Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing
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Practice Guide

Accessing Interpreter Services in Aged Care

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Purpose

This Practice Guide provides aged care providers with information about accessing and effectively using interpreter services to support older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It incorporates the requirements and principles of the Aged Care Act 2024, which establishes a rights-based approach to aged care and emphasises dignity, inclusion, supported decision-making, and culturally safe care.

It is incumbent on aged care providers to ensure full access to services and support individuals to make informed choices with due regard to the preferred language of the individual. This means ensuring the appropriate use of qualified interpreters (and translated materials).

The engagement of an interpreter service is necessary when an individual's ability to communicate in English is not suited to the conversation or communication that needs to occur. For example, a person may be comfortable to communicate in English regarding a meal choice or social activity. However, they may feel challenged to communicate confidently when navigating the terms and signing of a service agreement or making a complaint about a serious incident.

Key Practice Message

The use of accredited interpreters is more than a communication support strategy. Under the Aged Care Act 2024, use of interpreter services is essential for ensuring older people can understand information, exercise their rights, participate in decision-making, provide informed consent and receive culturally safe, person-centred care.

TIS National

The Commonwealth Department of Health, Disability and Ageing funds TIS National (Translating and Interpreting Service) to provide interpreter services to all government-funded aged care providers. TIS National operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week and provides immediate telephone, prebooked telephone, on-site and video remote interpreting services in addition to ATIS (Automated Telephone Interpreter Service) which is an automated, voice prompted immediate phone interpreting service that organisations can use to access an interpreter in high demand languages, without assistance from a TIS National operator.

When Can You Use TIS National?

The Commonwealth Department of Health, Disability and Ageing funds TIS National (Translating and Interpreting Service) to provide interpreter services to all government-funded aged care providers**.** Using TIS National should be considered by aged care organisations when they are supporting individuals to:

- understand service agreements
- discuss fees and charges
- discuss care needs, services and preferences
- develop, review or explain care plans
- understand individual budgets and monthly statements
- provide informed consent

TIS National services can also be accessed by the older person when they need to communicate with their aged care providers.

Telephone interpreting should generally be used unless there is a genuine need for an on-site interpreter.

Where interpreter services are used for purposes outside approved aged care activities, providers may be required to fund the service through their own resources or the individual's budget.

The Role of TIS National Interpreters

The role of a TIS National interpreter is to:

- facilitate accurate communication
- interpret information faithfully and completely

- remain impartial and objective
- maintain confidentiality
- Maintain the ethical and professional standards of the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) Code of Ethics.

Interpreters do not:

- provide advice
- advocate on behalf of either party
- complete forms
- make decisions for individuals
- provide information unrelated to the conversation.

The use of qualified interpreters supports the communication, individual participation and informed consent expectations of the Aged Care Act 2024 and the Aged Care Quality Standards.

Legislative Requirements under the Aged Care Act 2024

The Aged Care Act 2024 places older people at the centre of aged care and establishes a framework that promotes:

- dignity and respect
- independence and autonomy
- supported decision-making
- informed choice
- inclusion and participation
- culturally safe and trauma-aware care
- equitable access to services.

Providers must ensure that individuals are able to understand information that affects them and participate meaningfully in decisions about their care and services. Access to professional interpreter services is an important mechanism for supporting these obligations.

The use of accredited interpreters helps providers:

- promote informed consent

- support individual choice and control
- remove language barriers
- facilitate supported decision-making
- deliver culturally safe and inclusive care
- uphold individual rights under the Act

Failure to address language barriers may compromise an individual's ability to exercise their rights, participate in decisions and fully engage with aged care services.

Why Access Interpreters?

Aged care providers are responsible for removing communication barriers that may prevent individuals from accessing services, understanding information and making informed decisions.

Professional interpreters should be engaged whenever an individual:

- has limited English proficiency
- is unable to communicate effectively in English for the given situation
- prefers to communicate in another language
- requires assistance to understand important information relating to care or services.

Using professional interpreters supports compliance with the principles of the Aged Care Act 2024 and assists providers to deliver person-centred, culturally safe care.

What if an Individual or their Family Declines an Interpreter?

Individuals sometimes prefer to rely on family members or friends rather than a professional interpreter.

If an individual declines an interpreter:

- explain that the interpreter assists both parties to ensure accurate communication
- discuss the interpreter's duty of confidentiality and impartiality
- explain that the service is free and their entitlement to access it.
- reassure the individual that professional interpreters are bound by strict ethical standards.

