engage a telephone interpreter to assist with communication. Was this the right decision?

A. Yes, your decision to use an accredited interpreter rather than the client's 11 year old daughter was a good one. Government policy states that it not acceptable to use family or friends to interpret, or children under 18 years of age. The potential risks to the client, the child and the service provider in this example are significant.

IDENTIFYING LANGUAGE

Guessing a client's language by their country of birth can be unreliable. For example, a person from China may speak Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka or any number of other dialects or languages.

There are several ways that the language spoken by a client can be determined;

- Ask the client which language they speak. Often people who have used interpreters previously can give you the name of the language they speak;
- If the person is accompanied by an English speaking friend or family member, they may be able to tell you the language spoken by the client;
- Use visual aides that list languages. The client may be able to point to the language they speak. To create your own poster or flip chart that will assist you to identify the languages that people

from culturally and linguistically diverse communities speak, visit 'Find your Language':
http://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcht.nsf/pages/find_your_language?open

- Contact a language services provider and they maybe able to assist you to identify the language through the use of telephone interpreters.

In situations where a client speaks a less common language, it may be useful to ask whether they speak another language, and how well. For example, someone born in Malaysia may have Hakka as their first language and Malay as their second. If an interpreter is not available in their first language, an interpreter may be available in their second language.

CHOOSING THE MODE OF INTERPRETING

There are three types of interpreting services available in Victoria:

- onsite interpreting (face to face);
- telephone interpreting; and
- video-conferencing.

Onsite interpreting (face to face)

An onsite interpreter attends a meeting in person and should be used in situations where complex, legally binding or lengthy matters need to be discussed. Onsite interpreters facilitate both verbal and non-verbal communication (body language). This may result in a broader understanding of the information than occurs with telephone interpreting.

Onsite interpreting is generally more expensive than other interpreting options and requires advance booking, particularly where interpreters are required to travel long distances. The availability of onsite interpreters may also be limited in some rural/regional areas and in some languages.

Most interpreting agencies have a minimum fee for onsite interpreting based on a 90 minute session.

Telephone interpreting

Telephone interpreters deliver their service via the telephone.

Telephone interpreting is particularly useful in emergency situations when immediate assistance is required. It is less expensive than onsite interpreting and more accessible to rural/regional areas. It is most cost effective to pre-book telephone interpreting and to conduct sessions during business hours. Telephone interpreting is usually booked in 15 minute blocks.

Telephone interpreting can also be used to access an interpreter in languages in which there is a limited number of accredited interpreters or to establish the language spoken and the nature of an enquiry before an onsite interpreter is called.

As telephone interpreters cannot take account of non-verbal communication, they are not used for Auslan clients.

Telephone interpreting is more effective when a landline is used rather than a mobile phone. It is also recommended that a dual handset be used where possible.

Video-conference interpreting

Video-conference interpreting uses an interpreter to deliver a service through video and allows remote access to an interpreter. Video conference interpreting can be organised at short notice and enables face to face communication without the expense of travel costs.

Charges for video-conference interpreting are similar to those for onsite interpreting however additional telecommunication costs may apply. Video-conferencing is available through some government offices, hospitals, educational institutions, local councils and courts.

The Department of Human Services has initiated a Video Relay Interpreting (VRI) project that provides sign (Auslan) and spoken language interpreting over the internet.

The locations of rooms in which VRI facilities are available are listed here: *http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/vri*

BOOKING AN INTERPRETER

The language service provider will require specific information to process a booking for an interpreter.

For booking a face to face or onsite interpreter it is essential to collate the following information prior to ringing the language service provider;

- The client's name;
- The language/dialect that is required;
- The preferred sex of the interpreter (if applicable);
- The date and time the interpreter is required – ensure you allocate enough time prior to the interview to brief the interpreter;
- The type of interview, for example, a medical or legal appointment or court hearing etc.;
- The address of the agency requiring the interpreter;
- The name and telephone contact details of the person the interpreter needs to report to;
- The nature of the matter to be discussed, for example, an aged care health assessment, a family violence police interview etc.;
- Approximately how long the interview will take; and
- The interpreter's name, if you or the client wishes for a specific interpreter for continuity of care reasons.

Similarly, 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 sharing the handset?

