



# Using Interpreters and Family Safety

In the 2016 census, **820,000 people reported that they did not speak English well or at all.** In addition, almost three in ten Australians, or about five million people, reported they speak a language other than English at home. While many of these people will also speak English, in emergency or crisis situations people often revert to their first language.

It is essential that people with limited English who have experienced family, domestic or sexual violence are provided with access to accredited, professional interpreters.

## Frontline service providers' use of interpreting services

People working in frontline family, domestic violence or sexual assault services play a pivotal role in ensuring that people who don't speak English, or speak English as a second language, are treated respectfully and that their interests are accurately represented. Family, friends or close community members should not be used as interpreters, even where clients may ask them to.

The use of unqualified or inappropriate interpreters can have serious implications for all parties concerned, particularly where there are legal or health matters involved.

Engaging professionally trained and accredited interpreters is crucial to ensuring that victims of domestic violence receive appropriate assistance, support and access to justice.

## How to access interpreters

**In an emergency situation call TIS National on 131 450.**

TIS National has access to over 3000 interpreters across 160 languages and dialects.

**TIS National services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**

In Australia there are a number of interpreting service providers, run by both government and private companies. A Google search will show many results, however the Department of Social Services recommends using professional interpreters who are accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) wherever possible. It is particularly critical that NAATI accredited interpreters are used for sensitive and complex matters, such as domestic violence or sexual assault situations. You can check an interpreter's NAATI accreditation online on the **NAATI website** at **[www.naati.com.au](http://www.naati.com.au)**.

When making a booking, it is possible to indicate if an interpreter of a specific gender is required.

## Tips for working with interpreters

Some simple tips to work effectively with interpreters include:

- brief the interpreter on what to expect beforehand so they can be adequately prepared;
- speak in short sentences and pause often;
- use simple language and avoid jargon;
- allow the interpreter to seek clarification or ask for repetition when needed;
- always speak directly to the client;
- manage the flow of the interview; and
- don't put the interpreter in an ethically difficult situation.

An interpreter should never provide advice, counselling or offer opinions to an individual or service provider.

## The role of interpreters

Professional interpreters are bound by the ethical and professional standards of the **Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT)** Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct. More information is available on the **AUSIT website** at [www.ausit.org](http://www.ausit.org).

### A professional interpreter should:

- facilitate communication between two or more people speaking different languages;
- maintain integrity, impartiality and confidentiality of assignments; and
- clearly communicate everything that is said without distortion or omission.

### A professional interpreter should never:

- advocate, provide guidance or advice, or act as a subject matter expert;
- offer their personal opinions;
- provide information or advice on cultural matters, unless they impinge on their ability to interpret faithfully;
- complete forms for you or your client; and
- change the content and meaning of the source message.

Interpreting accurately does not mean interpreting word-for-word, because sometimes there might not be an appropriate word or term in the target language. The interpreter's role is to assess the meaning of the statement/question and provide that information in the appropriate language.

## What to do if the interpreter is not performing their role

If you are accessing an interpreter over the phone, the first thing you can do is end the job, call back the interpreting service provider, and request a different interpreter.

If you think that the interpreter is not acting professionally, for example by not remaining impartial, or acting as an advocate for the client, there are several options for you to provide feedback:

- raise the matter with the interpreter;
- raise the matter with the interpreting service provider;
- raise the matter with the AUSIT Board of Professional Conduct (if the interpreter is an AUSIT member and you feel they have acted outside of the AUSIT Code of Ethics or Code of Conduct). More information is available on the **AUSIT website** at [www.ausit.org](http://www.ausit.org); or
- make a complaint to NAATI (if the interpreter holds a NAATI accreditation). More information is available on the **NAATI website** at [www.naati.com.au](http://www.naati.com.au).

## Who pays for interpreting services?

If you are running a government funded program, provisions for interpreting and translating services may be incorporated into your funding contract. If you're not sure, contact your funding body to clarify the arrangement. If you are a non-government organisation providing casework or emergency services that are not substantially government funded, you may be eligible to access the Free Interpreting Service. More information is available on the **Department of Home Affairs** website at <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/settle-in-australia/language-services/free-interpreting-service>.

**The cost of using an interpreter should never be passed on to the non-English speaker.**

## Family Safety Pack

The Australian Government has developed a Family Safety Pack with information on Australia's laws regarding domestic and family violence, sexual assault and forced marriage. The **Family Safety Pack** is available online in a range of community languages at [www.dss.gov.au/family-safety-pack](http://www.dss.gov.au/family-safety-pack).

## Do you need support?

For free, confidential counselling and information, you can contact **1800RESPECT**, Australia's National Sexual Assault, Family and Domestic Violence Counselling Service. **1800RESPECT** provides both telephone and online counselling to people affected by family violence, including professionals that are working in this area.

Call **1800 737 732** or go to the **1800RESPECT** website at **[www.1800RESPECT.org.au](http://www.1800RESPECT.org.au)**.

Information about the **Translating and Interpreting Service** (TIS National) provided by the Department of Home Affairs for people who do not speak English and for agencies and businesses that need to communicate with their non-English speaking clients is on the TIS National website at **[www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)**.