

# Translation: an introduction



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 developing translations. It provides basic information related to translation.

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/](http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/projects-and-initiatives/improving-language-services/)

## What is translation?

Translation means converting written information from one language into another. Conversion is not restricted to written text. For example, text can be converted to a CD, DVD or sound file.

**Tip:** Learning about your target audience will help you to identify the most suitable format into which the resource should be translated. For a target audience with limited literacy in their community language, information translated into written text is unsuitable.

## Who does translation?

A translator is a professional qualified to convert written information accurately and objectively into another language. In Australia the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) is responsible for maintaining the quality of translators. Victorian Government

policy is to engage NAATI accredited Professional translators (or higher). Where this is not possible, a lower credentialed translator can be engaged.

**Tip:** Find out more about the NAATI credentialing at [www.naati.com.au](http://www.naati.com.au)

**Tip:** Find out more about the translators' code of ethics at [www.ausit.org](http://www.ausit.org)

## Where do I find a translator?

The three most commonly used sources for translators are the Yellow Pages, NAATI and the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) websites.

Agencies that arrange the supply of accredited translators can be found at [www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/resources/community-directory](http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/resources/community-directory) by selecting 'Interpreting and translating organisations' from the 'Organisation type' dropdown menu.

**Tip:** In most cases, government departments and funded agencies will have a contract with a translation agency and do not need to seek out individual translators.

## Whom is a translation aimed at?

Translated information is aimed at communities or individual clients with limited English proficiency.

**Tip:** When considering which languages to select for translation, choose languages where there is a high rate of limited English proficiency, rather than languages that have the largest number of people that speak a particular language. This information is available from [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au). Similar data on Victoria's population is available from [www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/population-and-migration/victorias-diversity](http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/population-and-migration/victorias-diversity). Data on permanent arrivals in the last five years is available from [www.immi.gov.au/settlement/](http://www.immi.gov.au/settlement/)

## What can be translated?

Anything can be translated. The purpose of translating can be to:

- Deliver important information to people who need it
- Reinforce face-to-face communication
- Provide information for referral when needed
- Make information accessible to clients.

Providing a translation does not replace the need to engage with interpreters. Translated information can supplement interpreting services and provide information that a client can refer to at a later time.

## What formats do translations take?

Translated resources can be produced in different formats, such as brochures, posters, newsletters and magazines, and audio and audio-visual formats. The format should be considered jointly with the method of distribution. For example, a translation produced as an audio file could be accessed from the organisation's website or played as a community announcement on an ethnic radio station. A translated brochure could be distributed through a peak ethno-specific organisation or left in the waiting area of services.

**Tip:** Think creatively about the best format and dissemination method for the message to reach the target audience.

## What about machine translation?

Machine translation refers to translation generated by computer software, some of which is available free online. Automated translation does have its place in certain industries such as manufacturing, which produces content with a highly predictable structure and repeated terms and phrases. However, when dealing with human services, machine translation is not suitable as the risk of mistranslation is high, particularly where nuance is required or where variations in dialect and the linguistic preferences of communities needs to be taken into account.

It is government policy that qualified translators be used.

## Does the translated information already exist?

In response to Australia's linguistic diversity, many translated resources are now available. There are over 10,000 multilingual resources in health alone.

**Tip:** Ask within your own and other similar organisations if there is already a translation that is suitable for your needs. For translated health information, search [www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcht.nsf](http://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcht.nsf) and [www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/](http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/)

For translated information on legal, settlement and education topics, as well as common library phrases, search <http://mylanguage.gov.au/translated-information.html>

**Tip:** Be wary of using translated resources developed for communities outside Australia or Victoria as they may contain incorrect information.



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