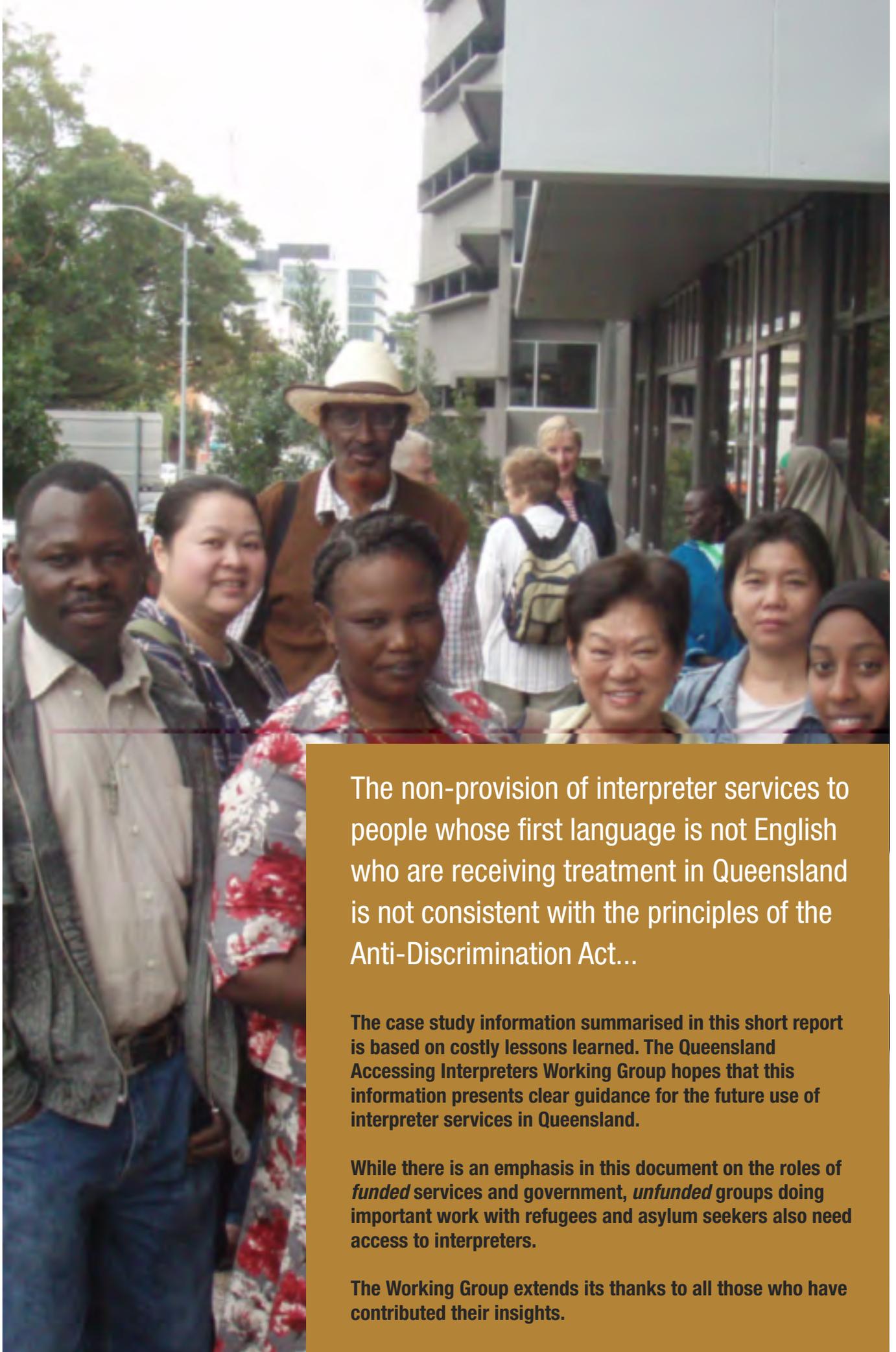


# A Matter of Interpretation

The case for access to high quality accredited interpreting and translating services and cultural competence in Queensland services working with culturally and linguistically diverse people.

**December 2008**

**Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working Group**



The non-provision of interpreter services to people whose first language is not English who are receiving treatment in Queensland is not consistent with the principles of the Anti-Discrimination Act...

The case study information summarised in this short report is based on costly lessons learned. The Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working Group hopes that this information presents clear guidance for the future use of interpreter services in Queensland.

While there is an emphasis in this document on the roles of *funded* services and government, *unfunded* groups doing important work with refugees and asylum seekers also need access to interpreters.

The Working Group extends its thanks to all those who have contributed their insights.



## Our case and recommendations

In this document, the Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working Group has pooled the experience and insights of workers at the community service coal face to highlight the need to ensure equitable access to services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds through provision of fee-free qualified<sup>1</sup> interpreting services for State funded community services in Queensland.

