

## Western Australian Language Services Policy 2020

### When to engage an interpreter

The decision whether or not to engage an interpreter is based on an assessment of the needs of the client and the level of risk to the client of not doing so.

Bilingual/multilingual staff (who speak English and one or more languages other than English) can be useful in front-line services to provide simple information or gather sufficient information to deal with immediate situations. However, unless they have tertiary qualifications and/or a NAATI credential as an interpreter they should not be requested to interpret.

When in doubt, it is wise to err on the side of caution and to engage an interpreter. It is important to engage a tertiary qualified and/or NAATI credentialed practitioner who meets current industry standards and adheres to the **Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT)** or **Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association (ASLIA)**.

In any situation, do not ask people under the age of 18 to act as interpreters.

### How to assess the need for an interpreter

If a client requests an interpreter or shows a **Government of Western Australia**, **Aboriginal Interpreting WA** or **Department of Home Affairs** ***I need an interpreter card***, they should be provided with one.

An ***I need an interpreter card*** aims to help clients request an interpreter and makes it easier for agency staff to arrange for an interpreter in the appropriate language.

Hard copies of the Western Australian version of the card are available from the **Office of Multicultural Interests**.



Department of **Local Government,  
Sport and Cultural Industries**  
Office of **Multicultural Interests**

### Western Australian “I need an Interpreter Card” Information for Communities



If you find it hard to communicate in English, this card will let government agencies know you need an interpreter.

#### How do I use the card?

Write the name of the language you speak or use on the front of the card in English. If you speak or use more than one language, write the other languages on the card in the order of strongest to weakest. Ask the person who gave you the card to help you with this if necessary.

If you need help from an interpreter when using a government service, show your card to a staff member. They will try to arrange for an interpreter (either in person or by telephone) who speaks your language.

If an interpreter who speaks your first language is not available, the staff member will try to find an interpreter who speaks your second or third language.

#### Who can get an Interpreter Card?

Anyone who needs help to communicate in English when using government services can get a card.

#### How much does the card cost?

The card is free. If you lose your card, you can get a new one for free.

#### Where can I get a card?

Cards are available from migrant resource centres, multicultural community service providers, some public hospitals, schools with Intensive English Centres, some local government authorities, the WA Deaf Society and the Kimberley Interpreting Service.

Information for Communities: English

www.omi.wa.gov.au



Australian Government  
Department of Home Affairs



### I need an interpreter

I speak: \_\_\_\_\_



The bearer of this card requires the assistance of an interpreter.



### I need an Aboriginal Language Interpreter

My first language is: \_\_\_\_\_

I also speak: \_\_\_\_\_

Ring Aboriginal Interpreting WA 1800 330 331

If a client presents an *I need an interpreter* card:

- check the language/s on the front of the card
- inform the client that you will arrange for an interpreter
- arrange for an interpreter in accordance with agency policies or guidelines.

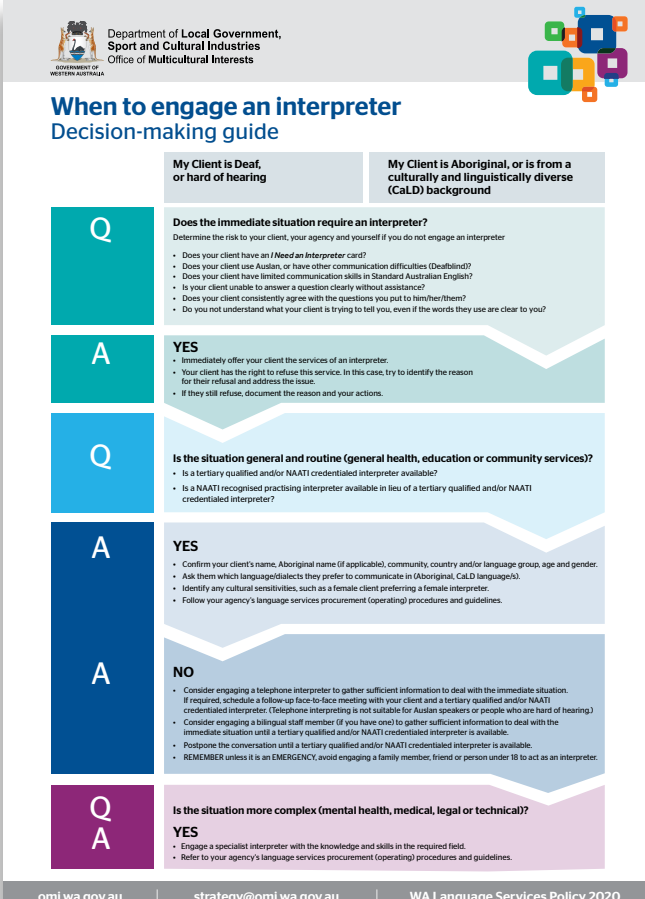
If a client does not have an *I need an interpreter* card, here are some ways to determine if they need an interpreter:

- ask a question that requires your client to answer in a sentence, for example 'How may I help you?'
- ask 'In which language would you prefer to speak?'
- explain information to the client and ask them to repeat what you have said.

Before booking an interpreter, consider the needs of the client and the level of risk to the client of not doing so.

Be aware of the risks of gratuitous concurrence, which occurs when a person appears to agree with every proposition put to them when, in fact, they do not. The person may nod their head, or use sounds like 'aha', 'hmm' or 'uh-huh', or say 'yes'. These gestures do not necessarily mean he or she agrees with or understands what is said. If there is any doubt about a person's ability to communicate or understand Standard Australian English, an interpreter should be engaged.

