



Australian Government
Department of Social Services



Free Interpreting Service
Information and resources for Medical Specialists

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Free Interpreting Service for Medical Practitioners

The Free Interpreting Service aims to provide equitable access to key services for people with limited English language proficiency.

Medical practitioners can access the Free Interpreting Service to provide Medicare rebateable services to anyone with a Medicare card.

Why medical practitioners use interpreters

Australia has a rich cultural diversity. The 2016 census revealed that Australians were born in almost 200 different countries and speak more than 300 languages. Not everyone can speak English well.

Medical practitioners use credentialed interpreters to communicate complex or technical information to patients with limited or no English proficiency. This can help to ensure accuracy of communication, reduce confusion, save time, and protect practitioners from professional risk. It is particularly important when:

- seeking informed consent
- dealing with patients in a crisis
- dealing with complexity
- assessing patient competence.

Services available to medical practitioners

Medical practitioners can use the Free Interpreting Service to access interpreting services delivered by TIS National, including:

- immediate phone interpreting
- pre-booked phone interpreting
- pre-booked onsite interpreting.

Immediate phone interpreting is most useful for unplanned interactions. It provides:

- access to over 3000 interpreters in over 160 different languages
- interpreting services 24 hours a day 7 days a week
- connection to an interpreter within a few minutes of calling.

Pre-booked phone interpreting is useful for planned medical appointments, or if you need to request a less common language.

When phone interpreting is not suitable, TIS National can arrange an interpreter to arrive onsite for a face-to-face appointment. This may be important when the consultation is particularly complicated, for example, where a doctor needs to give complex or technical instructions or rely heavily on non-verbal cues.

You may also wish to use onsite interpreting if you have several patients who need the same language interpreter and are able to schedule these so that one interpreter can attend for several appointments.





Eligibility

Under the Free Interpreting Service, medical practitioners are defined as general practitioners and approved medical specialists.

Medical practitioners are eligible to access the Free Interpreting Service when delivering services that are:

- Medicare-rebateable
- delivered in private practice
- provided to anyone with a Medicare card.

Nursing and practice support staff working with a medical practitioner registered with TIS National can also access the service using the same client code.

The Free Interpreting Service can be used for delivering health services, including but not limited to:

- arranging appointment times
- undertaking health consultations
- developing health plans
- providing medical test results.

The Free Interpreting Service cannot be used for:

- allied health services
- patients who do not hold a Medicare card
- state funded public health services, such as services provided in hospitals.

Register for a client code

To register for a client code, complete the online client registration form on the [TIS National website](#), or allow a few extra minutes the first time you use the service.

You can also register by contacting TIS National on 1300 575 847 or at tis.lpl@homeaffairs.gov.au.

How to access the Free Interpreting Service

1. Call TIS National on 131 450
2. Provide the operator with the language of the interpreter that you need
3. Provide your client code and the name of the medical practitioner
4. Request an interpreter of a particular gender, if required (subject to availability)

Using the Free Interpreting Service is easy and convenient. It is quick and simple to register and you will be connected to a phone interpreter within a few minutes.

More information

Read: about the Free Interpreting Service on the [DSS website](#).

Visit: the [TIS National website](#) to watch videos about TIS National services and how to work with interpreters. You can also find free promotional materials in the TIS National catalogue and order these from the website.

Contact TIS National: 1300 575 847 or tis.lpl@homeaffairs.gov.au.



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How to use the Doctors Priority Line



1300 131 450
24 hours a day 7 days a week

Step 1



Call the Doctors Priority Line
on
1300 131 450

Step 2



Provide the operator with the
language of the interpreter
that you need

Step 3



Provide your client code*
and the name of your
agency to the operator

Step 4



Your patient may wish to request
an interpreter of a particular
gender (subject to availability)

Subject to eligibility. *To register for a client code or for more information please visit www.tisnational.gov.au or call 1300 575 847.