As Queensland's Anti-Discrimination Commissioner stressed in a recent speech on the subject of access to interpreters: *The non-provision of interpreter services to people whose first language is not English who are receiving treatment in Queensland is not consistent with the principles of the Anti-Discrimination Act or its practical effect.*<sup>2</sup>

To investigate the matter further, in 2008 the Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working Group collected case studies about access to qualified interpreters and the cultural responsiveness of Government services and State funded community services.

The case studies reveal significant flaws in the way Queensland's services currently operate. Fortunately, they can be remedied if those in leadership in Government adopt the following Working Group recommendations:

### Recommendation One:

That the Queensland Government adopt a whole-of-government commitment and approach to guarantee the provision and use of fee-free qualified interpreting services to State funded community services in Queensland.

### Recommendation Two:

That until a whole-of-government response is achieved, each department either reimburse interpreter costs or provide recurrent funding for qualified interpreters, to all State funded organisations that provide services to the public.

### Recommendation Three:

That the Queensland Government funds all State Government departments and State funded community services to ensure the sustained development and implementation of cultural competence in their service provision.

### Implementing a system that works

1. Government services and State funded community services providing services to people from CALD backgrounds must ensure all relevant personnel are trained to know when and how to work effectively with qualified interpreters.

Workers in services must understand and respond to people based on an understanding of cultural differences. This cultural competence requires workers to have sensitivity to the diverse cultural beliefs and practices of others. Workers need to develop knowledge and understanding about the client's own culture while also understanding that the individual and his/her situation is always unique. Services also need to be open to clients' concerns about the quality of interpreter services (e.g. speaks correct dialect).

2. To promote effective, state-wide take up of qualified interpreter services, the Government must implement a streamlined system for handling the costs of service delivery, especially important for those operating with very tight cash flow arrangements. It is recommended that the Queensland Government institute a uniform, whole-of-government and well understood system that is low on red tape for funded community services.

<sup>1</sup> The word *qualified* is used here to mean NAATI accredited or recognised interpreters. See glossary also.

<sup>2</sup> Speech notes - 4 December 2007 at Launch of "Language and Culture Matter: Remove the Barriers Now" Presentation by Susan Booth Anti Discrimination Commissioner Queensland <http://www.amparoadvocacy.com.au/Downloads/SB%20SPEECH%20NOTES%20-%20AMPARO%20LAUNCH%204%20DEC.pdf> Viewed 23 October 2008



## Background - the case for interpreter services

**The availability of interpreter services in most Queensland Government funded community services stopped in 2005 when the Australian Government restricted Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS, now TIS National) fee exemptions to apply only to federally funded services.**

Provision of qualified interpreting and translating services is vital to ensure non-discriminatory and effective access to services for people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB).

This document summarises the picture revealed in 72 case studies collated by the Queensland Access to Interpreters Working Group about a wide range of service areas. It cements the case for funding to the State funded community service sector and starkly outlines the need to ensure cultural competence in the provision of services by Government and community agencies.

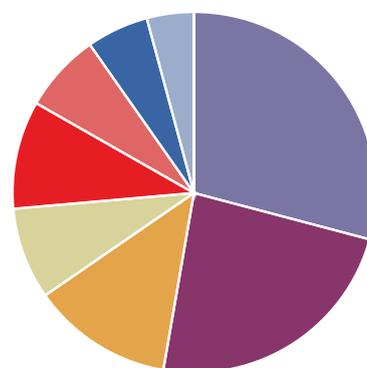
Access to accredited interpreters can have profound positive impacts on economic participation and social inclusion and facilitates early and effective intervention. Culturally competent service delivery is supported by the 2004 Queensland Government Multicultural Policy and Queensland Government Language Services Policy *Multicultural Queensland – Making a World of Difference* with its emphasis on productive diversity.

The policy is a perfect fit for Queensland with significant development opportunities and a growing culturally diverse population - the distribution of Australia's overseas-born population in the 30 years from 1971 to 2001 saw an increase in the proportion living in Queensland from 9% to 15% while the proportion living in Victoria fell from 31% to 27%, and in South Australia from 11% to 7%. This tends to match trends in the distribution of the Australian-born population over the same period.<sup>3</sup>

In 2006, almost a quarter (24.8%) of Queensland residents were born outside Australia.<sup>4</sup> Overseas migration forms a significant proportion of our population growth - net overseas migration made the largest contribution to population growth in Queensland in the 12 months to 31 March 2008 (42.5%), followed by natural increase (31.1%). This was a record contribution by net overseas migration to population growth in Queensland (previous record was 37.2% in the 12 months to 30 September 2007).<sup>5</sup>

