

# Planning for translation



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/)

## Budget, timeline and process

Undertaking translation is a process and should be considered a project with a budget and timelines. Discuss your needs with the translation agency first and plan your timeline by working backwards from the time it takes for a translation to be completed.

Speak to the translation agency about their process for handling assignments submitted for translation. Plan your own process for how and by whom your translation project will be checked for quality. To ensure that your translation conveys what is intended, it should be checked for meaning by a sample of the target audience and checked for quality and accuracy by another translator with at least the same level of accreditation as the original translator.

Search [www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/services/translation/](http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/services/translation/) for more information on checking methods.

## Writing your text for translation

Regardless of whether your finished translated product is in text or another form, the following tips will assist in preparing your text for translation.

- Clarity.** Use 'plain English': that is, you should aim to make complex language as simple as possible without changing the meaning. If special terminology must be used, it needs to be explained. Avoid figures of speech and metaphors as these do not translate well across different languages. For example, consider the potential problems with the mental health slogan 'Give your brain a breather'. In many cases, the active voice is preferred to the passive voice. For example 'our staff can help you find work' is better than, 'help with finding work is provided by our staff'. Avoid using nouns as adjectives. For example, 'advise about foods' is better than 'food advice'.

- Brevity.** Keep it short. Be clear about your key messages. Avoid long sentences as these are more likely to be mistranslated if they contain more than one message or superfluous information. If a community has not received information on the topic in their preferred language previously, some information is better than too much.
- Appropriateness.** Translating an English language source text directly into multiple languages is not suitable, as each community group has unique needs. Adapt the source text to each community group. Be alert to cultural sensitivities about particular topics. Consult the relevant community about the most appropriate way to address a topic. Ensure that any images or graphics used are culturally appropriate.
- Accuracy.** Ensure your text is accurate and appropriate before submitting to a translator. Any content changes will attract an additional cost.

For more information on ways to improve written communication, see the CEH health literacy information sheet *Written communication*.

## Choosing the languages for translation

Research is needed to identify the target audience and appropriate language(s) for translation. Data about the clients using your service or similar services may provide guidance. Alternatively, consider using demographic data to identify communities in your service catchment that are not accessing your service. Consult your community and other agencies for additional information.

## Writing systems

Be aware that different writing systems may be used within particular languages. For example, the target audience may use simplified or traditional characters for writing in Chinese depending on where people lived prior to emigration. Consult a translator and members from the target community to determine the appropriate writing system.

## Design and layout

The translation may take up more, or less, space than the English text. The translated text may not run in the same direction as English. Text can also be presented side-by-side in a bilingual format – in English and the other language. The use of headings, sub headings and appropriate graphics can assist the reader to understand the messages being conveyed. Consult a translator and brief your graphic designer beforehand.

## Brief the translator

Brief your translator about the work you are submitting to ensure you receive an accurate quote and that your requirements are understood. Information to provide to your translator includes:

- Purpose of the translation
- Audience for the translation, including education and literacy levels, ethnic group, age, gender and any other details to help the translator determine the appropriate style for the translation
- Languages (including dialects) for translation

- Elements of the text that do not need to be translated (such as logos, acronyms and names)
- Format and intended distribution method (such as a radio script for recording to be broadcast on ethnic radio)
- Technical requirements, such as file type;
- Deadline requirements, including turnaround time for any amendments

## Design and production

Your translated resource may not always be in your immediate control. For example, a brochure distributed to agencies may be handed out to clients by clinicians or left in a rack in a waiting room. To assist service providers identify the resource and use it effectively, include in English the following information:

- Title and subtitle
- Who produced the resource and is responsible for the content
- Language name and, if required, writing system – for example: Chinese (Simplified).

Include information for the intended audience about how they can get more information via an interpreter. Include the telephone number of an interpreter service and a brief explanation of how to engage the service. Consider placing the National Interpreter Symbol on translated resources. This symbol and the guidelines for its use can be downloaded from [www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/projects-and-initiatives/improving-language-services/](http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/projects-and-initiatives/improving-language-services/).

All resources should include the date of production.

## Evaluate and maintain translations

Review your translated resources periodically to determine if they are effective, relevant and current. Set up a system to link the translated resource to the original English source text to ensure changes are not missed. Consulting the target audience improves the effectiveness of translated resources, as well as encouraging community participation.



### Information sheets in the CEH language services series

#### INTERPRETATION

1. Interpreters: an introduction
2. Assessing the need for an interpreter
3. Booking and briefing an interpreter
4. Communicating via an interpreter
5. Debriefing with an interpreter

#### TRANSLATION

6. Translation: an introduction
7. Planning for translation

#### BILINGUAL STAFF

8. Recruiting bilingual staff
9. Managing bilingual staff

#### ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSE

10. Developing a comprehensive language services response

© Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health, 2014.

(03) 9418 9929  
enquiries@ceh.org.au  
www.ceh.org.au

