

Communicating Through an Interpreter

Interpreters and Translators

- An **interpreter** is a person specially trained to convert oral messages from one language to another.
- A **translator** is a person specially trained to convert written text from one language to another.




Who can serve as an interpreter?

- Bi/multilingual persons over the age of 18, who are legally allowed to work in Canada can be contracted to serve as interpreters.
- Not all interpreters and translators are certified. Be aware that there are some specialized services where a certified interpreter or translator may be required.

Family, friends, and children under 18 years old, other clients/patients or visitors, and untrained volunteers **should NOT** serve as interpreters and translators.


Interpreter Pre-Session

- The pre-session is an opportunity to be clear about the nature of the upcoming encounter and any particular concerns that the provider would like to address prior to meeting with the client.
- Provides a chance to address any technical language that may be used.
- It is also an opportunity to raise any cultural concerns that may be pertinent to the client.

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Working Effectively Through an Interpreter

- Request that the interpreter interpret everything into first person.
- Speak directly to the client, maintaining eye contact with the client - even when the interpreter is talking.
- Speak slowly and at an even pace. Pause between natural segments so the interpreter can interpret.
- Everything that is said in the meeting will be interpreted. This includes everything the client, facilitator, family members and anyone else in the room says.
- Be aware that jargon, humour, and some idioms may have no linguistic or conceptual equivalent in other languages.
- Encourage the interpreter to alert you of potential cultural misunderstandings. Respect an interpreter's judgement that a particular question is culturally inappropriate.
- Understand that everything in the session will be said twice, so remember the session itself will last twice as long.
- Avoid patronizing or infantilizing the client. A lack of English language skills is not a reflection of low cognitive function or lack of education.
- Do not ask the interpreter if the client understands everything. Instead, ask the client to repeat back important information that you want to make sure is understood.

Be patient. Providing services across a language barrier takes time. However, the time spent up front will be paid back by good rapport and clear communication that will avoid wasted time and dangerous misunderstandings.



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