**Apart from the community-wide benefits for Queensland, assured access to accredited interpreters could mean immediate improvements in daily life for many of the 7.8% of Queenslanders who speak a language other than English at home.<sup>6</sup> In some cases, it will prevent unintended but real suffering for migrants and refugees living here.**

### Case study focus



- Health and wellbeing
- Families, children-safety, care
- Economic participation
- Disability Services
- Access, human rights
- Interpreter systems issues
- Learning
- Housing

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/7d12b0f6763c78caca257061001cc588/999b9257fae07df5ca256e9e00263527%21OpenDocument>. Viewed 21 October 2008

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/ABSNavigation/prenav/ViewData?producttype=QuickStats&subaction=1&areacode=3&action=401&collection=Census&textversion=false&breadcrumb=LP&period=2006&navmapdisplayed=true&#Country%20of%20Birth> Viewed 3 November 2008

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/queensland-by-theme/demography/briefs/aust-demographic-stats/aust-demographic-stats-200803.pdf> Viewed 3 November 2008

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/queensland-by-theme/demography/population-characteristics/bulletins/census-2006/qld-characteristics-sd-comp-c06/qld-characteristics-sd-comp-c06.pdf>. Viewed 21 October 2008.



We need a workable interpreter service delivery system for State funded services and government services.

**The priorities to implement an effective whole-of-government approach to creating a workable system for Queensland are to:**

- ensure training in cultural competence and how to work effectively with interpreters
- have a simple and easy to use system
- widely promote the available system and how to use it.



A State funded community service agency stated they couldn't deal with a particular client any more because of the complexity of her case. Up to that point however, the attempt to use an interpreter had failed because the agency booked someone who didn't speak the client's language.

## Families and children - safety and care

**Almost a quarter of the case studies dealt with families where domestic and family violence and/or child safety matters were central.**

In New South Wales, 70% of the funding provided to community services is used by women's refuges assisting women escaping domestic and family violence which may be quite appropriate given the grave safety risks to women and children which are often entailed. Issues highlighted in the Queensland case studies include:

- Queensland Police Service use of a child to act as interpreter to investigate a domestic violence matter
- Magistrate Court-based worker, Family Court and lawyer unwilling to use interpreters
- Department of Child Safety staff lack of knowledge about when and how to work effectively with interpreters
- State funded community services' refusal to provide domestic violence and counselling services because of the need for interpreters
- State funded community service using an interpreter who didn't speak the client's language – lack of cultural competence
- effective service delivery due to access to accredited interpreters.

**Examples of the case studies include:**

- A woman called the police when she returned from a medical appointment for a domestic violence related injury and found herself locked out of the house by her husband. Police used her daughter to interpret communication between themselves and the woman. She was not sure of her rights in this situation.
- A referral to a regional domestic violence accommodation service was refused because the client needed an interpreter and the service had previously had problems accessing interpreters when they were needed.
- A woman in hospital for the birth of a child raised concerns with the Department of Child Safety about the safety of her other children at home in the care of her husband who had been violent towards her. Child Safety staff responded but did not know how to engage an interpreter. As a result, until a community service advocated for the woman, she could not understand the role of the Department of Child Safety or the nature of the short term voluntary care agreement they wanted her to sign. The woman also became fearful that the children would not be returned to her care.
- The Department of Child Safety used an interpreter in their negotiations with the mother of a child who was in the department's care. Because the interpreter spoke a different dialect to the mother, instructions, comments and opinions were interpreted inaccurately. The problem was only noticed because the mother's case worker happened to know the interpreter's dialect and also knew it was not the client's dialect. The issue was raised with Child Safety but the error was repeated at the following appointment. Apart from creating misunderstandings, the situation also raised the risk that the mother would be found to be non-compliant with the department's requirements of her.
- A south east Queensland settlement service assisted a woman and her children to move into domestic violence refuge accommodation. After three days there, with security grills on the windows, no explanation in her language about how the refuge worked and no understanding of whether she was free to come and go, the woman "*escaped*" back to her violent husband. On her return she was distressed that her call for help had resulted in her '*being imprisoned*'. Use of an interpreter to clarify the situation and extend help would have meant an entirely different outcome.
- A woman was distressed after attending a Family Court hearing about custody of her child as no interpreter was provided. This was despite the woman's friend previously speaking to her lawyer on her behalf requesting an interpreter be present for all meetings with the lawyer and at court but this had not occurred. Subsequently, the woman struggled to understand the legal proceedings in either setting.



An employment service held an information session for a group of Vietnamese prospective clients who brought a friend to interpret for them. As the session progressed it was apparent that the friend conveyed much more than the employment service presented, which may or may not have been accurate.

