

Use of Interpreters Policy



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1. Purpose

This policy outlines how Women's Housing Ltd (WHL) will utilise interpreter services to ensure that clients from culturally and linguistically diverse background are supported to communicate in their preferred language.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers, students, and board members of WHL.

3. Statement of commitment

WHL recognises that clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are often excluded from accessing services due to language and communication barriers. WHL commits to ensuring all clients have an opportunity to receive information and communication in their preferred language, so they are empowered to make fully informed decisions about their access to services.

4. Language Loop

WHL utilise Language Loop for all interpreting and translation needs. Language Loop provides interpreting services both in person and via video link or telephone.

For more information about Language Loop, see: <https://languageloop.com.au/>

5. Client rights

WHL staff will ascertain if an interpreter is necessary on initial contact, but clients are also welcomed to request this. Support workers or other stakeholders may also provide information and context about a client's preferred language.

The following points apply to clients accessing interpreting services:

- Clients do not have to pay for interpreting services
- Clients can refuse specific interpreters
- Clients can request gender or culturally specific interpreters
- Clients have the right to terminate the meeting or conversation if they are concerned about the skills or conduct of the interpreter

WHL will make all attempts to conform with the client's requests. Where it is not possible or reasonable to meet the request, WHL will work with the client and/or support worker to identify an alternative approach.

WHL may require an interpreter to be present before proceeding with providing services, as this ensures that the client is fully informed about their rights and obligations as a service user.

6. Arranging interpreters

Clients or support workers who wish to request an interpreter in advance of a meeting should advise their point of contact at WHL. WHL staff can arrange phone, video or in-person interpreting services in advance to avoid any delays or unexpected issues.

WHL staff who wish to arrange an interpreter should contact Language Loop as per WHL's Use of Interpreters Procedure.

6.1 Family and friends as interpreters

WHL will always utilise professional interpreting services when important information is being conveyed, such as information pertaining to creating a tenancy, VCAT or legal action, or key communications impacting the tenancy. It may be acceptable for a family or friend to interpret basic information such as a maintenance request or general conversation. This will occur at the discretion of the WHL staff member.

7. Working with interpreters

WHL staff will receive regular training and access to resources about how to utilise an interpreter with clients. Key points to a successful session include:

- Speaking directly with the client
- Using clear language and avoiding slang or technical jargon
- Enabling the interpreter to clarify information
- Pausing regularly and speak slowly
- Not interrupting the interpreter

WHL are aware of how cultural differences may impact communication styles or language choices, and this will be considered in these contexts.

WHL staff will be prepared to explain terms that are specific to the social housing sector in plain language.

7.1 Australian Sign Language (Auslan)

Language Loop can facilitate video or in-person interpreting services for clients that communicate using Auslan.

Clients who prefer to use the National Relay Services (NRS) can also utilise this.

8. Confidentiality

Interpreters operate under strict rules of confidentiality and are trained in handling sensitive or personal matters. WHL regularly audit the policies of interpreter services and are confident that only high-quality services will be used.

9. Complaints & appeals

Complaints about WHL's failure to provide accessible communication options are taken very seriously. Any complaints pertaining to this policy should be submitted as per WHL's Complaints & Appeals Policy. WHL is open to receiving feedback about the use of interpreters under this policy.

10. Reviewing

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years or when laws or best practice guidelines are updated.

11. Related documents

- WHL Customer Service Charter
- WHL Complaints & Appeals Policy
- WHL Privacy & Confidentiality Policy
- WHL Diversity & Inclusion Policy
- WHL Community Engagement Policy

12. Relevant legislation

- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)
- Charter of Human Rights and Opportunities 2006 (Vic)
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)