

# THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE

## IMPROVING THE PROVISION OF LANGUAGE SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE LINGUISTIC BACKGROUNDS IN AGED CARE



**C**ommunication is a fundamental human right as mentioned in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 5 of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

However, language barriers can make the delivery of high-quality aged care very challenging and can have a negative impact on the quality of healthcare and consumer safety, and increase feelings of loneliness or isolation.

Australia's older population is culturally and linguistically diverse, with 37 per cent of adults aged over 65 born overseas and English proficiency can decline with the onset of dementia, for adults from a non-English speaking background.

The Australian Government's Aged Care Diversity Framework aims to help aged care providers address barriers faced by older people from diverse backgrounds.

The CALD action plan, which complements the Framework, highlights the need to provide information about services in a range of languages as well as, where possible, the need to employ bilingual and bicultural staff who reflect the cultural and language demographic of consumers at these services.

Aged care providers are encouraged to consider these actions within their own services.

In addition, approved providers of Australian Government can use the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) for free when discussing care needs, fees, care plans and budgets with consumers.

Unfortunately, feedback from the sector suggests challenges related to using language services to support communication for consumers. These include the under-utilisation of TIS, inconsistent use of interpreters, the shortage of interpreters in some languages, using family members as interpreters and a lack of understanding in how to engage with interpreters. Clearly, more work on this needs to be done.

In spite of the challenges, it is important to recognise innovative examples of effective language services programs to support culturally diverse consumers within the aged care and health sectors. For example, the Transcultural and Language Services (TALS) and Narrun Wilip-giin Aboriginal Support Unit at Northern Health have over 40 in-house interpreters covering 15 languages and almost a quarter of all their appointments have an interpreter.

The CSIRO and Western Health have partnered to create a free app called CALD Assist™ which offers a simple and dynamic way for health care workers to communicate with patients from culturally diverse backgrounds when an interpreter is not available. It features phrases commonly used during basic care interactions translated and recorded in 10 common languages (plus English).

Other examples include the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing's communication cards and aged care signage in 57 languages as well as Bolton Clarke's multilingual phone line for callers to enquire about their service in their preferred language.

It is vital that aged care providers are taking steps to ensure they can effectively communicate care options, services and practices to the older people in their care, or seeking their services. While Government-funded resources are available, there is also a lot of scope for individual providers to innovate.

For more information on effective use of language services, aged care providers are invited to download the Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing's Communication Practice Guide at: [www.culturaldiversity.com.au/images/Practice\\_Guides/Communication.pdf](http://www.culturaldiversity.com.au/images/Practice_Guides/Communication.pdf)

**Lisa Tribuzio is Manager, Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing.**

**For more information visit [www.culturaldiversity.com.au](http://www.culturaldiversity.com.au)**