## Economic participation

**Governments and community members alike recognise the importance of employment for all those capable of workforce participation.**

Or in the words of the Queensland Government's 2004 Multicultural Policy, *successful management of multiculturalism involves capturing the economic advantages of our cultural and linguistic diversity*. Besides the obvious economic benefits, involvement in a workplace can accelerate the settlement process for those new to Queensland.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in Australia in November 2007, there were 647,000 recent migrants<sup>7</sup>. The majority (76%) were born in other than main English speaking countries, and 90% were aged 15-44 years when they arrived. Of the recent migrants who had a job at some time since arriving in Australia, 36% reported having experienced difficulty finding their first job. One of the main reported difficulties was language difficulties (35%).<sup>8</sup> These figures suggest making interpreters available to NESB job seekers is a sound investment.

Over 12% of case studies provided relate to employment issues or issues related to obtaining a drivers licence, often a job requirement. The interpreter-related issues evident in the case studies are:

- willingness to use interpreters but diminished service provision due to lack of budget for interpreters
- inappropriate use of friends or family as interpreters
- poor and discriminatory standards of customer service for people needing interpreters
- a user pays approach to interpreter use for access to services which others receive at no cost, which seems to entail racial discrimination
- use of poor quality interpreter services
- cultural insensitivity/incompetence.

<sup>7</sup> People born overseas, who arrived in Australia after 1997, were aged 15 years and over on arrival, had obtained permanent Australian resident status prior to or after their arrival, were not born in New Zealand, were not New Zealand citizens, did not hold Australian citizenship before arrival and were planning to stay in Australia for more than 12 months. Labour Force and Other Characteristics of Recent Migrants, Australia, Nov 2007: <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/6250.0?OpenDocument>. Viewed 21 October 2008.

<sup>8</sup> IBID.

### Some case study examples:

- A Brisbane employment service took a referral for a newly arrived person from Myanmar (Burma) who was anxious to find work. The employment assessment process was quite unsatisfactory because the employment service had no budget to engage interpreters. A Burmese community leader was asked to become involved and the person eventually got the desired job but while other service clients received post-placement follow up support on the job, this person could not.
- A referral to a disability employment service for a young man with a disability and his mother from a north-eastern African country became a complicated exercise:
  - the pre-booked telephone interpreter for an appointment was not used in favour of "winging it" without an interpreter
  - the appointment was rescheduled on the understanding that an interpreter would be available
  - two days before the rescheduled appointment the service rang to say no funds remained for interpreters in that financial year
  - the support service then resorted to arranging for the Telephone Interpreter Service to be booked and paid for on the employment service's behalf – an unsustainable arrangement.
 The employment service seemed unconcerned about the delays and service difficulties for the client.



A south east Queensland primary school had arranged for an 11 year old to interpret for parents and teachers each Friday afternoon after school. The child was also asked to help with interpreting when the part-time school liaison officer was absent. The liaison officer worked there one day per week.

## Learning

**Case studies concerned with education issues included the failure of some schools to communicate effectively with parents and students from non-English speaking backgrounds.**

Here the issues were:

- failure to use interpreters
- inappropriate use of children or neighbours as interpreters
- failure to use translated information
- obtaining signatures without use of translated information.

**Some case study examples:**

- A regional Queensland school regularly arranges interviews between parents from north eastern Africa, their children attending the school, the principal, deputy principals and senior teaching staff. The school gives several days notice and their goal is to cover end of term reporting, written permission from parents for work experience or other activities as well as disciplinary matters.
- Parents are also called to the school if there are ad hoc disciplinary matters to deal with. The family support agency worker involved with the families reported that interpreters were never used, translated permission forms were never used and most parents had no idea what the meetings involved until afterwards when some information was given by their children. Parents were encouraged to sign forms or make decisions affecting their child's future without understanding what was being communicated.
- In this situation, the parents are forced to play the role of passive spectator when they attend the school. They are forced to rely on the English skills of their child, even when the child is the subject of a disciplinary matter.
- Staff stated that while the school has worked with NESB refugee students for several years they were unaware of any instance of the school's use of an interpreter for any interactions between parent, staff and students.
- A teacher in regional Queensland became concerned with the health of a child from north eastern Africa. The teacher had approached the child's parent without an interpreter but couldn't make herself understood.
- Because of the lack of funding for interpreters, a regional Queensland State funded community service resorted to asking near neighbours to act as interpreters to help with school enrolment for a family from north eastern Africa.



A regional State funded community service with no funds for interpreters tried to help a client deal with a real estate agent through the use of drawing to explain a complex situation. The service felt the process was less than just and the tenant was agitated about the situation.

## Housing

**The private rental housing market in Queensland and particularly in areas close to employment opportunities has become increasingly unaffordable. 17.9% of Queensland renters were experiencing housing stress in 2007-08<sup>9</sup>.**

All the housing-related case studies provided highlighted situations where people had successfully obtained tenancies that were put at risk through lack of access to interpreters.

