



Lessons learnt from navigators

Working with interpreters

Who is this for and why

This resource may be helpful for PHN staff and/or the care finder line manager as an additional resource to inform their existing expertise and knowledge.

It is based upon experiences and reflections of Aged Care System Navigators and COTA Australia as part of the Australian Government funded Aged Care System Navigator Trial measure (ACSN).

The official operation of the National care finder program, including working with interpreters, is governed by [care finder policy documentation](#).



Links to the Care Finder Competency Framework

The following domains in the *Competency Framework* are linked to this document.

- Communication / Intrapersonal Skills
- Person-Centred
- Knowledge of Ageing

Background

Navigators identified clear and effective communication with customers was an essential skill when responding to their individual communication needs. For example, where customers were not fluent in English or were hearing impaired, navigators used a range of strategies to facilitate effective communication with the customer. This included working with interpreters, translators and often bilingual and bi-cultural workers to provide customers with the information and support they needed for informed decision-making. Communicating with the customer in their own language also enabled the customer to ask questions of the navigator.

Navigators stressed the provision of written materials in the customer's own language alone was generally insufficient in making people aware of the aged care system and services available.

Definitions

Interpreters:	Verbally convey in one language what has been said in another language. This may be done in person or over the phone.
Translators:	Change written materials from one language to another language.
Bilingual Worker:	A person employed to use their language skills in English and another language with a linguistic proficiency in both languages appropriate to the function of their position, and who also understands and shares the values of the community they are employed to work with and their employing agency. ¹
Bicultural Worker:	A person employed to work specifically with people or communities with whom they share similar cultural experiences and understandings, and who is employed to use their cultural skills and knowledge to negotiate and communicate between communities and their employing agency. ²

Lessons learnt: using interpreters

- Navigators relied upon professional interpreters where complex information was being shared, private issues were to be discussed, and decisions were to be made that require reflection and informed consent by the customer. The latter was critical to ensure customers understood what they were providing consent to and in what context.
- Non-professional interpreters such as friends, relatives and neighbours were only used for general information regarding the navigator service. Navigators stressed that nonprofessional interpreters often struggled with concepts and jargon used in the aged care system. Consequently, the customer might not be fully informed or become confused because of poor translation. Bilingual workers with appropriate interpreter training fill an important role in the provision of information and support to people at a community level.
- Navigators stressed having an interpreter in person was the optimal way of working. However, this was not always possible due to lack of interpreters in a particular language or location, so the Telephone Interpreter Service was used. Navigators had access to the Translation Interpreter Service (TIS) at no cost to the navigator or the customer.
- Navigators noted that utilising the 3 ways conversation capacity in mobile phones proved very effective when linking up customer, TIS and navigator, rather than sharing a phone with the customer.

Reflections from navigators

One community I work with has only one interpreter in Australia for this language. We need to book them well ahead. In some cases, they get called away as an urgent medical interpreter so ends up with no one. This can be frustrating.

Planning the session was necessary

- There are limited numbers of qualified interpreters in some languages, and this posed challenges for navigators. In this circumstance, navigators noted it was important to book well in advance to secure an interpreter.
- The interpreter's time is limited so navigators needed to ensure they were clear about what they wanted from the planned session with the customer. Briefing the interpreter beforehand helped sessions run efficiently.

- Navigators noted it was important to allow for adequate time when booking the interpreter. The session may take longer than usual as two people are speaking.
- Navigators noted that Interpreters could be directed to urgent situations and not turn up to a booked session. This could be both frustrating for the navigator and the customer.

Briefing the customer was important

- Navigators reported that when seeking permission to use an interpreter, it was vital to take time to explain to customers why they wanted to use interpreters. Navigators stressed that information shared would remain private. This was particularly important in smaller communities.
- Navigators reported that at times, customers often preferred to use a bilingual worker, rather than interpreter, as they already had a relationship with them. They noted that the customer must be able to choose who they wish to use i.e., interpreter or bilingual worker.
- As part of cultural safety, Navigators said it was critical to respect gender and cultural preferences of customers, i.e., ask if the customer prefers a female or male interpreter.

Navigators also briefed the interpreter

- Navigators took time to brief the interpreter about the session. This included showing interpreters any written information to ensure the interpreter was familiar with the materials before the session and being clear about what they wanted to achieve during the meeting with the customer.
- Navigators noted that much of the language and jargon in aged care was specific to the aged care system. It was useful that the interpreter be made familiar with bureaucratic phrases or words before a session, so they could identify the correct way of interpreting them. Some navigators wrote them down for the interpreter before a session and discussed their meaning. Taking time to educate the interpreter enabled the conversation to flow better and improve the accuracy of the interpreting.

