

Interpretation Principles for Equitable and Accessible Services

There are over 120,000 residents of Waterloo Region whose first language is not English or French. Over 9,000 of these individuals do not yet understand either of Canada's official languagesⁱ. Language interpretationⁱⁱ is critical to enable some immigrants and refugees to receive services equal to all other clients. Appropriate interpretation enables organizations to increase the quality of service delivery and decrease risks for both organizations and newcomer clients.

This principle statement is for organizations to follow in providing appropriate and consistent interpretation to a diverse local population. The principles are based on best practices and provide flexible and adaptable guidance for organizations to better serve clients.

1. Recognize your responsibility to understand and communicate well

It is the responsibility of the organization providing a service to ensure that appropriate interpretation is provided to ensure that the client understands what is being shared, discussed or agreed to.

Although there is no specific legislation in Ontario or Canada indicating clients have a right to a trained interpreter, service providers have a duty of care to ensure clear communication in a language that is understood by the client. Clients' full understanding is required to be able to provide informed consent for services. Furthermore, some sectors and publicly funded agencies are required to provide universally accessible services. It is also important that organizations fully understand what the client is communicating.

There are many benefits of using trained interpreters, including: Reducing unnecessary medical testing or incorrect treatment, ensuring informed consent for services, enhancing client understanding and service usage, ensuring validity of contractual agreements and decreasing service providers' exposure to risk and liability. If service providers do not provide appropriate interpretation the risks and costs to clients that do not speak English, the service provider and the broader community are increased.



2. Provide appropriate interpretation

Trained interpreters should be used on medical, legal and other situations that require informed consent, confidentiality, specialized terminology or impartiality. Informal interpreters may be appropriate for other less critical conversations such as orientation to bus services, shopping, etc.

Trained interpreters provide interpretation services either over the phone or in person. They have completed extensive training as part of a community college certificate program in interpretation skills, specialized terminology and professional conduct, and have been independently tested in their interpretation skills. The college curriculum includes training for medical, legal and immigration assignments. Trained interpreters take

ongoing training and professional development sessions every year. They also have gone through a screening process and police vulnerable sector check, are covered by Errors and Omission insurance and have signed confidentiality agreements. Trained interpreters adhere to a strict code of conduct and industry approved Standards of Practice.

Informal interpreters are individuals who are not trained in interpretation and may not have specific training in the topic area. They may include: friends/family members, community volunteers or staff of an agency who can speak the client's first language. Informal interpretation can also include technology-based interpretation/translation such as Google Translate. Accuracy of the message is not guaranteed with informal interpretation using untrained interpreters or machine translation.

Informal interpretation can be helpful with less critical assignments such as orientation to bus services, shopping, building neighbourhood friendships, etc. Volunteers may have training in a specialized field but their ability to transfer that knowledge between English and another language has not been tested. Currently, machine translation (i.e. Google Translate) is not generally appropriate for critical interpretation tasks but may be useful for informal conversations.

It is important to ask clients if they would like interpretation. In some situations, a client may bring someone with them to provide informal interpretation. It is the service providers' responsibility to offer a trained interpreter for situations where this is most appropriate. It remains the client's choice, however, to decline this service if they wish.

It is not appropriate to use a child to provide interpretation for any critical interpretation tasks and also often not appropriate to have family members provide interpretation for critical conversations.

3. Develop strong interpretation policies and budget

All organizations should develop and follow an interpretation policy that has universally understood and followed procedures; provide regular interpretation policy training for staff; allocate sufficient, ongoing funds for interpretation; and promote language options and interpretation policy/procedures to the public.

Contact the Immigration Partnership for examples of interpretation policies.

To access in-person interpretation contact:

Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre, 519-745-2593, interpreters@kwmc-on.com

To access over-the-phone interpretation contact:

RIO Network 1-888-278-8007, languages@accessalliance.ca,
www.accessalliance.ca/programs-services/language-services/r-i-o-network-remote-interpretation-ontario
Language Line 1-800-752-6096, www.language.com

ⁱ Population figures are from the 2016 Census by Statistics Canada.

ⁱⁱ Interpretation is an act of verbal communication which involves delivering, as faithfully as possible, a message from one person to another, from one language into another. Translation, on the other hand, is written instead of verbal.

For more information:

Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership
519-575-4757x3171
ImmigrationPartnership@regionofwaterloo.ca
www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca

