

Booking and briefing an interpreter



This information sheet is one of a series produced by the Centre for Culture Ethnicity & Health (CEH) covering aspects of language services. It aims to enhance language services planning and practice for staff working with people with limited English proficiency.

This information sheet is for staff in funded agencies who are responsible for working with accredited interpreters. It provides basic information related to interpreting.

Victorians with limited English proficiency require some form of language service to overcome a language barrier in complex communication encounters with service providers.

The Victorian Government requires that government departments and funded agencies ensure people with limited English proficiency have the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their lives. For more information go to

www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/projects-and-initiatives/improving-language-services/

Getting the best interpreter starts at the booking stage. Consider your needs and those of your client and outline these in your request. The more information you give to the interpreter agency, the more likely you are to get an appropriate interpreter. The information you provide will assist the interpreter agency to allocate an appropriate interpreter for the assignment. If you are unsure what information is relevant, ask the interpreter agency. Some considerations are listed below.

Booking an interpreter

Correct language/dialect

There are more languages and dialects in the world than there are countries. Country does not necessarily equate to language. For example, 'Chinese' is actually an umbrella word for many languages and dialects. Specify if it is Mandarin, Cantonese or another language you require.

Sex of interpreter

You can request a female or male interpreter

in circumstances where it is considered critical for effective communication, such as requesting a female interpreter for a gynaecological examination. In some languages, you may not have the option of choosing an interpreter from either sex.

Tip: When there is no interpreter of a certain sex available at a time requested, consider changing the appointment time.

Ethnicity and affiliation of the interpreter

A client who has suffered torture or trauma from a particular group of people may not accept an interpreter who is a representative of, or affiliated with, that group. This is a particular concern for people who are refugees or asylum seekers. Note that an interpreter agency may consider such a request as breaching the Racial Discrimination Act and may not comply.

Name of the client

It is not mandatory to provide a client's name when booking an interpreter. A client's name can be withheld for good reason, such as concerns about

confidentiality. However, supplying this information gives the interpreter the opportunity to decline an assignment if the client and interpreter are related or know each other socially. Where the information is not provided, this may cause delays if the interpreter has to decline the assignment after being introduced to the client at the start of the interpreting session.

Topic and type of appointment

Is the matter sensitive or controversial? Will the communication deal with issues such as torture, trauma, imminent death, organ donation, divorce, domestic violence or sexual acts? When booking an interpreter in relation to a potentially sensitive matter, you should provide unambiguous information about the topic and nature of the appointment. For example, using euphemisms such as 'pregnancy counselling' when the matter to be discussed is aborting a foetus may be misleading. An informed interpreter will have prior opportunity to prepare for the assignment or decline it.

Setting, styles and ways of engaging with interpreters

The setting and topic influences the most appropriate style of interpreting and the ways of engaging an interpreter (face-to-face, telephone or videoconferencing). For example, a large group setting will require an interpreter whose voice can carry and is confident engaging with many people.

Tip: The CEH information sheet, *Interpreters: an introduction*, outlines the styles and ways of engaging with interpreters.

General administration

When booking an interpreter, the following information is needed:

- Date and time of the appointment
- Anticipated length of the appointment. As a rule of thumb, allow for twice the time needed for a non-interpreted discussion. Remember to allow time for briefing the interpreter.

If a specific interpreter is required for any reason, such as continuity of care, ensure the interpreter's name is included in the booking.

To book an on-site interpreter, the following additional information is needed:

- Your name and telephone number in case the interpreter is running late or cannot find you
- Address where the interpreter will meet you, which may be different to the billing address. Include information if the building has multiple entries or floors. If the location is the client's home, you should instruct the interpreter to meet you outside. This will avoid compromising the role of the interpreter and allow you to conduct your briefing.

Briefing an interpreter

The purpose of the briefing is for you and your interpreter to have a shared understanding of the process of the interpreted communication, your respective roles and the goal of the discussion with your client. Interpreters work with people from a range of occupations. It should not be assumed that the interpreter is familiar with the terminology and practices of your occupation. Brief the interpreter about:

- Who you are and what you do
- General background information to the session and any specific terms to be used
- How you will conduct the discussion
- Any safety concerns and safety protocols to be used during the discussion, such as a code word.

This is an opportunity for you to ask the interpreter questions, such as:

- Do you know the client socially?
- What experience do you have of the topic and sector?
- What is your NAATI accreditation?
- What is the most appropriate style of interpreting and seating arrangements?

Offer the interpreter permission to stop and ask for clarification if anything is unclear during the discussion with the client. This encourages more accurate communication.

Tip: More information on the style of interpreting and seating arrangements can be found in the CEH information sheet *Interpreters: an introduction*.



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