

How to: ASSESSING THE NEED FOR AN INTERPRETER

Advise that interpreters are available on request and are free of charge

Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients may not request one because they believe there is a cost involved • Clients may not be familiar with the procedure for requesting or working with interpreters • Clients may not even be aware that such a service exists
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have translated information in community languages in the foyer which states that interpreters are available • Include information about the code of ethics of professional interpreters regarding confidentiality, accuracy and the procedure for working with interpreters • Advise verbally that interpreters are available and free of charge
Client Issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients may be sensitive about their level of English proficiency • Client may have concerns about confidentiality
Service Provider Issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is ultimately the (medico-legal) responsibility of the practitioner to make sure that communication is clear • Most of the time, it is easy to tell if an interpreter is needed

Ask the client if they need or want an interpreter

Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the most effective way of finding out if one is needed
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just ask 'Would you like an interpreter?' • You could get some information translated into community languages which you could use as a flashcard to ask this question
Client Issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client may feel uncomfortable discussing sensitive issues with a third person
Service Provider Issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the client declines, it is still the service provider's responsibility to assess if an interpreter is needed • Don't rely on the client's friends or relatives to stand in as interpreters, especially where children are being used to interpret

Ask the client simple questions about their personal details

Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the client is having difficulty understanding relatively simple questions, then an interpreter is definitely needed • A non-English speaking background client who has been in an English speaking country less than two years is likely to need an interpreter • Many clients from non-English speaking backgrounds who have been in the country more than two years may still need an interpreter
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the client to spell out their address or say their date of birth – this can indicate both proficiency in spoken English and literacy level
Client Issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The client may have had to answer these questions a number of times already so may be frustrated • The client may not know their exact date of birth
Service Provider Issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A telephone interpreter could be introduced at this point if communication is difficult

How to: ASSESSING THE NEED FOR AN INTERPRETER *continued ...*

Ask the client what main language they speak at home

Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This will indicate which language the client is most comfortable using
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check if a dialect is spoken or if the client is of a particular ethnicity
Client Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Client may say English is the main language spoken at home, even though other languages are spoken
Service Provider Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This information is important for data collection in the agency about demographics of clients and to satisfy funding and service requirements

Ask a more detailed question, which requires more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer or ask the client to repeat something you have said in their own words

Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This will let you hear their fluency and the kinds of words that they use• The 'Do you understand?' question is likely to yield a 'yes' response regardless of the level of understanding• Even more advanced conversational English can mean the client will have trouble understanding terminology• Comprehension and spoken language ability are often at different levels
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask 'How do you feel about that?' or 'Tell me what you think?'• Listen for the client's use of verb tenses – low level of proficiency with tense could influence treatment or clinical assessment considerably (eg "I have medicine" versus "I had medicine")• Avoid a familiar question like 'Where do you live?'
Client Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In stressful situations proficiency is likely to decrease• As clients age, their English skills may diminish
Service Provider Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you can't understand what point the client is trying to convey, then an interpreter is needed• If you think that an interpreter is needed, it is important to explain to the client that it is just as important for your understanding as for their own

Decide which type of interpreter is going to be most suitable

Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Both telephone and on-site interpreting services are available• On-site interpreting may be limited in rural and regional areas• The gender of the interpreter may be of the utmost importance in some sensitive situations
How	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check with the client if they have any issues with working with interpreters• Use interstate telephone interpreters where confidentiality is an issue• Ask the client whether they would like a male or female interpreter
Client Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In small communities, the client may know the interpreter• The ethnicity of the interpreter may also be important to the client, particularly when they come from countries where there has been political or civil unrest
Service Provider Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There may be delays for interpreters