

TIS INTERPRETING GUIDELINES

Home Affairs provides TIS (Translating and Interpreting Service) FREE for pharmacies, local council, real estate agents, banks, allied health professionals, parliamentarians, and medical practitioners.

Step 1:

Is your organisation registered with TIS? If not, register at <https://tisonline.tisnational.gov.au/registeragency> and note your client code.



Step 2:

Call 131 450 and state the language you need. You will be asked to confirm with a yes or no. Hold to connect with an operator.



Step 3:

An operator will ask for your full name, contact details and client code, and the client's name and gender. You may choose to say "confidential". Tell the operator the nature of the call (e.g. if it's for counselling and/or relates to a sensitive matter such as DFV, child protection, or a women's health issue) so they can choose the best interpreter for the job. The operator will also ask how long you need the interpreter for.



Step 4:

When you connect to an interpreter, the operator will give you a job number and then drop out of the call. Keep the job number for your own reference (e.g. billing or complaints).

Ask the interpreter to introduce themselves to your client/customer to check that they understand each other clearly. If not, end the call and start the process again. When booking a new interpreter, quote the previous job number and ask the operator not to allocate that person again.

Repeat this process until you get the right interpreter. Ten minutes can save hours of problems. If an interpreter is not available, assess the urgency of the session and how to proceed.

TIP: Interpreters are paid and booked in 15-minute blocks. It is better to over-, rather than under-estimate how long you'll need than to have to call back and begin the process again.

TIP: If the conversation is not urgent, you could try contacting a local multicultural agency (such as a settlement service) who may be able to connect you to a community interpreter.

Understand the roles of interpreters and translators:

Interpreters work in real time with spoken or sign language, while translators work with written text.

Interpreters are not advocates, nor should they offer personal opinions.

Use an interpreter if:

- the client requests one
- the client has limited English skills
- there's a lot of information to discuss
- you're discussing concepts that are unfamiliar to clients
- important decisions are being made as part of the session
- you need informed consent.

Choose the best available option:

- For professional accuracy, always use NAATI-certified interpreters. NAATI is the gold standard, and all TIS interpreters are NAATI-certified. Community interpreters may not be NAATI-certified, so use your best judgement based on the situation.
- TIS National can provide access to interpreters over the phone, via video conference, or in person.
- Avoid using the client's family or friends as interpreters, even if it seems convenient at the time. Children must not interpret.

Preparing for interpretation sessions:

- You can book a TIS interpreter in advance using TIS online, but be warned: they occasionally cancel at the last minute. Phone interpreters can almost always be secured on the spot (following the steps on page 1). If none are available, try again 5–10 minutes later.
- As a guide, book double the time you'll need to communicate your message in English. This allows enough time for the conversation to be relayed in the other language.

During the session:

- Brief the interpreter at the start of the call or meeting to give context and any key terminology, and tell the interpreter how many people are on the call to avoid confusion.
- Speak to the client, not the interpreter.
- Speak in short, concise blocks and allow time for clarification if needed.
- Use plain English and avoid industry jargon.
- Check regularly for understanding – ask the client to reflect key messages back to you.
- Before ending the session, ask the client if they have any questions.

Ensure cultural sensitivity:

- Some topics (e.g. health and domestic violence) require a same-gender interpreter.
- Some language groups are small, and the client and interpreter may have social or family connections. TIS Interpreters must follow strict professional guidelines, but it's still good to check if the client is ok with using a particular individual, especially when face-to-face.

Handling challenges:

- Your responsibility is to your client/customer – if an interpreter seems biased or unprofessional, end the call.
- You might say something like "Sorry, interpreter, the client is having trouble understanding you," or "It's a bad phone line," and end the call. Then phone TIS again to request a different interpreter.
- Be patient – some concepts may not have a direct translation, so you may have to explain them in a few different ways.