For some clients, the sex of the interpreter will be important. Prior to booking an interpreter, explore if this is an issue for your client and book the sex of the interpreter accordingly.

In some rare languages, there are few accredited interpreters. These interpreters are used to interpret in a variety of situations, some of which may be sensitive in nature. In some circumstances the client may know the interpreter or the interpreter may know the client. This may present some issues with the client or the interpreter. Knowing the name of the interpreter prior to the interview may be useful in identifying any concerns the client or interpreter may have.

WORKING EFFECTIVELY
WITH INTERPRETERS

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH INTERPRETERS

TIPS FOR WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH INTERPRETERS

Before the Interview

- Immediately before the interview, arrange to give the interpreter a short briefing to provide general background information such as the reason for the interview, specific terms used and what you want to achieve from the interview.

- For a telephone interpreting interview, ensure you have access to the appropriate telephone technology and understand how to work the telephone system.

- Avoid leaving the interpreter alone with the client, either in the room where the interview will take place or a waiting room. Additionally, allow the interpreter to leave separately to the client.

At the beginning of the interview

- Begin by introducing yourself and the interpreter to the client.

- Explain your role and the interpreter's role. Stress 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 interview and what you hope to achieve. You should not assume that your client knows what the interview is about.

- Explain to the client that questions or concerns can be raised at any time during the interview.

For an onsite interpreting interview, ensure the room is set up for maximum communication. Ideally seats will be arranged in a triangle with the interviewer facing the person being interviewed.

Interpreter

Interviewer   **Interviewee**

During the interview

- Talk directly to the client and maintain eye contact.

- 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, colloquialisms and metaphors.

- Make one point at a time. Pause for the interpretation after the completion of a full sentence, never mid-sentence. Keep questions, statements and comments short. This gives the interpreter time to understand what you have said and to pass information on to the client in stages.

- Allow the interpreter to clarify information with you. If there is a need to clarify information with the interpreter, ask that this is explained 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. Make sure that you have understood the information that they provided, and ensure the client understands any information you had conveyed.

After the interview

- You may debrief the interpreter and discuss any issues experienced in the interview that related to the role of the interviewer or the interpreter.

- Do not to ask the interpreter to express an opinion on the client or what they have said.

- Provide any positive feedback about the interpreting session and the ways in which the interpreter assisted the interview to run smoothly.

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

Complaints and Feedback

You, as well as your staff and clients, need to be confident that interpreting services are of the highest quality. Maintaining and promoting the professionalism of interpreting services is therefore extremely important.

You should expect accredited interpreters to be accountable and comply with the Code of Ethics developed by AUSIT. The Code of Ethics is available at the AUSIT website *www.ausit.org*. If an interpreter fails to comply with the principles outlined in the AUSIT Code of Ethics, you have the right to take action, and should do so in the interests of maintaining professional standards of interpreting in Australia.

Most language services providers have a complaints policy and processes to resolve issues. If there are issues with the performance of a specific interpreter, discuss this with the interpreter in the first instance and, if not resolved, contact your language service provider to make a formal complaint.

If you have an issue such as losing bookings, charging incorrect fees or providing interpreters with inappropriate levels of accreditation, it is advisable to discuss the matter with the person responsible for dealing with complaints.

PROMOTING THE
AVAILABILITY OF INTERPRETERS

PROMOTING THE AVAILABILITY OF INTERPRETERS

It is important that all Government Departments and funded agencies make it clear that interpreters are available to clients who feel that they require language assistance.

The most effective way of promoting the availability of language services is by ensuring that all staff members are aware of your organisation's language services policy and have been adequately trained in identifying the need for language assistance and acting on this requirement.
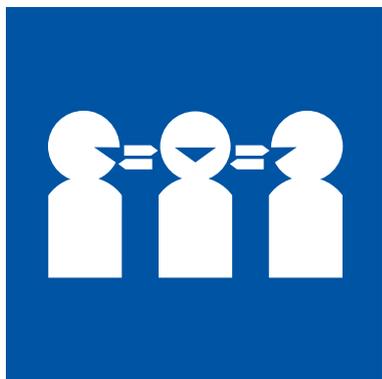
NATIONAL INTERPRETER SYMBOL

The National Interpreter Symbol is a national public information symbol developed by Victoria in partnership with the Commonwealth, state and territory governments. The symbol provides a simple way of indicating where people with limited English proficiency can ask for language assistance when using government services.