Issues were:

- lack of access to interpreters in private rental market
- failure to use interpreters
- lack of access to interpreters in State funded services
- lack of cultural competence in government agencies
- lack of culturally appropriate information.

### Case studies include:

- A real estate agent in a regional town asked a State funded community service to provide interpreters to deal with a tenant's rental issues but the service had no funds to pay for interpreters. A family member with limited English did his best to assist but the situation was less than satisfactory.
- A family of eight in a private rental property accidentally dropped an iron and damaged the carpet in the corner of one room. They agreed to allow the owner to inspect the damage and then received a notice to pay over \$2000 to replace a large area of carpet. The eldest daughter tried to negotiate with the real estate agent but was referred to a government tenancy information service who in turn referred her to the Small Claims Tribunal which they explained was a court. Fearful of going to court, the young woman asked for legal advice and was referred to the internet and Yellow Pages. The young woman couldn't use the internet and didn't know what the Yellow pages were but was advised that further referral for legal help was not available.

The family became increasingly anxious as the deadline to pay for the carpet approached and their efforts to get legal advice failed. As refugees they feared they could be sent back to their home country if they broke the law in Australia. In desperation they borrowed the money from someone in their community and agreed to pay back double the amount within six months. The family felt that the government tenancy information service had been unhelpful and seemed very frustrated by the young woman's poor understanding of English. The family took a long time to recover from this financial set back.

<sup>9</sup> National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling: HIA 2007 cited in the Queensland Shelter Housing Policy Platform at <http://www.qshelter.asn.au/files/QS%20Housing%20PolicyPlatform%20June%202007.pdf>. Viewed 21/08/08



## Health and wellbeing

**30% of case studies provided dealt with health services through public hospitals, general practitioners and mental health, dental, optometry and x-ray clinics.**

The health sector, like other service areas in Queensland, has an inconsistent and confusing array of services which may or may not have or use TIS National fee exemption, may or may not comply with the Queensland Government's Language Services policy for its own agencies, and may or may not self-fund culturally competent practice. It is hard for those who need interpreters to know what to expect or what their entitlements and rights are.

The problems community workers encountered were:

- ignorance about how and when to access interpreters
- unwillingness to use interpreters
- refusal to provide a service because of the need for interpreters
- lack of service policy to standardise appropriate use of interpreters
- failure to provide translated written information
- no timely access to interpreters
- reluctance of interpreters to travel long distances to a job in unpaid time.

The consequences of inadequate access to interpreters in health settings can be serious, with an associated risk that more acute and costly health services will be needed later.

### Case studies include:

- A mother from an east African country who had chest pains was brought by ambulance to a south east Queensland hospital emergency department. She discharged herself because an interpreter was not available in time to help her make alternative arrangements for collection of her Year One child from after school care. She had to leave before receiving a clear diagnosis or any treatment.
- An elderly man with minimal English was discharged from a north Queensland hospital after a triple bypass surgery without an interpreter being used to develop a clear discharge plan. Consequently, he did not understand how to use his new medications, what to do about his old medications or how to access home services. Living alone in a first floor unit, the man was distressed about how he would manage care of his wounds, cook, shop or clean.
- A settlement service made an appointment at a Brisbane medical centre for an ill client who required an interpreter and was informed there would be a two week wait due to inadequate availability of interpreters. The settlement worker assisting the client felt that two weeks was an unacceptable wait when someone is ill.
- A pregnant Afghani woman presented at a State funded community service in great distress having just learned that she would be giving birth to a child with a disability. She suffered needlessly however, as it was later clarified by the community service case worker who spoke the same language that the unborn child was fine, although particular factors presented a risk to possible future children. The trauma could have been avoided completely if the general practitioner had used an accredited interpreter.
- Staff at one Brisbane hospital expressed concern to a patient's community service case worker that the patient didn't understand the seriousness of her health problems, but they had not used interpreters. In addition, the patient has missed hospital appointments because the letters advising her of appointments were in English.
- A settlement service booked a Brisbane medical centre appointment for a non-English speaking family and requested an interpreter be provided for the consultation. The family was disappointed and frustrated when the consultation went ahead without an interpreter and the settlement service worker who followed up was then told interpreters were not usually used at the clinic.

A Brisbane hospital ultrasound clinic had an interpreter present when a woman was booked in to find out if she was pregnant. The interpreter had inadequate knowledge of English, guessed what was being said and wrongly conveyed to a very excited patient that she was expecting twins. Later, when the woman learned she was not pregnant at all, she was devastated and took a long time to accept the truth.



A family with limited English proficiency had their child with profound intellectual disability placed in institutional care by Disability Services Queensland. The family was unhappy about the placement as well as the support for their child. During regular phone calls with family members Disability Services Queensland staff did not use interpreters.

