

Debriefing with an interpreter



This information sheet is one of a series produced by the Centre for Culture Ethnicity & Health (CEH) covering aspects of language services. It aims to enhance language services planning and practice for staff working with people with limited English proficiency.

This information sheet is for staff in funded agencies who are responsible for working with accredited interpreters. It provides basic information related to interpreting.

Victorians with limited English proficiency require some form of language service to overcome a language barrier in complex communication encounters with service providers.

The Victorian Government requires that government departments and funded agencies ensure people with limited English proficiency have the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their lives. For more information go to www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/projects-and-initiatives/improving-language-services/

Debriefing and comments

The debriefing is an opportunity for you to give the interpreter feedback on the interpreted discussion and to ask for feedback from the interpreter on your performance and management of the discussion. This is a mutual learning process and contributes to a higher quality of service delivery.

Debriefing can clarify issues. For example, your concern that an interpreter 'took over' a discussion needs to be seen in light of an interpreter's perception that you lost control of the discussion. A complaint by a client that an interpreter used inappropriate language (such as overly technical terms) may reflect on your choice of words that were actually interpreted accurately.

Always offer to debrief the interpreter if the discussion involved emotional or contentious content. However, do not seek the interpreter's opinion on the client, the client's behaviour or the information communicated by the client.

Ask the interpreter whether there are any comments they would like to make. After discussion with your interpreter, you may make suggestions to improve the interpreting process. For example, you may suggest that the interpreter meets you at a different location or earlier time to avoid an awkward situation when the interpreter and client are waiting together for you.

Compliments

Interpreters are expected to comply with the AUSIT Code of Ethics. Familiarise yourself with this code to determine if there has been a breach. Common causes for complaint are when interpreters:

- Are late for an appointment
- Leave earlier than the appointed time
- Constantly check their mobile device during an interpreted discussion
- Conduct unexplained side conversations with the client
- Summarise the client's responses.

Issues such as the interpreter failing to attend or having an inappropriate accreditation level must be discussed with the interpreter agency.

Taking the matter further

Interpreter agencies operate in a competitive market and agencies want to maintain the quality of services offered by their interpreters. They like to hear about the good work an interpreter has performed as well as any concerns.

If you are dissatisfied with the conduct of your interpreter or the explanation offered during the debriefing, you have two options.

1. If the interpreter was sent by an agency, raise the issue with agency.
2. If the interpreter was independently contracted, you may wish to explore your concern with someone who is more expert in working with interpreters, such as your language services co-ordinator or an independent external body such as AUSIT.

If the interpreter's conduct is found to breach the AUSIT Code of Ethics, depending on the severity and whether the act is a repeat offence, you may request not to have this interpreter booked for your client(s) or even request that they are barred from interpreting in your organisation.



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