- if confidentiality concerns exist, particularly within small communities, consider requesting a telephone interpreter from another state where organisational policies permit.

Where possible, document the discussion and the individual's preference.

Situations Where Interpreters Are Particularly Important

Interpreter services should be used when:

- conducting clinical assessments
- undertaking care needs assessments
- collecting personal information
- explaining admission processes
- discussing service provision
- developing and reviewing care plans
- explaining individual rights and responsibilities
- discussing budgets, fees and charges
- obtaining informed consent
- responding to complaints or concerns.

Accessing TIS National

TIS National Client Code

All government-funded aged care providers can register for a TIS National client code, which is required to activate access to the service. If you are unsure of your TIS National client code, contact TIS National on 1300 655 820 or email tispromo@homeaffairs.gov.au.

To register as a new TIS National client visit the agency registration page on the TIS website and follow these steps:

1. Register a new account
2. Non-government

3. Aged Care Services
4. Select specific services your organisation is funded to provide
5. Complete Organisations details

Once the Organisation registers for a TIS National account, the person who registers will be the Administrator of the account and will receive a 'Welcome Email' with the following details:

TIS National client code	
Name of organisation	
ATIS account number	
ATIS access number	

The Administrator will receive a secondary email with a hyperlink to set up a password. This step must be completed to have online booking access.

How to access TIS National Interpreters

Aged Care providers have three easy ways to access the Interpreting Service (TIS). These options make it easier than ever to connect with interpreter services and support diverse residents and families.

1. **Immediate Interpreter Support via the TIS National Operator 131450** for urgent language assistance
2. **ATIS (Automated Telephone Interpreting Service) 1800 131 450** for fast, self-service interpreter access
3. **Online Bookings** to pre-book telephone (minimum 30 min), on-site (minimum 90 min) or video remote interpreter.

Immediate Interpreter Support via TIS National Operator

TIS National provides operator-assisted access to an immediate telephone interpreter in over 150 languages where you request your language and the operator allocates the interpreter for you. Call 131 450 to connect with the TIS National Operator.

When you dial 131 450, an automated prompt will ask you which language you need. When your call is answered, the TIS National operator will ask you for the following information:

- to confirm the language you have requested
- your ***TIS National client code***

- your agency's name and the section you work in
- your name and phone number
- the non-English speaker's name
- the non-English speaker's phone number (if you require TIS to conference them into the call)
- any required information your agency has requested be recorded by TIS National (for example, an identification number or claim number).

ATIS Automated Telephone Interpreting Service

Automated Telephone Interpreting Service (ATIS) is an immediate service for agency clients who need to access a phone interpreter. ATIS connects you to an interpreter when you need to communicate with your non-English speaking client, without having wait for operator-assistance. ATIS is available in more than 150 languages.

How do I use ATIS?

Refer to the ATIS help card where you will record your Organisation TIS National Client Code, ATIS Account Number and PIN for easy access. If you are unsure of this information, contact TIS National on 1300 655 820 or email tispromo@homeaffairs.gov.au.

To use ATIS, call 1800 131 450.

- When prompted, say the language that you need
- Choose the gender of your interpreter by pressing:
    - 1 to select either gender
    - 2 to select a female interpreter
    - 3 to select a male interpreter
- Enter your ATIS account number (this is different from your TIS National client code) then enter your ATIS access (PIN) number
- Press # and write down the job number provided
- If ATIS is unable to allocate an interpreter for your request, your call will be re-directed to a TIS National Contact Centre operator. When calling ATIS, please have your TIS National client code ready in case your call is redirected.

TIS National Online Accounts

Once the Organisation registers for a TIS National Client Number, the person who registers becomes the account Administrator and will receive a secondary email with a hyperlink to set up a password. This step must be completed to have online booking access.

Setting up a TIS National online account is required for Aged Care Organisations to pre-book telephone, on-site and video remote interpreters and to manage and monitor the bookings. If you are unsure how to set up your online account, contact TIS National on 1300 655 820 or email tispromo@homeaffairs.gov.au.

Pre-booked phone, video remote and on-site interpreting

TIS Online is a self-service booking tool that allows Organisation's TIS Administrator to request, manage and monitor TIS National interpreter bookings online.

All Organisations with a TIS National account are automatically registered to use TIS Online to manage their on-site interpreter bookings. Have your TIS National Client Code handy and visit the login to TIS Online page to book an interpreter. User guides on how to use TIS Online are available.

Ensure staff are informed about how to book an interpreter and have access to the organisations TIS National client code.

