



Language Services Policy

1. Purpose

The WA health system is committed to providing high quality, safe and accessible health care to all Western Australians who may need language assistance when using WA health system services. This includes those who cannot effectively communicate in written and/or spoken standard Australian English (Standard English) such as some Aboriginal people, some people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people who are Deaf or hard of hearing who communicate in Auslan.

The *Language Services Policy* (the policy) establishes the minimum standards to enable effective communication with consumers and carers who have difficulty communicating in Standard English, or who are Deaf or hard of hearing, for the delivery of culturally appropriate and/or trauma informed care that is equitable, non-discriminatory, respectful and safe.

This policy supports the delivery of free, targeted language services that promote fundamental consumer rights such as access to high quality care and services, safety, respect, communication and participation.

The policy aligns to the State Government [Western Australian Language Services Policy 2020](#) and the Department of Health's [MP 0180/23 Work Health and Safety Management Policy](#).

This policy is a mandatory requirement for Health Service Providers under the *System Governance, Risk and Assurance Policy Framework* pursuant to section 26(2)(c) of the *Health Services Act 2016*.

This policy is also a mandatory requirement for the Department of Health pursuant to section 29 of the *Public Sector Management Act 1994*.

2. Applicability

This policy is applicable to WA health entities.

The requirements contained within this policy are applicable to the services purchased from contracted health entities where it is explicitly stated in the contract between the contracted health entity and the State of Western Australia or Health Service Provider. The State of Western Australia or Health Service Provider contract manager is responsible for ensuring that any obligation to comply with this policy by the contracted health entity is accurately reflected in the relevant contract and managed accordingly.

3. Policy Requirements

3.1 WA health entities must:

- apply language service procedures relevant to their workplace, to enable appropriate and timely engagement of interpreters and translators, particularly to manage situations with health, legal or other risks for consumers or the WA health system
- provide all consumers and carers who need assistance with standard English with access to appropriate interpreting and translating assistance
- ensure staff members who engage with consumers and carers, have the cultural and linguistic knowledge and skills to assess the need for language services through appropriate training
- engage tertiary qualified and/or National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) credentialed interpreters and translators through the Common User Arrangement (CUA) for interpreting and translating services
- ensure that interpreters and translators engaged in 'child-related work' as defined by the *Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004* hold a current Working with Children Card
- ensure appropriate pre-briefings and debriefings are undertaken with the interpreter as required
- ensure that adequate provisions are made for the health, safety and wellbeing of the interpreter during the session
- develop information in accessible formats for those who are not described in this policy, such as some people with cognitive disabilities or acquired brain injuries, but who still require assistance with standard English.

3.2 All new staff members must complete the WA Health Language Services eLearning module (available through My Learning) within 6 months of their commencement date.

4. Compliance Monitoring

WA health entities must report the following information to the System Manager using the Language Services Annual Report Template:

- Number of staff who have completed language services training.
- Number of staff who have completed cultural awareness training.
- Number of interpreters engaged, identified by language.
- Expenditure on interpreters, identified by language.
- Number of translations completed, identified by language.
- Expenditure on translators, identified by language.
- Number of requests for written information developed in accessible alternative format/s, identified by type of format.
- Expenditure on the development of information in accessible alternative format, identified by type of format.

The Cultural Diversity Unit, Department of Health, on behalf of the System Manager, will collate the data received and prepare a submission of the summary annual report to ensure alignment with policy requirements.

5. Related Documents

The following documents are mandatory pursuant to this policy:

- [Language Services Procedure](#)
- [Language Services Annual Reporting Template](#)
- [Language Services eLearning module \(available through My Learning\)](#)

6. Supporting Information

The following information is not mandatory but informs and/or supports the implementation of this policy:

- [Language Services Guidelines](#)
- [Engaging Interpreters Checklist](#)
- [Decision making tree for engaging an interpreter](#)

7. Definitions

The following definition(s) are relevant to this policy.

Term	Definition
Auslan	Australian sign language is a recognised language used by the Australian Deaf ¹ community. Auslan does not follow English sentence structure and has its own grammar and vocabulary. ¹
Carers	<p>The <i>Carer's Recognition Act 2004</i> defines a person as a carer if they provide ongoing care or assistance to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a person with a disability as defined in the <i>Disability Services Act 1993</i> section 3;• a person who has a chronic illness, including a mental illness as defined in the <i>Mental Health Act 1996</i> section 3;• a person who, because of frailty, requires assistance with carrying out everyday tasks; or• a person of a prescribed class. <p>For the purposes of this policy the term carer also includes 'parents', 'guardians' or people looking after children under 18 years of age and young people who care for their parent(s). For Aboriginal people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, the term may also include any family member who is available to take on the responsibility of caring for another member of the family, including extended family members.</p>
Consumers	This term is intended to be as broad and inclusive as possible and includes individuals or groups who may also be known as 'patients' or 'clients' within the WA health system.

