



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration  
and Border Protection**



# Bridge the communication gap



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Thousands of non-English speaking Australians face a communication gap every day. Across Australia, the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) helps bridge that gap.

TIS National has more than 40 years' experience in the interpreting industry and access to more than 2,900 contracted interpreters speaking more than 160 languages and dialects across Australia. Whenever English speakers and non-English speakers need to communicate, TIS National can provide an interpreter to help 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

## Who needs interpreters?

Australia is a dynamic and culturally diverse society, whose population speaks hundreds of different languages and dialects. In Australian society interpreters are not only required by non-English speakers, but also by the English speakers who need to communicate with them. In short, interpreters provide the language link that bridges the communication gap between English and non-English speakers.

There are a variety of reasons why non-English speakers need interpreters. Initially, the Australian Government introduced a phone interpreting service (now known as TIS National) to provide interpreting assistance to meet migrant information and welfare needs.

TIS National continues to deliver this service and is available to any person or organisation in Australia who needs an interpreter. TIS National provides interpreting assistance to enable non-English speakers to access government agencies and services, police and legal services, education, healthcare and community groups, as well as services offered by private businesses.

English speakers are increasingly seeking to engage interpreters to communicate with non-English speakers. Services provided by TIS National are to individuals and agencies who recognise the importance of reaching out to non-English speakers to further business opportunities, satisfy community needs and provide accessible and equitable government and other services.



## How can I access an interpreter?

Interpreting assistance is as close as the phone. TIS National can connect you with an interpreter in more than 160 languages and dialects over the phone at any time, every day of the year by calling 131 450. TIS National's immediate phone interpreting service can be accessed directly by both English speakers and non-English speakers.

Phone interpreting services can also be booked in advance, which ensures an interpreter will be available in the language you need and to cater for any special requirements.

TIS National can also arrange for an interpreter to attend a specific location anywhere in Australia (subject to interpreter availability), known as on-site interpreting.

Find out more about accessing TIS National's interpreting services on our website ([www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)).

## What is the role of the interpreter?

The role of the interpreter is to facilitate and ensure accurate communication between people of different languages, while taking into account any cultural sensitivities. Interpreters are bound by a professional code which requires them to:

- interpret accurately and honestly without adding or omitting anything being said
- maintain absolute confidentiality
- be impartial and objective
- act in a professional manner at all times.

## Can I just use someone who speaks the same language?

On many occasions, relatives or acquaintances have been called upon to interpret because they speak the same language. However, they may be unfamiliar with the dialect being spoken, the specialist terminology used or cultural nuances involved. Furthermore, they are not bound by a professional code that requires them to be impartial and to maintain confidentiality.

Interpreting is a specialist skill that is not possessed just because a person speaks the language. It requires a high level of fluency in both languages and the ability to be able to quickly, accurately and appropriately convey the whole message from one language to another.

The use of an appropriately qualified and accredited interpreter is essential whenever there is a communication need because of a language difference. A situation may arise where you may even be held legally liable if injury, loss or damage is suffered because you failed to use a professional interpreter where it was deemed reasonably necessary.

## What qualification should I look for?

Interpreters and translators in Australia are awarded an accreditation level from the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) according to their degree of competence. NAATI accreditation is available at the following four levels:

- Paraprofessional Interpreter (formerly known as level 2)
- Professional Interpreter (formerly known as level 3)
- Conference Interpreter (formerly known as level 4)
- Conference Interpreter (Senior) (formerly known as level 5).

NAATI may also provide a recognition credential in languages where accreditation testing is not available as acknowledgement of recent and regular work experience.

TIS National assigns work to interpreters on the basis of their NAATI credential level and

availability in order to ensure you receive the most qualified available interpreter.



# What do I need to consider when booking an interpreter?

## Language

In many countries a range of dialects are spoken. For example, a person born in Cambodia may require interpreting assistance in Khmer, any of the Chinese languages or dialects or French. Ask TIS National for advice if you are unsure about which language is appropriate for your client's needs.