Organisations' TIS Administrator can appoint 'Agents' who can also manage and check bookings and reschedule if required. The Administrator is also able to request data and monitor interpreter use by the organisation.

Telephone Versus On-Site Interpreting

Telephone Interpreting

Telephone interpreting is suitable when:

- communication needs are straightforward
- urgent access is required
- the discussion is relatively brief
- immediate language support is needed.

On-Site Interpreting

Consider booking an on-site interpreter when:

- discussions are sensitive or complex
- informed consent is being sought
- significant information will be exchanged
- a scheduled appointment has been arranged
- the meeting is expected to be lengthy

To book an on-site interpreter, use your TIS National online account or phone 131 450.

Tips for Working with Interpreters

To maximise communication effectiveness:

Before the Session

- introduce yourself
- brief the interpreter on key discussion topics
- explain the purpose of the meeting

During the Session

- speak directly to the individual
- use first-person language
- keep sentences short
- pause regularly for interpretation
- avoid jargon and acronyms
- allow interpreters to clarify information when necessary
- maintain control and structure of the conversation

Telephone Interpreting – additional considerations

- explain whether you are using a speakerphone, dual handset or single handset system
- clearly identify all participants

Long Sessions

- allow interpreters a short break approximately every 30 minutes if required

Closing the Session

- clearly indicate when the discussion has concluded
- confirm understanding and next steps

On-Site Interpreting

Arrange seating in a triangular formation, with the individual opposite the worker and the interpreter seated slightly to the side.

Use of the National Interpreter Symbol 

The National Interpreter Symbol is a nationally recognised symbol indicating that language assistance is available. National Interpreter Symbol and posters can be accessed from the Multicultural and Multifaith Victoria website. Refer to Interpreter symbol use guidelines.

The Interpreter Symbol is a national public information symbol developed by Victoria in partnership with the Commonwealth, state and territory governments according to Australian Standard 2342. The symbol shows where someone can ask for language assistance. It provides a simple way to help people with low English proficiency access government services.

Aged care providers are encouraged to display the symbol in a variety of settings including client contact areas where language services are available. By displaying the symbol providers indicate to people with limited English that they are committed to providing accessible and equitable services, and that they can arrange an interpreter if needed.

Aged care providers are encouraged to display the symbol in:

- reception areas
- assessment rooms
- information desks
- waiting areas
- printed and digital communication materials.

Displaying the symbol demonstrates a commitment to accessibility, inclusion and equitable access to services for people with limited English proficiency. It also supports the principles of culturally safe and inclusive care promoted under the Aged Care Act 2024.

Aged Care providers can also provide language assistance in a number of other ways, including:

- Google translate or other applications for low-risk information
- the Centre's communication cards and bilingual phrase cards for day-to-day words and phrases
- translated information
- assistance from a bilingual staff member (who has received appropriate training)
- multilingual web information
- family and friends for low risk, lower sensitivity information.
  Remember that family and friends will generally not "interpret" for the person. Families will often speak for the person as a supporter or advocate. This is appropriate in many circumstances. However, it is different to having the person

speak for themselves via an interpreter. When the person speaks for themselves then they are assuming their own agency. An additional gain from speaking with a person through an interpreter is that it enables aged care professionals to gauge whether the individual is comprehending what is being communicated. This is because interpreters will interpret everything that is being said. They will even interpret a side comment or question that you might raise with someone else in the room including the family members or a co-worker.

In addition, the Centre has translated *Please arrange an interpreter* cards in multiple languages that can be printed and provided to individuals whose preferred language is not English. The cards can be accessed and downloaded from the Centre's website.

Policy and Procedure Considerations

Providers should develop and maintain documented policies and procedures addressing:

- identification of interpreter needs
- individual preferences
- booking and accessing interpreter services
- use of telephone and on-site interpreters
- informed consent requirements
- documentation requirements
- staff roles and responsibilities
- privacy and confidentiality
- culturally safe communication practices.

Policies should align with:

- the Aged Care Act 2024
- the Aged Care Quality Standards
- organisational obligations relating to diversity, inclusion and equity

Useful resources:

- TIS National: 131 450
- Department of Health, Disability and Ageing - Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) for aged care service providers and older people in aged care
- Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission - Free Aged Care Translation Service Brochure
- Department of Health, Disability and Ageing - Aged Care Translation Service
- Aged Care Act 2024
- Inclusive and Culturally Safe Governance Guide
- The Centre's multilingual resources, including communication cards and bilingual phrase cards
- '*Please arrange an interpreter'* translated cards

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