Service providers are encouraged to display the symbol in a variety of settings including client contact areas such as front desks or reception areas, in public areas where language services are available and on websites.

Guidelines for the use of the National Interpreter Symbol and resources including the symbol itself can be downloaded free from *www.multicultural.vic.gov.au*

Is the National Interpreter Symbol displayed in a prominent position at your customer service counter?

National Interpreter Symbol

VICTORIAN INTERPRETER CARD
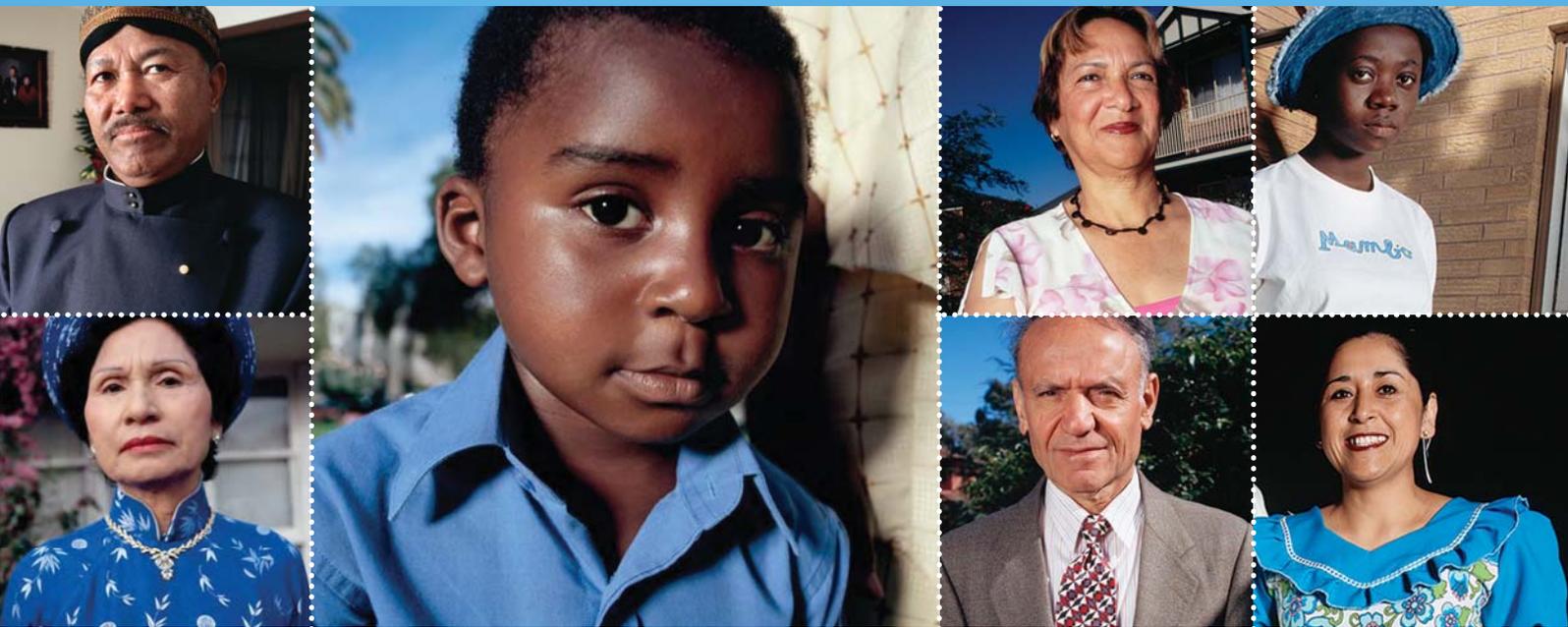

Interpreter card front

Interpreter card back

The Victorian Interpreter Card is designed to provide people who require language assistance with an easy and effective means of requesting it.

The card is wallet sized and features the National Interpreter Symbol, as well as the card holder's preferred languages of communication. A client can present the card to provide a non-verbal indication that language assistance is required and the language in which it is sought.

The Victorian Interpreter Card can be downloaded free from *www.multicultural.vic.gov.au*

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