To assist Western Australian public sector agencies in the decision-making process, consult the ***When to engage an interpreter: Decision-making guide***. This guide can be downloaded from the Office of Multicultural Interests' website at [www.omi.wa.gov.au](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au). For clients refusing the services of an interpreter, refer to information in the next section.



The flowchart is titled 'When to engage an interpreter Decision-making guide' and is published by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, Office of Multicultural Interests. It provides a structured approach to deciding when to engage an interpreter based on the client's needs and the situation.

**My Client is Deaf, or hard of hearing**

**Q** Does the immediate situation require an interpreter?  
Determine the risk to your client, your agency and yourself if you do not engage an interpreter.

- Does your client have an *I need an interpreter* card?
- Does your client use Auslan, or have other communication difficulties (Deafblind)?
- Does your client have limited communication skills in Standard Australian English?
- Is your client unable to answer a question clearly without assistance?
- Does your client consistently agree with the questions you put to him/her/them?
- Do you not understand what your client is trying to tell you, even if the words they use are clear to you?

**A** YES

- Immediately offer your client the services of an interpreter.
- Your client has the right to refuse this service. In this case, try to identify the reason for their refusal and address the issue.
- If they still refuse, document the reason and your actions.

**Q** Is the situation general and routine (general health, education or community services)?

- Is a tertiary qualified and/or NAATI credentialed interpreter available?
- Is a NAATI recognised practising interpreter available in lieu of a tertiary qualified and/or NAATI credentialed interpreter?

**A** YES

- Confirm your client's name, Aboriginal name (if applicable), community, country and/or language group, age and gender.
- Ask them which language/dialects they prefer to communicate in (Aboriginal, CaLD language/s).
- Identify any cultural sensitivities, such as a female client preferring a female interpreter.
- Follow your agency's language services procurement (operating) procedures and guidelines.

**A** NO

- Consider engaging a telephone interpreter to gather sufficient information to deal with the immediate situation. If required, schedule a follow-up face-to-face meeting with your client and a tertiary qualified and/or NAATI credentialed interpreter. (Telephone interpreting is not suitable for Auslan speakers or people who are hard of hearing.)
- Consider engaging a bilingual staff member (if you have one) to gather sufficient information to deal with the immediate situation until a tertiary qualified and/or NAATI credentialed interpreter is available.
- Postpone the conversation until a tertiary qualified and/or NAATI credentialed interpreter is available.
- REMEMBER unless it is an EMERGENCY, avoid engaging a family member, friend or person under 18 to act as an interpreter.

**Q** Is the situation more complex (mental health, medical, legal or technical)?

**A** YES

- Engage a specialist interpreter with the knowledge and skills in the required field.
- Refer to your agency's language services procurement (operating) procedures and guidelines.

omi.wa.gov.au | strategy@omi.wa.gov.au | WA Language Services Policy 2020

It is rare for a client not to be able to tell you the language they speak. However, if they are not able to do so, you can:

- ask for a document that will show where they were born or lived before coming to Australia and look up the countries to find the language/s spoken
- use visual aids such as **posters** to identify a language.

Simply identifying the country, or place of origin may not accurately determine a client's language. Several languages may be spoken in the same country. However, it could provide a starting point from which the language services provider should be able to assist in identifying the appropriate language.

## Refusal of an interpreter

A client may refuse the services of an interpreter before or during a session. This could be because they:

- are confident in their own ability to communicate in Standard English
- prefer a family member or friend to act as an interpreter
- do not understand the reasons why the interpreter has been engaged
- do not realise that the agency staff member who speaks Standard English needs the services of an interpreter to provide an effective and appropriate service
- think they must pay for interpreting services
- know the interpreter personally and feel uncomfortable talking in their presence
- are worried about gossip in their community
- feel uncomfortable with the gender of the interpreter
- have experienced unprofessional behaviour by an interpreter.

A client cannot be compelled to work with an interpreter. If possible, try to identify the reason for their refusal and address the issue.

If the client still refuses an interpreter:

- explain that you/the Standard English speaker needs to be able to understand the client well and that there are risks (such as misunderstanding) if you do not
- offer them access to telephone interpreting instead
- decide whether or not to proceed with the client interaction.

If the session proceeds without an interpreter, it is essential you document the reason for refusal and any associated concerns.

## Further reading

- **Western Australian Language Services Policy 2020 and Guidelines**
- **How to work with an interpreter (PDF)**
- Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT)—**Best Practices and Guidelines**
- What not to do, common mistakes—**YouTube example**
- Australian Government, Department of Communications and the Arts **Accesshub**—includes access to the National Relay Service (NRS)

### *I need an interpreter card*

- Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) national **promotional materials catalogue**
- OMI website information cards for communities: <https://www.omi.wa.gov.au/languages/translating-and-interpreting>
- Example Western Australian Government agency promotional poster: <https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/-/media/Files/Corporate/general%20documents/Multicultural/PDF/MultilingualPoster.ashx>
- The Australian Government through the Department of Social Services (DSS) offers a **Free Interpreting Service** for eligible groups. Delivered by **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) National**, it aims to provide equitable access to key services that are non-government funded for people with limited or no English proficiency.
- Aboriginal Language Services—information kit
- Blurred Borders—‘**Ask for an Interpreter**’ poster

