

# How to Work with Interpreters

## Community and Health Care Settings

*A Checklist for Good Practice*



### WHY INTERPRETERS?

Interpreters are an **indispensable part of a multilingual society**. Properly trained and screened interpreter enable service providers to deliver programs and services to clients that represent a diversity of languages and cultures. And they allow clients to be heard, in their own voice, without omission or alteration. But working with interpreters requires some skill and knowledge.

An interpreter is a professional who **orally conveys meaning** between two or more people who do not speak the same language. Being bilingual alone does not make someone an interpreter. This distinction is crucial, as **untrained interpreters can pose risks to personal privacy, professional confidentiality, and legal liability**.

While many people refer to interpreting as translation, and interpreters as translators, the correct terms are, in fact, interpreting and interpreter. And yes, interpreters do 'translate', but they do it in spoken or visual (e.g., ASL) form. Translators, on the other hand, translate written content – either digitally or in print.

### GOOD TO KNOW

- ☞ **Interpreters work across many sectors:** conference, court, diplomatic, business, and community/public services. Community-based interpreting includes working in settings such as social services, law enforcement, educational, health and medical services.
- ☞ Interpreters are freelance professionals that work for a variety of clients and agencies.
- ☞ Before the appointment starts, **ask the interpreter what length of time they have been booked for**, and if they have any other appointments to follow this one.
- ☞ It is understandable that **the addition of an interpreter will increase the length of any appointment**. However, a trained interpreter can compensate through adept application of their skills and will seamlessly work alongside you. But do allow for extra time.

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### BEFORE YOU START

- ☞ Take a moment to **welcome the interpreter** and provide any contextual information without breaking any protocols or confidential guidelines.
- ☞ **Introduce yourself, the client, the aims of the session** – (e.g., this may be as brief as “I am Sam, the social worker for this case, this is Ms. Khan and we are discussing Ms. Khan’s application for daycare subsidy).
- ☞ **IMPORTANT: Properly trained interpreters follow a standard introduction protocol.** This includes a brief overview of their role in the session and the interpreting methods they may use (e.g., consecutive interpreting, note-taking, etc.). Allow the interpreter to introduce themselves to both you and the client and explain their role. This helps set the client at ease.

### DURING THE SESSION

- ☞ **The interpreter will be speaking in 1st person.** Ensure that this is indeed happening. Should the interpreter need to clarify anything, they will address themselves in 3rd person with a statement such as “the interpreter would like...”
- ☞ Should it apply, structure the seating arrangement so that you and the client have primary contact, be it eye contact or physical positioning. **Avoid a setting where the interpreter physically blocks your communication.**
- ☞ If you are in a remote setting, phone or video, **take the lead in addressing any technical issues** that cause lag time, or any overlap when people are speaking.
- ☞ **Interpreters NEVER engage in any side conversations**, be it with you or with the client. **TRANSPARENCY** is a foundational underpinning of the 3 cornerstones of interpreting: accuracy, impartiality and confidentiality
- ☞ **Speak directly to the client** and avoid addressing or looking at the interpreter when the conversation is directed at the client. Encourage the client to do the same (NEVER say “tell him, her, the clients...etc.).
- ☞ Remember to **retain control of the session**. Should anything seem odd, check in with the interpreter.
- ☞ Use a **well-paced speaking style**, and remember that the interpreter is working with memory, so allow them to interpret every 2-3 sentences (this varies depending on the skill of the interpreter). This is called “consecutive interpreting” and is most often used in community-based interpreting.

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- ☞ **Interpreters may take notes.** These are short and aid the interpreter in ensuring that important and often detailed information is not lost. These notes are NOT for distribution and the interpreter will destroy them at the end of the session. DO NOT ASK for these notes.
- ☞ Should there be any paperwork required of the client, (admission forms, consent forms, etc.), recognize that there is a limit to how much form-filling an interpreter is made responsible for. Additionally, **stay present to answer any questions** that the client may have, as it is not the interpreter's responsibility to do so.
- ☞ **Thank the interpreter** and ask if they need any forms signed themselves to validate their time.
- ☞ If you are pleased with the interpreter's work, let them know. Better yet, let the LSP know by making comments on the form or letting the office know next time you call.

### **Trained interpreters adhere to a strict set of Ethical Principles and Standards of Practice.**

The International Standards Organization (ISO) has a technical committee dedicated to standards in this industry: **ISO TC 387/SC 5 Translation, interpreting and related technologies** has published over 18 standards specific to this field. To find out more, contact us at [admin@interpreterslab.org](mailto:admin@interpreterslab.org)

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### **The Interpreter's Lab: Centre for Interpreter Training and Education.**

**At The Interpreter's Lab we believe that access to language services via trained professional interpreters is an essential component of a socially just ecosystem.**

Ensuring access to essential services for all community members is a critical ingredient of an equitable society. Supporting professionals and public services to meaningfully include and engage with all members – is a true act of social justice and leads to cohesive communities. We are committed to helping people confidently navigate complex and often challenging situations with the skill and compassionate assistance of a trained professional interpreter.



Find out more: [www.interpreterslab.org](http://www.interpreterslab.org)