

Interpreters in Victoria's Health Services

"INTERPRETERS ARE PROFESSIONAL AND THEY HELP ME TO UNDERSTAND THINGS MORE CLEARLY THAN MY FAMILY MEMBERS DO. MY CHILDREN DON'T SPEAK VIETNAMESE VERY WELL."

Health consumer

Background

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV), health services and multicultural advocates are concerned with the low levels of awareness among culturally diverse communities about the role and engagement of accredited interpreters. To better understand the issues, ECCV in partnership with a number of member organisations, undertook extensive community consultations with culturally and linguistically diverse health consumers.

The consultations culminated in ECCV's discussion paper [Our stories, our voices: culturally diverse consumer perspectives on the role of accredited interpreters in Victoria's health services](#). This position paper summarises the key findings and recommendations, and the way forward.

Key findings

- Culturally diverse health consumers find it hard to communicate with health professionals in English.
- Many consumers are still unaware of the role and importance of using accredited interpreters.
- Despite increasing efforts to improve health literacy, many service users still prefer and use a family member to interpret for them. They continue to be unaware of the associated risks of miscommunication and adverse health outcomes.
- A substantial number of migrants and refugees don't know there are interpreting services available and that they are free for culturally diverse consumers.
- Many consumers are still unaware about their right to access an accredited interpreter and that interpreters are bound by a Code of Ethics.
- Worryingly, not all health services, particularly hospitals and private general practitioners, offer interpreters to all consumers who need one. Some providers also still lack the knowledge of how to book and use interpreters.
- Recent ECCV consultations also highlight the importance of interpreters having sufficient medical knowledge and being appropriately qualified for working in health settings, including through accreditation by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators & Interpreters (NAATI).

Key ECCV Policy Positions and Recommendations

Based on the consultation findings mentioned above, ECCV believes that a number of gaps and barriers to equitable health care for culturally diverse consumers remain unaddressed. Further improvements to the availability, accessibility and quality of interpreting services are required to achieve culturally responsive, person-centred and consumer-directed health care services.

1. ECCV recognises that culturally diverse consumers and their families and carers and service providers have to become more knowledgeable about how to access and engage interpreting services and to understand their importance in reaching better health outcomes.
2. ECCV recommends that a consumer awareness-raising pilot project should be jointly developed by a multicultural peak, a health service and a language service provider to promote the role and engagement of interpreters.
3. ECCV believes that all Victorian health service providers should follow existing and explicit government policies and service provider procedures which ensure their culturally diverse consumers and their families and carers are aware of, know how to access and understand the importance of health interpreting services.
4. ECCV recommends that all Victorian public health service providers need to ensure that culturally diverse Victorians who access their health services know their rights to access accredited interpreters, clear communication, safety, respect, privacy and confidentiality and the right to give feedback and have their concerns addressed.
5. ECCV recognises the importance of all Victorian public healthcare providers collecting, analysing and reporting on their language services data to measure and identify gaps in interpreter services to health consumers to assist in managing current and expected demand.
6. ECCV proposes that the Victorian Government delivers financial incentives to language services to provide interpreters with professional pathways in medical interpreting and further education and training options to regularly upgrade their medical knowledge.
7. ECCV advocates that the Victorian Government provides adequate funding to increase the supply and quality of accredited interpreters to meet growing demand (via the methods identified by previous reports by the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture¹).

The Way Forward

The ability to access health services and information is vital for culturally diverse consumers to live a high quality of life. Importantly, the use of and engagement with language services, including professional interpreting in Victoria's health system makes a real difference to the health outcomes of our multicultural communities.

Ensuring the *availability* and *accessibility* of interpreting services will be paramount to achieve culturally responsive, consumer-centred and user-friendly health services. The Victorian Government needs to ensure that its ongoing review of language services considers the current and expected supply and demand of qualified interpreters in the public healthcare system, particularly in providing an adequate supply of interpreters to new and emerging communities.

ECCV will continue to advocate for improved language services to ensure a sustainable, high quality language services industry that meets the needs of Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

¹ For example, see; Foundation House, 2013, *Promoting the engagement of interpreters in Victorian health services*.