## Political, religious or cultural sensitivities

In some circumstances certain sensitivities may influence the success of an interpreting situation. TIS National can advise you about these to ensure the most appropriate interpreter is provided.

## Specialist knowledge

Identifying whether your client will require interpreting of sensitive or complex information, such as legal or medical, will help TIS National to provide the most appropriate interpreter for your needs. Please discuss your needs when you are submitting your booking.

## Gender

In some circumstances it is advisable to book a female interpreter for a female client and a male interpreter for a male client. This especially applies for medical appointments or situations when sensitive or personal matters may need to be discussed, such as domestic violence or marital problems.

## Phone or on-site interpreting

Consider your requirements when deciding to request either a phone or on-site interpreter.

The quickest and most affordable way to obtain interpreting help is over the phone. Phone interpreting also provides a more anonymous service, which may provide the non-English speaker with fewer concerns about privacy or confidentiality. Using a phone interpreter may be inappropriate in cases where the non-English speaker is under some mental or physical stress or where a lengthy interview is anticipated.



TIS National can provide advice on the most appropriate service channel to meet your requirements.

## How can I make the most of my interpreter?

### Phone interpreting

The following tips can help you to get the best results when using a phone interpreter:

- Speak directly to your client, not to the interpreter.
- Talk a little louder than usual to ensure the interpreter can hear properly.
- Keep sentences short and succinct, with only one idea per sentence.
- Include a pause after each sentence so that participants don't talk over each other or cut each other off.
- If you have the non-English speaker with you, sit and face them and watch their body language.

If you have the non-English speaker with you, we recommend you use a hands-free/speaker phone to avoid having to pass the phone back and forth. This will enable much more efficient and effective communication.

### On-site interpreting

The following tips can help you to get the best results when using an on-site interpreter:

- Briefly explain the purpose of the interview to the interpreter.
- During the interview, speak directly to your client, not to the interpreter.
- Speak clearly, slowly and succinctly. Pause after every few sentences to allow time for the information to be interpreted.
- The ideal seating arrangement is a triangle, with participants at equal distances from each other, so that eye contact can be maintained at all times.
- Avoid private discussions with the interpreter—this may make the other party feel anxious or uncomfortable.
- Clarify any problems that arise with the interpreter. The interpreter may also need to have brief discussions with the non-English speaker to respond to concerns or explanations about your questions or comments.

## How much does interpreting cost?

Charges for interpreting services vary according to the type of service provided. You can view TIS National's interpreting service charges on our website ([www.tisnational.gov.au/charges](http://www.tisnational.gov.au/charges)) or by speaking to one of our Client Liaison Account Managers on 1300 655 820.



## Free services

The Australian Government through TIS National provides free interpreting services for non-English speaking Australian citizens and permanent residents communicating with the following approved groups and individuals:

- private medical practitioners (defined as general practitioners and medical specialists) providing medicare-rebateable services and their reception staff to arrange appointments and provide results of medical tests
- non-profit, non-government, community-based organisations for case work and emergency services where the organisation does not receive funding to provide these services
- Members of Parliament for constituency purposes
- local government authorities who communicate with non-English speaking residents on issues such as rates, garbage collection and urban services
- trade unions who respond to members' enquiries or requests
- pharmacies for the purpose of dispensing Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medications.

More information is available on the TIS National website ([www.tisnational.gov.au/fis](http://www.tisnational.gov.au/fis)).

## EVERY HOUR EVERY DAY

### Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)

131 450

#### General and account enquiries

##### Client Liaison

Phone: 1300 655 820

Email: [tispromo@border.gov.au](mailto:tispromo@border.gov.au)

##### Finance Administration

Phone: 1300 304 604

Email: [tis.finance@border.gov.au](mailto:tis.finance@border.gov.au)

#### Enquiries about existing bookings

##### On-site interpreting

Phone: 1300 655 082

Email: [tis@border.gov.au](mailto:tis@border.gov.au)

##### Pre-booked phone interpreting

Phone: 1300 655 081

Email: [tis.prebook@border.gov.au](mailto:tis.prebook@border.gov.au)

Find us online at [www.tisnational.gov.au](http://www.tisnational.gov.au)