For immediate phone interpreting call the 24 hour Doctors Priority Line on 1300 131 450



Language card

English

Please indicate which language you speak, so that we can arrange an interpreter to help you communicate.

Mandarin/简体中文

请说明您说哪种语言，这样我们就能安排翻译帮助您沟通。

Tamil/தமிழ்

தயவுசெய்து தாங்கள் பேசும் மொழி எதுவென அறியத் தந்தால், நாம் எமக்கு உதவும் வகையில் ஒரு மொழிபெயர்ப்பாளரைப் பெற்றுக் கொள்ள முயற்சிப்போம்.

Korean/한국어

어떤 언어를 사용하시는지 알려주십시오. 그러면 저희가 귀하의 의사소통을 도와드릴 통역사를 주선할 수 있습니다.

Cantonese/廣東話

請說明您所講的語言，以便我們安排口譯員協助您溝通。

Spanish/Español

Por favor indique el idioma que usted habla, para organizar un intérprete que le ayudará a comunicarse.

Turkish/Türkçe

Hangi dili konuştuğunuzu belirtin, böylece iletişimde bulunabilmeniz için size bir tercüman ayarlayabilelim.

Myanmar Language (alt Burmese)/မြန်မာ

ကျေးဇူးပြု၍ သင် မည်သည့်ဘာသာစကားပြောသည်ကို ပြောပြပါ။ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ကူညီရန် စကားပြန်တစ်ဦး ရအောင်ရှာပါမည်။

Greek/Ελληνικά

Παρακαλούμε αναφέρετε ποια γλώσσα ομιλείτε, ώστε να μπορέσουμε να κανονίσουμε ένα διερμηνέα να σας βοηθήσει να επικοινωνήσετε.

Somali/Soomaali

Fadlan tilmaan luuqadaad ku hadashid, si aan kuugu soo balamino turjumaan kaa caawiya wada hadalka.

Italian/Italiano

Sei pregato di indicare la lingua da te parlata, affinché si possa organizzare il servizio di un interprete che ti aiuti a comunicare.

Nepali/नेपाली

कृपया तपाईं कुन भाषा बोल्नुहुन्छ जनाउनुहोला, तसर्थ हामीले तपाईंलाई संग कुराकानी गर्न मद्दत गर्नकोलागि दोभाषेको व्यवस्था गर्न सक्नेछौं।

Karen/ကဉ်

ဝံသးစုတ်ဖျါဝီတိလနကတိကွိဝဲလဲတခါလဲတခါဒီးပကယုနုနုပုကွီးထံတၢ်ဖိတကလကမၤစၢပုအဲဒါလီၤ.

Serbian/Српски

Молимо вас да назначите који језик говорите да бисмо могли да ангажујемо преводиоца који ће вам помоћи да комуницирате.

Russian/Русский

Укажите, на каком языке вы говорите, и мы предоставим вам переводчика.

Thai/ภาษาไทย

กรุณาแจ้งภาษาที่คุณใช้สนทนา เราสามารถจัดหาล่ามมาช่วยคุณในการสื่อสารได้

Khmer/ខ្មែរ

សូមបញ្ជាក់ប្រាប់នូវភាសាណាមួយដែលលោកអ្នកនិយាយ ដើម្បីឆ្ពោះឱ្យយើងអាចរៀបចំអ្នកបកប្រែភាសាមួយរូប ដើម្បីជួយលោកអ្នកក្នុងការប្រាស្រ័យទាក់ទង។

Japanese/日本語

スムーズにコミュニケーションを取ることができるようにこちらで通訳を手配することができますので、どの言語を話すかをお知らせ下さい。

Bosnian/Bosanski

Molimo vas da navedete kojim jezikom govorite, tako da vam možemo organizirati prevodioca koji će vam pomoći u razgovoru.

Croatian/Hrvatski

Molimo navedite koji jezik govorite tako da možemo organizirati tumača koji će vam pomoći u komuniciranju.

