When should I use an interpreter?

The services of an accredited interpreter are appropriate not only when communication is impossible but also whenever any party assesses that the client may be disadvantaged without the services of an interpreter. Interpreter’s assistance may also be required to ensure complex tasks such as assessments are carried out correctly. This includes situations where understanding complex information of a medical, technical or legal nature is required, and during stressful or emotional situations when a client’s command of English decreases temporarily. Effective communication can prevent costly mistakes, complaints and reduce risk of litigation from clients unable to access services.

Professional interpreters are highly skilled in English and a language(s) other than English. They adhere to the AUSIT Code of Ethics, which requires them to act professionally and impartially, and maintain confidentiality, privacy and accuracy.

The following three Decision Trees will be a valuable tool to assist you to determine the most appropriate pathway when ascertaining:

- When to use an Interpreter – Appendix 1, Decision tree 1
- When a client refuses to use an Interpreter – Appendix 2, Decision Tree 2, and
- What to do when an Interpreter is not available – Appendix 3, Decision Tree 3.
Appendix 1 – Decision tree 1: using an interpreter

A client has hesitation or difficulty in understanding and communicating in English

Is it a general matter requiring simple communication?

YES

Contact a CLAS officer or a bilingual worker for telephone or face-to-face communication

NO

The matter is lengthy, complex, technical or legal

If a CLAS officer or bilingual worker is unavailable

Call an accredited interpreter

Use an on-site accredited interpreter

If an on-site accredited interpreter is not available, use an accredited telephone interpreter

If the person is deaf, use an AUSLAN interpreter

Contact an accredited Interpreter for telephone or face-to-face communication

Appendix 2 – Decision tree 2: when a client refuses to use an interpreter

Can the client speak some English?

Yes

Try to explore with the client the reason for their refusal to use an interpreter. Explain to the client the disadvantages of not using a professional interpreter.

NO

Try to explore with the client the reason for their refusal to use an interpreter, using a telephone interpreter or a bilingual staff member. If these options are unacceptable to the client, use a family member or friend of the client to interpret. Do NOT use a child or relative under 18 years of age to interpret. Explain to the client the advantages of using an accredited professional and the disadvantages of not using one.

Can the client’s concerns be addressed?

Yes

Use an interpreter

NO

If appropriate, continue interview without an interpreter. If necessary, use a family member or friend of the client to interpret. Do NOT use a child or relative under 18 years of age to interpret. Record the reason for doing so in the client’s file.

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Appendix 3 – Decision tree 3: when an interpreter is not available

Can the appointment be postponed?

Yes

Postpone the appointment until a time that an interpreter is available

No

If an onsite interpreter was required and is not available, would a telephone interpreter be appropriate? Remember to make sure you tell them it is urgent when you call; an interpreter can usually be located in an emergency.

Yes

Use an interpreter

No

Is an interpreter available who is accredited at a lower level?

Yes

Use an interpreter

No

Is a bilingual worker or CLAS officer available?

Yes

Use the staff member

No

Use a family member or friend of the client to interpret. Do NOT use a child or relative under 18 years of age to interpret. Record the reason for doing so in the client’s file.