## Disability services

- At a different Brisbane medical centre the receptionist advised the settlement service that a particular person would not be accepted there because of the need for an interpreter. The settlement service eventually found an alternative clinic willing to use interpreters but the wait time was longer and transport costs to reach this clinic were high.
- An appointment with a psychiatrist including an interpreter had been made for a person at a Brisbane Community Mental Health service. The receptionist advised that despite the client's expressed need for an interpreter, the psychiatrist had cancelled the interpreter, believing that the client's English was good enough and that it was inappropriate to use an interpreter in that setting.
- A Caboolture antenatal clinic needed access to a Thai-speaking interpreter but none were available in the area or willing to travel there.
- A north Queensland optometrist refused to use an interpreter on the grounds that speaking was not really needed and if it was, his use of sign language and ability to speak loudly was an adequate approach. Not surprisingly, the patient felt confused, upset and patronised.

**Only some community services retained access to Translating and Interpreting Service fee exemptions when the Australian Government restricted eligibility in 2005.**

The Working Group is aware that in mid-2008 Disability Services Queensland announced a one-off tender worth up to \$600,000 for interpreting and translating services to cover State funded community services targeting several population groups including people from non-English speaking backgrounds. The Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working Group welcomes this important step.

Eight percent of the case studies highlighted issues for people with disabilities, particularly:

- failure to provide translated information
- ignorance about when and how to work effectively with interpreters
- failure to use interpreters
- lack of cultural competence.

### Some case study examples:

- The mother of a young woman with a disability received a letter from a government department advising that she would need to respond to the letter within seven days or it would be assumed support services were no longer required. The mother was not fluent in spoken or written English.
- For seven years a person suffering post traumatic stress disorder and severe depression was unaware of the eligibility requirements for the Disability Support Pension. This person had been unsuccessfully trying to access this pension for several years but Centrelink was not willing to provide a translated explanation of why she could not.
- The Office of the Public Trust had been appointed by the Guardianship and Administration Tribunal as financial administrator for an individual from a non-English speaking background with a disability. The Public Trust were required to develop an Annual Client Service Plan with the person outlining how they would manage their finances.

When the Office of the Public Trust was informed that an accredited interpreter would be needed for the planning meeting the Public Trust officer stated that the cost for this would come out of the person's finances. The person was on a Disability Support Pension and being asked to pay \$75 per hour for the assistance of an interpreter, leaving very little money to pay for essential items such as food. As a result of advocacy the Public Trust has responded by acknowledging their responsibility to pay for the costs involved in providing an interpreter for their clients.



## Access to services and respect for human rights

**Other case studies raised problems that occurred within a variety of areas – policing, aged care accommodation, supported accommodation, the Guardianship Administration Tribunal, the Public Trust and family support.**

The issues largely echoed those in the sections areas above:

- failure to use an interpreter
- failure to translate court documents
- inappropriate use of family and friends as interpreters
- inappropriate use of an interpreter where international conflict sensitivities were ignored.

### Some case study examples:

The following case studies highlight the importance of government agencies providing detailed translated and interpreted information.

- A young Afghan man was told by Queensland Transport that in order to drive he must do a learner's permit exam and then make sure someone is present whenever he drives a car. The young man interpreted this quite literally and commenced driving once he handed in his test. He always drove with another person in the car, although quite often it was his four year old brother.

He bought a car on sale at a roadside near his home, unaware that it was unregistered. After a minor accident, the police were called and while the young man believed he was being charged, he could not understand on what grounds. A few days later the young man received an insurance company letter asking him to pay over \$6,000 for repairs to the other car. Later he received letters ordering him to appear in court on charges of unlicensed driving, unsafe driving and driving an unregistered vehicle. Not being able to understand the letters, he ignored them, placing himself at greater legal risk.

- A Croatian client with no English attended a Guardianship Administration Tribunal hearing with a bilingual worker from a State funded service. As no interpreter was present the Bilingual Support Worker tried to assist. At the worker's insistence the tribunal finally agreed to provide an interpreter. The State funded service was concerned about the whole process, in particular the Tribunal's initial reluctance to use an interpreter and to adequately explain the process to the client.



## What we need

### 1. A workable interpreting service delivery system for State funded services

The priorities to implement an effective whole-of-government approach to creating a workable system for Queensland are to:

- ensure training in cultural competence and how to work effectively with interpreters
- have a simple and easy to use system. For example, New South Wales women's refuges are allocated a PIN number for charging interpreter services to the department, which eliminates slow and labour intensive paper work and reimbursement processes
- widely promote the available system and how to use it.

### 2. A workable interpreting service delivery system for government services

From the community services vantage point, cultural competence in government agencies is the critical gap. For example, public schools are vital front line services where communication with families and students is a day to day need.