During the session

- It was essential that navigators introduced the interpreters to the customer and explained why they were there and what they would do. If required, navigators said they would remind the customer about the conversation they had had previously about using an interpreter and why they were important.
- Working with an interpreter is a learned skill. With practice it becomes easier to talk to the customer directly and not talk about the customer in the third person when using the interpreter. It was important for the customer to know that the navigator was talking to them, and not the interpreter.
- Navigators identified the importance of using plain English where possible. This included avoiding unnecessary jargon and complex ideas. They noted at times it was difficult to avoid jargon such as ACAT and CHSP. In this case, explain the jargon and why it is important.
- Navigators said it was important to maintain eye contact with the customer while the interpreter was interpreting, as it is a conversation happening between the customer and the navigator. Navigators noted this took practice.
- Navigators stressed it was important to provide feedback on interpreter performance via the TIS website.

Setting up for Auslan – some tips

- Choose a space that is private and quiet so you can hear each other, and discussion remains private.
- Use a room that is well lit to assist in lip reading if a person is hearing impaired.
- Set up the room so participants can see each other. Respect personal space.
- The best seating position is a triangular seating setting with a clear view of each other. This can be done sitting around a table or without a table.

Case study

Mrs K. – using an interpreter to connect with services and community

Mrs K. lives with her eldest son and his family. Mrs K. and the family are non-English speaking and Mrs K. suffers from poor hearing (even with hearing aids) and is unable to use a telephone. The family support and assist her with daily living tasks such as cooking, shopping, paying bills and the cleaning. Mrs K.'s son was concerned that some tasks such as personal hygiene were becoming difficult for Mrs K. to manage on her own and that she had withdrawn from activities outside of the home and family. With her permission, he sought Aged Care support for his mother.

Mrs K.'s son contacted the Aged Care team at the MRC, who assisted with his application to register as her Representative on My Aged Care.

The MRC also supported Mrs K. and her son with an interpreter to assist the family to apply for an online assessment on My Aged Care, which also required a follow up phone call. The MRC supported the family over the phone. However, as Mrs K. was unable to understand and/or hear the TIS Interpreter, a further referral from a GP was recommended by the My Aged Care operator.

With consent, the MRC followed up with Mrs K.'s GP to explain the purpose of the referral. During the appointment with Mrs K., the GP initiated a broader discussion between the family and Mrs K. around her support network as well as discussing good physical and mental health as she ages. The GP completed the referral.

Mrs K. has reconnected with the MRC and her community's Elders Social Group. While Mrs K. doesn't wish to attend now, she is aware that there is an older community group that meets regularly as well as one on one support with a bicultural worker that speaks her language.

The support from the MRC was informed by an understanding of Mrs K.'s cultural and language needs, which was a great relief to Mrs K. and her family. Mrs K.'s son was able to support his mother as well as advocate for her through her aged care journey.

Mrs K.'s son is now aware of available supports for his mother and his family that will complement their cultural expectation of caring for elderly family members.

Useful resources

Auslan interpreters

Deaf Connect has resources and information about using Auslan interpreters.

<https://deafconnect.org.au/services/interpreting>

TIS does not supply Auslan Interpreters.

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)

The Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) website has information and resources about how to utilise and book interpreters. TIS is used by the Australian Government and is available to Navigators for free to work with customers. <https://www.tisnational.gov.au/>

Translating and Interpreting Service for aged care service providers.

This web page on the Australian Government Department of Health. It describes the translating and interpreting services for Aged Care Service provider, including Navigators.

[https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/translating-and-in interpreting-service-for-aged-care-service-providers](https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/translating-and-in- interpreting-service-for-aged-care-service-providers)

Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing

The Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing (CCDA) has developed an extensive list of resources on its website. It can also assist aged care services to develop tailored resources. Services should contact CCDA [by email](#) to request support.

The CCDA's [Service Providers Practice Guides](#) are designed for managers and staff to inform direct service provision. They provide guidance on how aged care services can consider and address the customers cultural and linguistic needs.

How to work with interpreters and translators A guide to effectively using language services

This resource from the Department of Health and Human Services of Victoria provides a comprehensive overview of working with interpreters and translators.

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/how-work-interpreting-and-translating-services>.

Endnotes

- ¹ Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) Australia's Bilingual and Bicultural Workforce (2017). At <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Australias-bilingual-and-bicultural-workforce-Report-2017.pdf>.
- ² Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) Australia's Bilingual and Bicultural Workforce (2017). At <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Australias-bilingual-and-bicultural-workforce-Report-2017.pdf>.