

assessing the need for an interpreter

This tip sheet will assist you to determine whether an interpreter is needed to work with a particular client.

Advise clients that interpreters are available and are free of charge.

Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clients may not be aware that such a service exists.• Clients may not be aware that they are entitled to the service.• Clients may not be familiar with the procedure for requesting or working with interpreters.
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide translated information in community languages in the foyer which states that interpreters are available and provided free of charge.• Ensure that written information on interpreter services emphasises the confidentiality of the service and outlines the procedure for working with interpreters.

Ask the client if they want or need an interpreter.

Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is the most direct way of finding out if one is needed.
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask “Do you need an interpreter?”• You can also use a flashcard to ask this question in the client’s preferred language.

Find your language

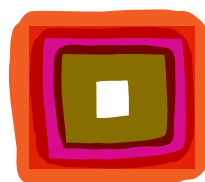
Find Your Language allows you to create a poster or flip chart that will assist you to identify the languages that people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities speak.

www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcht.nsf/pages/find_your_language?open

What if the client declines?

It is still the service provider’s duty of care to ensure effective communication.

Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clients may believe that their English proficiency is good enough to understand you.• Clients may feel embarrassed about their level of language proficiency.
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain to the client that it is equally important that you are able to understand what they are saying.



Ask the client simple questions about their personal details.

Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the client is having difficulty understanding relatively simple questions, then an interpreter is definitely needed.• A client of non-English-speaking background who has been in an English-speaking country less than two years is likely to need an interpreter.
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask a question which requires more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer or ask the client to repeat something you have said in their own words.• An interpreter should be introduced at this point if communication is difficult.

Try to address client concerns about interpreters.

Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clients may feel uncomfortable discussing sensitive issues with a third person.• Clients may have concerns about confidentiality (especially if they come from small communities where interpreters are people they may know).• Clients may have concerns about the accuracy of what the interpreter says.• Clients may prefer a family member or bilingual worker.
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reassure the client by explaining the role of an interpreter, including the confidentiality of the service.• Offer to use a telephone interpreter from another region or state.• Explain to the client that family members can be present to provide support if the client wishes. You can also say that some clients feel they can talk more openly if family members are not present.• Explain to the client that family members may not be familiar with some of the terminology that will be used during the session.• An interpreter should be introduced at this point if communication is difficult.

Other tip sheets in this series

Developing a comprehensive language services response

Arranging an interpreter

Working with interpreters