Because of staff turn over rates training needs to be a core requirement and constantly available, to develop, sustain and implement cultural competency.

Given that accredited interpreters are not available in some languages, government also has an important role in funding training for accreditation in those languages.

Some of the hallmarks of an effective system include *timely* availability of interpreters and translations and gender appropriate allocation of interpreters, for example, female interpreters for women dealing with domestic violence or sexual assault.

In developing a system for Queensland however, it is vital that the Queensland Government also takes into account training and promotion costs to bring our services up to an acceptable standard of cultural competence and build a workable system.

While not the subject of the Working Group's request for case studies, several organisations highlighted the impediments inherent in the current system. Lessons learned were around interpreter service quality issues that impinge on service delivery such as:

- putting people on hold for 30 minutes
- inability to engage interpreters from some agencies because the service location was 29.6 kilometres from the CBD, just short of the 30 kilometre trip specified for paid travel for the interpreters.

#### Funding gap for vision impaired people, deaf and Indigenous communities

The Working Group recognises that people who require an interpreter are not restricted to those from non-English speaking backgrounds but also includes some members of the Indigenous community and people who are deaf. (See explanatory notes on page 12.)

Blind and vision impaired people are also often disadvantaged when printed information is not provided in suitable alternative formats. The Working Group recognises the high and urgent need for access to interpreting and translating services for these groups to be addressed also.

The members of the Access to Interpreters Working Group look forward to working with the Queensland Government as it takes leadership for implementing funded qualified interpreting and translating services for State government funded community services.

**Interpreting, translating and culturally responsive services are vital to fulfil the principles of equitable access, social justice and inclusion for people from CALD backgrounds. We hope for a system that goes beyond simply providing timely funding for qualified interpreters. We aspire to a human services system where service providers at all levels know when and how to work effectively with interpreters, and are well equipped to work with culturally and linguistically diverse clients. The outcome will be a fairer system for people from non English speaking backgrounds as they are supported to participate in the economic and civil life of the state.**

For further information about this report, contact the Multicultural Policy Officer at QCSS on (07) 3004 6900 or [lalital@qcss.org.au](mailto:lalital@qcss.org.au)



## Explanatory notes

**CALD** - *culturally and linguistically diverse*. There is no single, official or State and Commonwealth-endorsed definition of this term. The Victorian Multicultural Strategy Unit (2002) provides the following definition: *In the Australian context, individuals from a CALD background are those who identify as having a specific cultural or linguistic affiliation by virtue of their place of birth, ancestry, ethnic origin, religion, preferred language, language(s) spoken at home, or because of their parents' identification on a similar basis.*

**NESB** - *non-English speaking background*. In the Queensland Government *Equal Opportunity in Public Employment Act 1992*, people from a NESB are defined as those who have migrated to Australia and whose first language is a language other than English, and the children of those people. For the purposes of the Act, Indigenous people are separately defined even though some members may have English as a second language.

### **The difference between NESB and CALD**

The term NESB was often considered an indicator of disadvantage and/or incorrectly used to define all migrants. A critique of the term NESB also included its demonstrable focus on the lack of English skills and its failure to acknowledge the diverse and often multiple language skills of people from diverse communities. The term CALD has since become popular and incorporates those communities from other English speaking backgrounds who may also migrate to Australia.

In this document the term NESB is used in recognition of the specific language barriers that may be experienced by those who speak a language other than English as their primary language or who have learnt to speak English as a second language. All communities experience challenges in transition when arriving in Australia and adjusting to a new environment. These experiences are often made more difficult where English is a second language. We recognise that some individuals may never become proficient in English for multiple reasons.<sup>10</sup>

### **Community interpreters**

Community interpreters in Australia facilitate oral communication between users of different languages, one of them being English. Interpreters convert consecutively from a source language to a target language, the language other than English being either a migrant/refugee language or an Australian Indigenous language. AUSLAN (deaf-sign language) is also used for interpreting.

The interpreter converts spoken language into the target language of the listener/s by retaining every semantic element, including feeling and intention. Australia's community interpreters are bilingual with additional expertise in the processes of interpreting. They are also acquainted with a wide range of knowledge pertaining to the language and culture of their languages and they are aware of the relevant ethical issues relating to their profession.

The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters Ltd (NAATI) accredits interpreters at four different proficiency levels, the two lower levels *Para-professional Interpreter* (formerly classified as *NAATI level two*) and *Interpreter* (formerly classified as *NAATI level three*) being intended for purposes of community interpreting. NAATI accreditation as *Interpreter* is identified as the first professional level. In order to ensure quality services from community interpreters, employers are encouraged to appoint whenever possible NAATI accredited *Interpreters*. In some languages only para-professional interpreters are available and in some emerging languages NAATI is able to offer recognition prior to accreditation testing becoming available.