Macedonian/Македонски

Ве молиме назначете кој јазик го зборувате, за да можеме да ангажираме преведувач да ви помогне во комуницирањето.

Polish/Polski

Prosimy wskazać język, w którym rozmawiasz, abyśmy mogli zorganizować ustnego tłumacza do pomocy w porozumieniu się.

Tigrinya/ትግርኛ

በጃጅግ ላይኑ ቋንቋ ከምትዛረቡ ግለጹ እጥ ከትዘራረቡ እንከሎ ሓገዝ ንምርካብ ኣስተርጓሚ ክነዳልዉ ንክእል ኢና።

Vietnamese/Việt ngữ

Xin cho biết quý vị nói ngôn ngữ nào để chúng tôi sắp xếp thông dịch viên giúp quý vị nói chuyện.

Arabic/عربي

يرجى الإشارة إلى اللغة التي تتكلمها وسنحاول الحصول على مترجم لمساعدتك على التواصل.

Farsi(alt Persian)/فارسی

لطفا نشان دهید به کدام زبان صحبت می کنید تا ما بتوانیم یک مترجم شفاهی بگیریم که به شما کمک کند ارتباط برقرار نمایید.

Hazaragi/هزاره گی

مهرباني كده نشوون پټين كه شمو ده كنوم زبون توره موگين ومو كوشش منيم تا يگون ترجمان ره بلدۍ كومك شمو ده دست بياريم

Dari/دري

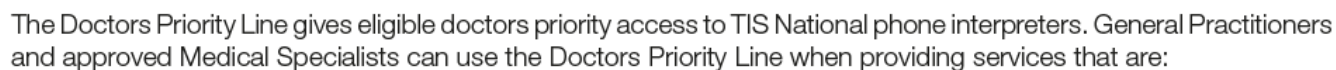
لطفاً معلوم نمائید به چه زبانی صحبت می کنید و ما کوشش می کنیم برای کمک به شما ترجمان بگیریم.

Pashto/پښتو

مهرباني وکړی څرگنده کړی چې په کومه ژبه خبری کوی ، ترڅو موږ وکولای شوډ یو ژباړونکي یا ترجمان بندوبست وکړو چې تاسو سره په مفاهمی یا خبرو اترو کی مرسته وکړي.



Doctors Priority Line
24 hour telephone interpreting
1300 131 450



- Medicare-rebateable
- delivered in private practice
- provided to non-English speakers who have a Medicare card.

Nursing and practice support staff working with GPs registered with TIS National can also access the service using the same client code.

List your Medical Practitioners' names in the table below and include their individual TIS National client code.

[illegible]



Critical case analysis of adverse events associated with failure to use interpreters for non-English speaking patients.



Australian National University

Authors: Dr Janine Rowse, A/Prof Katrina Anderson, A/Prof Christine Phillips, Dr Brian Chan
Australian National University Medical School.

Background

One in 35 Australians has limited English proficiency (LEP). Patients with LEP are likely to suffer more frequent and severe adverse events in hospital (1–3). There are case reports of unnecessary invasive interventions and missed diagnoses resulting in death occurring due to lack of interpreter use (4, 5)

Despite the availability of a national telephone interpreter service (TIS) and state-funded interpreter services in Australia, interpreter services remain alarmingly underused by health care staff (6). Research indicates there is persistent use of untrained ad hoc interpreters (7), including friends and relatives, which can be ethically hazardous (4) and result in greater number of clinically significant errors (8). It is estimated that an interpreter provided by TIS is used in 1 in every 100 consultations with patients with LEP (9) by doctors in private practice.

The majority of existing research into failure of appropriate interpreter use has been conducted in the hospital inpatient setting, and has relied on hospital recording systems or records associated with target outcome measures (e.g. length of stay, adverse events and information retention) (11) to collect data.

Aim:

The aim of this study was to describe adverse outcomes described by patients attending a refugee health service attributable to failure of appropriate interpreter use in health consultations.

Methods

This study was a clinical audit of all patient records of those attending a community based refugee health service.

The study population was all patients who first presented to the service between 1 July 2011 and 31 June 2013 (n= 471). A structured data collection sheet was used to extract data from the medical software system for the study population who for every consultation between study enrolment and 28 February 2014, or the patient left the medical service, whichever occurred first (total consultations, n=2530). Three reasons for encounter were coded in the ICPC-2 format for every consultation, and a brief summary of the issue was noted if the reason for encounter was a health care system problem. Cases of interest relating to inappropriate interpreter use were examined in further detail in a critical incident analysis.

Results

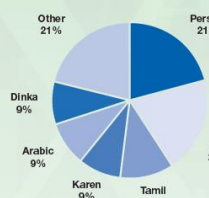
Of the 471 patients included in the study period, 357 (74.5%) were documented as requiring an interpreter, with languages spoken including Persian, Dari, Tamil, Karen, Arabic and Dinka.

Twenty-four separate incidents of adverse outcomes related to failure of appropriate interpreter use were reported by a total of 21 patients (two patients reported multiple incidents).

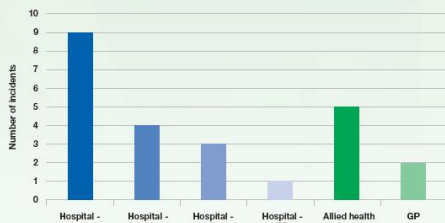
71% of reported incidents occurred in the hospital setting (outpatients, inpatient, and emergency), 21% in community allied health (including optometry, imaging and physiotherapy), and 8% occurred in general practice.

The majority (62.5%) of reported incidents involved obtaining informed consent. Incidents involving inappropriate ad-hoc interpreter use (16.7%), discharge medication instructions (12.5%) and other incident types (8.3%) were also reported. Four incidents resulted in physical harm, and nine incidents resulted in delays in investigations and diagnosis.

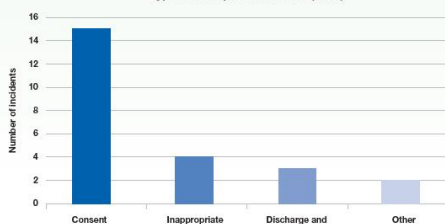
Languages spoken by patients (n=357) requiring interpreters



Encounter setting of interpreter incidents (n=24)



Types of interpreter incidents (n=24)



Type of harm	Critical incident examples	Interpreter related problem
Physical harm due to misdiagnosis.	Patient with subdural haematoma requiring emergency evacuation. Two presentations to health services with symptoms were dismissed as "non-specific" and not investigated.	Neighbour used as interpreter.
Psychological and physical harm.	Female who underwent gynaecological procedure without informed consent, unaware it was permanent.	Spouse used as interpreter to gain consent for procedure.
Psychological harm to son and father.	Child co-opted to interpret father's torture history at the request of the hospital specialist.	Child used as interpreter in specialised complex area, against the wishes of father. Parent's request for interpreter refused.
Psychological harm.	Child admitted for elective dental procedure after long waiting period. Parents did not understand what procedure was, and were refused an interpreter when they requested one.	No interpreter used to explain reason for admission or to obtain consent. Parents' request for interpreter refused.
Psychological harm.	Patient had abdominal surgery performed without knowing what the procedure was. Post-operatively awoke in state of terror due to abdomen wound.	No interpreter used for consent.
Potential harm due to failure of test to be performed correctly, psychological harm.	Anxious patient underwent a stress ECG without understanding what it was or that he needed to report pain during the procedure.	No interpreter used to explain procedure.
Harm due to medication effect.	Patient discharged from hospital later presented with an acute dystonic reaction due to taking a discharge medication too frequently.	No interpreter used to explain medications at discharge.

