



PHN Talking Points

Free Interpreting Service and the Doctors Priority Line

Guidance for PHN staff

The following talking points may be useful in conversations with Medical Practitioners, practice managers and other practice support staff about the Free Interpreting Service and the associated Doctors Priority Line.

The same messages are repeated in the printed and digital resources provided.

Please contact DSS Language Policy section at language.policy@dss.gov.au if you have any questions or comments.

Talking points

General

- The Department of Social Services (DSS) has expanded and simplified patient eligibility requirements for the Free Interpreting Service.
- General Practitioners and approved Medical Specialists can use the Doctors Priority Line when providing services that are:
 - Medicare-rebateable
 - delivered in private practice
 - provided to non-English speakers who have a Medicare card.
- Nursing and practice support staff working with medical practitioners registered with TIS National can also access the service using the same client code.
- The Doctors Priority Line is a free phone interpreting service for private practice
- It is available 24 hours 7 days a week
- Free call 1300 131 450

Why use an interpreter?

- The role of an interpreter is to facilitate accurate communication with people who have low English language proficiency.
- Using professional interpreters to communicate with patients who do not speak English well or at all is likely to:
 - increase the accuracy of communications,
 - reduce confusion and
 - save time.
- TIS National interpreters are bound by a professional code of ethics which requires them to:
 - interpret information accurately and honestly
 - maintain confidentiality
 - be impartial and objective
 - act in a professional manner at all times.
- TIS National's policy is to use the highest credentialed interpreter available. Requests for specific interpreters are not encouraged for this reason.
- Using interpreters is important for practitioners as well as patients. It helps to protect practitioners from professional risk and is particularly important when:
 - seeking informed consent
 - in a crisis
 - dealing with complexity
 - assessing patient competence.

Why use the Doctors Priority Line?

- Accessing the Free Interpreting Service is quick, easy and convenient, especially when using the Doctors Priority Line 1300 131 450.
- The Doctors Priority Line is an immediate telephone interpreting service which provides priority access to TIS National interpreters.
- Your call will be prioritised over other callers in the queue and a phone interpreter will usually be provided within a few minutes.
- The Doctors Priority Line is completely free of charge for medical practitioners and practice support staff who work in private practice.
- When using the Doctors Priority Line you will have access to more than 2500 interpreters speaking more than 160 languages.
- You will be connected to an interpreter in a major community language within just a few minutes.
- It is also possible to pre-book a free phone interpreter on the TIS National website at www.tisnational.gov.au/bookingform.
- It is especially useful to pre-book sessions for less common languages.

How to use the Doctors Priority Line

- To access an immediate phone interpreter:
 1. Call the Doctors Priority Line on 1300 131 450
 2. Provide the operator with the language of the interpreter that you need
 3. Provide your client code* and the name of your agency to the operator
 4. Ask your patient if they wish to request an interpreter of a particular gender (subject to availability)
- It is recommended that practice support staff call and set up the interpreting session a few minutes prior to the patient's appointment.
- It is ok for practice support staff to place an interpreter on hold for a few minutes and transfer the call to the doctor when they are ready to see the patient.
- If you place an interpreter on hold make sure that the interpreter is aware that this is happening and how long they can expect to wait.
- To register for a client code, complete the online client registration form on the TIS National website available at: www.tisnational.gov.au/register or allow a few extra minutes the first time you use the service.

Hints for using an interpreter

- **Consider the type of phone:**
 - use a hands-free phone for regular use
 - use a standard phone only for emergencies or occasional use.
- **Before beginning the consultation:**
 - introduce yourself to the interpreter
 - describe the phone you are using and where you are calling from
 - introduce the interpreter to the patient
 - ask the patient if they understand the interpreter.
- **During the consultation:**
 - sit facing your patient
 - speak clearly so the interpreter can hear you
 - pause often to allow the interpreter to speak
 - talk to your patient, not to the interpreter
 - use non-verbal reassurance
 - take a short break after 30 minutes if the consultation takes a long time
 - clearly indicate when the session has ended.

Free onsite interpreting

- The Free Interpreting Service also offers onsite interpreting between 9:00am and 6:00pm weekdays.
- An on-site interpreter may be most appropriate when:
 - the consultation is particularly complicated, for example, where a doctor needs to give complicated instructions or rely heavily on non-verbal cues
 - you anticipate that the appointment will go for an extended period of time
 - you have several patients who need the same language interpreter and are able to schedule these so that one interpreter can attend for all appointments.
- Onsite interpreters must be booked ahead of time using the TIS Online booking tool. You can pre book up to 90 days in advance.
- More information on using the TIS Online booking tool is available at: <https://www.tisnational.gov.au/Agencies/Help-using-TIS-National-services/TIS-Online-for-agencies>. For further assistance please contact TIS National on 1300 575 847 or at tis.lpl@border.gov.au.
- Any booking cancellations must be made in writing to tis.prebook@border.gov.au at least 24 hours in advance.

Questions or more information

- This pack includes resources for both the practice management staff and doctors to support your use of the Free Interpreting Service and the Doctors Priority Line.
- If you have any questions or require more of these free resources please contact TIS National
 - phone TIS National on 1300 575 847
 - visit the Department of Social Services' website: www.dss.gov.au/free-interpreting.