### **Deaf community**

Many people wrongly believe that deaf people can 'just write it down', or they can lip-read or that they choose to use sign language even though they can use English if they really want to. The reality is that deaf people use a different language, not a signed form of English, but a language, as different as Vietnamese, Samoan, Khmer or Somali are from English. In Australia the deaf community use AUSLAN (Australian Sign Language). A pre-lingually deaf person's literacy and ability to comprehend spoken English can be comparable to the average recently arrived CALD person, having never heard the English language spoken. (Information provided by Deaf Services Queensland.)



### Indigenous communities

Training and accreditation assessment systems are available for two Indigenous languages from Queensland as well as one from the Western Torres Strait and Torres Strait Creole. That leaves at least eleven other Indigenous languages in Northern Queensland that are still in daily use but have no system for accrediting interpreters. This situation is reasonably representative of most of Northern Australia regardless of state boundaries.<sup>11</sup>

### Settlement Services

The Australian Government funds organisations and agencies to deliver settlement services to newly-arrived humanitarian entrants through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy for six months after arrival, and subsequently through the Settlement Grants Programs.<sup>12</sup> Organisations running these services also often operate additional programs funded by State Government and other sources.

### TIS National – Translating and Interpreting Service National.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) provides the TIS National interpreting service for people who do not speak English and for the English speakers who need to communicate with them.

The Australian Government, through TIS National, provides free interpreting services to non-English speaking Australian citizens or permanent residents communicating with the following approved groups and individuals:

- private medical practitioners providing Medicare-rebateable services and their reception staff to arrange appointments and provide results of medical tests
- non-profit, non-government, community-based organisations for case work and emergency services where the organisation does not receive funding to provide these services
- Members of Parliament for constituency purposes
- local government authorities to communicate with non-English speaking residents on issues such as rates, garbage collection and urban services
- trade unions to respond to members' enquiries or requests
- Emergency Management Australia.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Thanks to the Immigrant Women's Support Service for use of extracts of their definitions of CALD and NESB.

<sup>11</sup> Information provided by Merie Spring, President AUSIT Queensland

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.multicultural.qld.gov.au/publications/reports/new-futures.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/help\\_with\\_translating/index.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/help_with_translating/index.htm)  
Viewed 4 November 2008

*Photos provided by Multicultural Development Association, Amparo Advocacy Inc., Harmony Place's Driver Literacy Course, Nambour Neighbourhood Centre, NAATI, QCOSS, Townsville Multicultural Support Group Inc.*



**The Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working Group** is made up of the following peak bodies and organisations concerned with equitable service provision in Queensland:

**Queensland Council of Social Service Inc**



queensland council of social service inc  
**WORKING FOR A FAIR QUEENSLAND**

**Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland**



**Multicultural Development Association Inc**



**AMPARO Advocacy Inc**



**Immigrant Women's Support Service**



**Spiritus Care Services**



The Working Group's position paper which this document supports was written in consultation with and endorsed by the following organisations and networks:

Career Employment Australia Inc - Newly Arrived Youth Support Service  
 Mercy Family Services  
 Red Cross Australia  
 Endeavour Foundation  
 Tenants' Union of Queensland  
 ACCES Services Inc.  
 Queensland Youth Housing Coalition  
 Diversicare  
 Moreton Bay Regional Council  
 Islamic Women's Association Queensland  
 Hhelp Darling Downs Inc  
 Australian Pensioners and Superannuants League  
 Romeo Centre  
 OzPol CCAI  
 Greek Orthodox Community of St George, Brisbane  
 TAAS, Youth and Family Service (Logan City) Inc  
 Migrant Settlement Services Centacare Cairns  
 Inala Community House  
 Relationships Australia  
 Multicultural Communities Council Gold Coast  
 Women's House Shelta  
 ASHRAM Network  
 Caravan and Manufactured Home Residents' Association of Queensland Inc  
 Youth Affairs Network of Queensland  
 Combined Women's Refuge Group  
 Nambour Community Centre Inc  
 St Vincent de Paul Society, Ipswich Settlement Service.  
 Multilink Community Services Inc.  
 Bundaberg and District Neighbourhood Centre Inc  
 Queensland Program to Assist Survivors of Torture and Trauma  
 Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services Inc.  
 Aged Care Queensland Inc  
 Kingston East Neighbourhood Group Inc  
 Micah Projects Inc  
 Townsville Multicultural Support Group Inc  
 Shelter Housing Action Cairns  
 Multicultural Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing ('Harmony Place')

This report was facilitated by QCOSS.

**Queensland Council of Social Service Inc**  
 Ground Floor River Tower,  
 20 Pidgeon Close, West End QLD 4104  
 PO Box 3786  
 South Brisbane Qld 4101  
 Phone 07-3004 6900  
 Fax 07-3004 6999