Procedures reportedly performed without informed consent

- Nerve root injection
- Exercise stress test
- Cholecystectomy
- MRI
- Joint injection under ultrasound
- Gynaecological procedure

Limitations

Limitations of a study of this design include the potential for bias in relying on patient reporting of events they have experienced. In most of the case studies presented, the patients treating general practitioners advocated on their patient's behalf (via correspondence with the involved health practitioners), and in all the cases that were able to be followed up it was confirmed that an interpreter had not been used.

Implications

- This study identifies particular situations at risk of harm resulting from failure of interpreter use including consent for procedures, instruction of hospital discharge medications, and inappropriate use of family members as interpreter.
- As health professionals, we have both a legal and ethical obligation to ensure that informed consent is obtained in competent patients prior to invasive procedures, with respect for patient autonomy, and provision of adequate information with discussion of alternatives. Multiple overseas studies have shown the effect of language barrier resulting in lower rates of appropriate informed consent obtained in the hospital setting (12–14), however to our knowledge this is the first study capturing such incidents in the Australian setting, where a free interpreting service is easily accessible.
- In our study, neighbours, community members and children were used as interpreters, or the patient's limited English was considered adequate for consent. There is particular risk of misleading information and miscommunication occurring when using relatives or friends as interpreters.

Conclusion

This is the first study to explore the situations surrounding and repercussions of failure of health professionals to use appropriate interpreter services, from the unique perspective of a LEP patient's description of events at a refugee health clinic. Failures occurred in the areas of consent, complex instructions, and in obtaining proper history. This research highlights the urgent need for proactive service policies and health staff education around appropriate use of interpreters. Health workers should focus on at a minimum using interpreters in which there is any doubt about the patient's English proficiency for consultations involving the four Cs: Consent, Complexity, Crisis and Competence (15).

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Working with interpreters

Interpreter's role

The role of an interpreter is to facilitate accurate communication with people who have limited or no English language proficiency.



Interpreter's code of ethics

TIS National interpreters are bound by a professional code of ethics, which requires them to:

- interpret information accurately and honestly
- maintain confidentiality
- be impartial and objective
- act in a professional manner at all times.

TIS National's policy is to use the highest [NAATI credentialed](#) interpreter available. Requests for specific interpreters are not encouraged for this reason.

Why medical practitioners use interpreters

Using interpreters is important for practitioners as well as patients. It helps to protect practitioners from professional risk and to ensure patients understand the information and advice they have been given. It is particularly important when:

- seeking informed consent
- dealing with patients in a crisis
- dealing with complexity
- assessing patient competence.

Hints for using a phone interpreter

Consider the type of phone:

- use a hands-free phone for regular use
- use a standard phone only for emergencies or occasional use.

Before beginning the consultation:

- introduce yourself to the interpreter
- describe the phone you are using and where you are calling from
- introduce the interpreter to the patient
- ask the patient if they understand the interpreter.

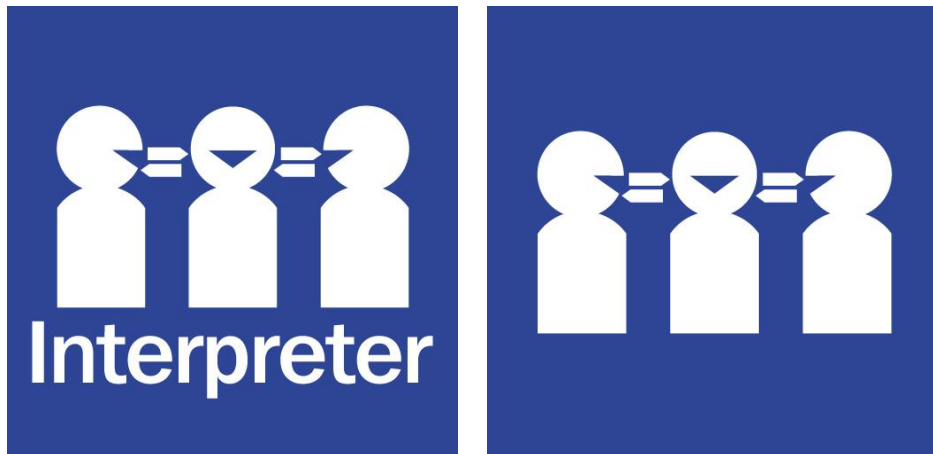
During the consultation:

- sit facing your patient
- speak clearly so the interpreter can hear you
- pause often to allow the interpreter to speak
- talk to your patient, not to the interpreter
- use non-verbal reassurance
- take a short break after 30 minutes if the consultation takes a long time
- clearly indicate when the session has ended.



For immediate phone interpreting call the 24 hour Doctors Priority Line on 1300 131 450

The National Interpreter Symbol



The Interpreter Symbol is a national public information symbol endorsed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. The symbol provides a simple way of indicating where people with limited or no English proficiency can ask for language assistance when using government and other services.

You may see the symbol in places that deliver government and community information and services such as hospitals, police stations, state schools, community centres, housing and employment offices, local councils, Adult Migrant English Program service providers and migrant resource centres.

All government service organisations and other community and private organisations, including private medical practitioners, are encouraged to use the symbol and promote the use of interpreters to their clients and patients. You can download the National Interpreter Symbol in JPEG and EPS formats. The more places that use the symbol, the more recognition and understanding there will be of what it means by both service organisations and clients.

For the Interpreter symbol with text see:

- [National Interpreter Symbol - with text \(106KB JPEG file\)](#)
- [National Interpreter Symbol - with text \(642KB EPS ZIP file\)](#)

For the Interpreter symbol without text see:

- [National Interpreter Symbol \(69KB JPEG file\)](#)
- [National Interpreter Symbol \(627KB EPS ZIP file\)](#)

The Free Translating Service



[The Free Translating Service](#) is provided for people settling permanently in Australia, to support their participation in employment, education and community engagement.

Permanent residents and select temporary or provisional visa holders are able to have up to ten eligible documents translated, into English, within the first two years of their eligible visa grant date.

If your patients are eligible for the service they can have their vaccination records or other medical documents translated, including medical reports and medical certificates issued outside of Australia and required for medical treatment in Australia.

Applications for the Free Translating Service are made on the [Free Translating Service website](#). The website is easy to use and is available in English, Arabic, Farsi and Simplified Chinese.

The Free Translating Service Helpdesk can be contacted:

- **by email:** fts@migrationtranslators.com.au
- **online:** Using the [‘Contact us’ form](#)
- **by phone:** 1800 962 100
- **with an interpreter:**
 1. Call TIS National on 131 450
 2. State the language interpreter that you require
 3. Ask to be connected to the Migration Translators on 1800 962 100.

For immediate phone interpreting call the 24 hour Doctors Priority Line on 1300 131 450

Other useful resources

Resource	Description	Link
NSW Health appointment reminder translation tool	Allows practice staff to input information into an English form. The NSW Health website then produces a pdf translation of health appointment reminders for patients. Available in 32 languages.	NSW Health appointment reminder translation tool
Health Translations Directory flyer	The Victorian Government's Health Translations Directory gives you access to more than 10,000 translated health resources in over 90 languages.	Health Translations Directory
TIS National resource catalogue	Free TIS National promotional products are available to view, download or order from their website.	TIS National resource catalogue

More information

Read: about the Free Interpreting Service on the [DSS website](#).

Watch: [videos](#) about working with interpreters and general information on TIS National services.

Discuss: the Free Interpreting Service with TIS National staff during Australian Eastern business hours. You can contact them on the details below.

Contact details

Phone: 1300 575 847

Email: tis.lpl@homeaffairs.gov.au.

*Thank you for your ongoing contribution to improving the wellbeing
of migrants and refugees in Australia.*

