

A Fact Sheet

For Older People, their Families and Friends

Communicating with older people from non-English speaking backgrounds

Lack of English should not stop people from understanding what is involved in their health care - or from making decisions about their health care. However, older people with limited English may have difficulty understanding and communicating when they use the Australian health system. This is why family and friends are often very involved in helping older people use health services. Sometimes families help the older person and the Health Professionals to communicate with each other.

But there are times when families and friends are not the best people to help older people communicate with health professionals - for example during conversations about diagnosis and treatment. This is the role of specially trained Healthcare Interpreters.

This is because

- family/friends may not be able to correctly explain medical information to the older person as they may not understand medical words themselves
- the Health Professional needs to be sure that the correct information is given to the older person.
- an older person may also feel uncomfortable about sharing personal or medical information with a younger relative or a relative of a different gender.

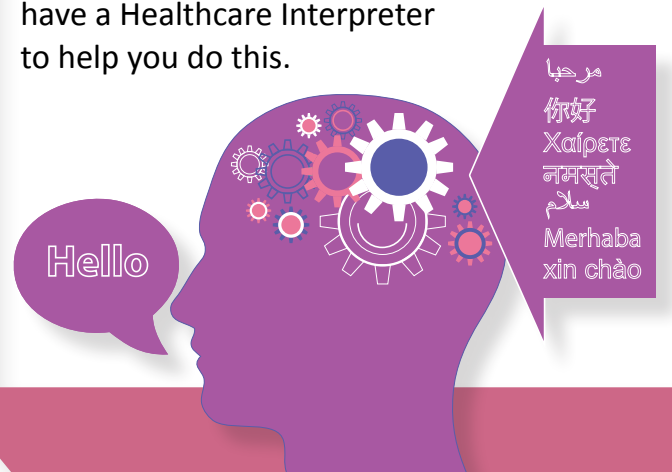
This fact sheet explains the different roles of family/friends and of interpreters in helping older people use the health system.

The role of interpreters

There are two main free interpreting services used in NSW health services.

- Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) often known as the 'Phone Interpreting Service'. This is a national service to help people who do not speak English to access services and information. It is mainly used over the phone (131 450).
- Health Care Interpreter Services (HCIS) are available in all public health services (such as hospitals and community health centres). This service is booked by the Health Professional or the health service providing the care.

Interpreters in these services are professionals trained to work in health care and to understand medical terms. They also have a professional Code of Ethics, which ensures confidentiality and impartiality. This means that any information you provide to them is confidential. If you don't speak English fluently and need to give informed consent to having medical treatment in NSW you must have a Healthcare Interpreter to help you do this.





The role of family / friends

The role of family/friends is different to the role of an interpreter. Family/friends can give emotional support to an older person. They can also give additional important information about a person's medical and personal history to Health Professionals. Family/friends can participate in discussions about health care and help with communication in situations such as making or confirming appointments; helping an older person communicate with hospital staff about menu choices or letting staff know if the person needs to use the toilet or help with discomfort or pain.

Why health professionals need interpreters

Health professionals must engage a Healthcare Interpreter to

- help the Health Professional clearly understand what the patient wants to tell them about their condition.
- Give clear information to a patient about their condition and the options for treatment.

It is very important that the patient understands the risks and benefits of treatments or surgery so that they can make informed decisions about their care and give informed consent.

"I choose to communicate in Turkish with the doctors because my language is Turkish, I prefer to have interpreters because then I am not a burden to anyone."

"There are things that I do not want my family to know. Therefore it is better to use the professional interpreting service."



This project is a partnership between South Western and Western Sydney LHDs. The contributing services included South Western Sydney LHD Health Promotion Service, Health Language Services and Braeside Hospital. The Western Sydney services included Multicultural Health, Translation Service, Social Work and Clinical Governance.