



Interpreting services: Your rights and responsibilities

The Department for Communities and Social Inclusion's commitment

The Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI) recognises that a significant number of people do not speak English to a level that allows effective communication with departmental staff.

You need to be able to understand and communicate with the staff member, and they need to be able to understand and communicate with you. An interpreter helps both of you.

All DCSI services are committed to providing interpreting services when required, at no cost to the client.

DCSI staff are required to provide interpreters that are accredited or recognised by the National Authority for Accreditation of Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), wherever possible.

The [Interpreting and Translating Policy](#) reflects DCSI's commitment to providing fair and equitable services that are of high quality and respond to the needs of the community.

DCSI implements this policy by ensuring that staff act on the obligation to provide effective, efficient and inclusive services through appropriate use of interpreters for people who are not proficient in English. Interpreting services might be provided face-to-face, by telephone or by video conferencing.

Your rights as a client

When you request an interpreter or are offered interpreting services, you have the right to ask for:

- a particular interpreter that you trust
- an interpreter from outside your local community, e.g. from an interstate interpreting service (for telephone and video interpreting only)
- a male or female interpreter
- an interpreter from a particular ethnicity
- interpreting to be provided in person, by telephone or by video.

While these cannot be guaranteed, your preferences will be accommodated wherever possible.

During interpreting, you have the right to:

- Ask the interpreter to repeat what was said if you did not hear well or have not understood what they are saying
- Stop the conversation at any time if you feel uneasy or uncomfortable.

Your responsibilities as a client

You should:

- give relevant and necessary information to the service provider to enable them to provide you the required services

- arrive on time when an appointment is booked
- show patience and respect when communicating through an interpreter by not talking for a long time or about many issues at the same time. The interpreter needs to remember what you are saying so that they will not forget any part of what you said
- complain to the service provider if you are unhappy with the interpreter or have concerns about their conduct, so that something can be done to stop this from happening again
- lodge a complaint through the Australian Institute of Interpreters & Translators (AUSIT), which is an organisation that has processes in place for investigating such complaints. You can call 1800 284 181 (free call) or email admin@ausit.org.

You should not:

- give a gift to the interpreter as they are bound by their professional Code of Ethics not to receive gifts
- ask the interpreter for a favour such as to transport you, even if both of you are going in the same direction.

The interpreter's role and responsibilities

The interpreter must:

- know your language
- speak English very well
- interpret exactly what the service provider says to you and what you say to the service provider without adding or omitting anything.

The interpreter must not:

- release any information about you to anyone in the community
- talk about your matter/ business with anyone else without your permission
- give their advice or opinion about the issue being discussed
- talk with you separately from the service provider (e.g. the doctor, counsellor or police officer).

Your family member or friend should not interpret for you

You may bring a family member, friend or carer to any appointment to provide comfort or support.

However, you may notice that the service provider does not want you family member, friend or carer to interpret for you. In the past there have been times where a family member or friend has interpreted for a client but:

- has accidentally miscommunicated an important message because they do not have the skills to interpret complex language or specialised terminology
- has not acted impartially
- has filtered information to 'protect' their relative or friend
- has shared the client's personal information or private matters with other people.

The service provider has a responsibility to use a professional interpreting service, which will provide an interpreter who has interpreting qualifications and who must act impartially and confidentially.