Interpreter	A person who conveys a message or statement verbally or by using sign language into another language with accuracy and impartiality to enable effective communication between two or more people who use different languages.
Language services	Includes interpreting and translating services to facilitate effective communication between the WA health system staff members and consumers and carers who have limited English proficiency and people who are Deaf or hard of hearing.
NAATI credentialed interpreters and translators	<p>The <i>Western Australian Language Services Policy 2020</i> recognises that an interpreter or translator may have obtained:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tertiary qualifications and/or • credentials issued by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). <p>Ideally, practitioners will have both tertiary qualifications and NAATI credentials.</p> <p>For languages of some Aboriginal and new and emerging communities, NAATI recognition or, in the case of Aboriginal interpreters, registration with Aboriginal Interpreting Western Australia is acceptable.</p>
Staff member	<p>Staff member means a person</p> <p>(a) employed in a health service provider by an employing authority pursuant to the <i>Health Services Act 2016</i> and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) the chief executive of the health service provider; (ii) a health executive employed in the health service provider; (iii) a person employed in the health service provider under section 140 of the <i>Health Services Act 2016</i>; (iv) a person seconded to the health service provider under section 136 or 142 of the <i>Health Services Act 2016</i>; <p>(b) a person engaged under a contract for services by a health service provider pursuant to the <i>Health Services Act 2016</i>;</p> <p>employed in the Department of Health by or under an employing authority pursuant to the <i>Public Sector Management Act 1994</i>.</p>
System Manager	The term used for the Department CEO to reflect their role as being responsible for overall management of the WA health system (see s.19 <i>Health Services Act 2016</i>).
Translator	A person who makes a written transfer of a message or statement from one language into another with accuracy and impartiality to enable effective communication between two or more people who use different languages.

WA health entities	<p>WA health entities include:</p> <p>(i) Health Service Providers as established by an order made under section 32 (1)(b) of the <i>Health Services Act 2016</i>.</p> <p>(ii) Department of Health as an administrative division of the State of Western Australia pursuant to section 35 of the Public Sector Management Act 1994.</p>
WA health system	<p>The WA health system is comprised of:</p> <p>(i) the Department;</p> <p>(ii) Health Service Providers (North Metropolitan Health Service, South Metropolitan Health Service, Child and Adolescent Health Service, WA Country Health Service, East Metropolitan Health Service, PathWest Laboratory Medicine WA, Quadriplegic Centre and Health Support Services); and</p> <p>(iii) contracted health entities, to the extent they provide health services to the State.</p>

8. Policy Contact

Enquiries relating to this policy may be directed to:

Title: Director, Health Networks

Directorate: Health Networks Directorate, Clinical Excellence Division

Email: culturaldiversity@health.wa.gov.au

9. Document Control

Version	Published date	Review date	Amendment(s)
MP 0051/17	3 April 2017	April 2022	Original version
MP 0051/17 v.1.0	6 April 2023	April 2026	Policy review and amendments as below
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion of the state government WA Language Services Policy 2020 in the Purpose section to ensure alignment. Applicability section amended to WA health entities – inclusion of Department of Health. Policy Requirements and Compliance Monitoring sections refined. Inclusion of related documents: Language Services Procedure, Language Services Annual Report Template and the Language Services eLearning module. Inclusion of supporting information document: Language Services Guidelines. Inclusion of definitions for ‘staff member’, ‘system manager’, ‘contracted health entity’ and ‘WA health entities’. 			
MP 0051/17 v.1.1	2 May 2023	April 2026	Minor amendment as detailed below.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insertion of supporting information document ‘Decision making tree for engaging an interpreter’. 			
MP 0051/17 v.1.2	11 July 2023	April 2026	Minor amendments as listed below.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion of additional question in Data Sources section of related document 			

‘Language Services Annual Reporting Template’.			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting information documents: ‘Language Services Guidelines’ and ‘Decision making tree for engaging an interpreter’ – minor amendments 			
MP 0051/17 v.2.0	17 March 2025	April 2026	Amendments as listed below.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purpose section amended to include reference to MP 0180/23 Work Health and Safety Management Policy. Policy Requirements section amended to include interpreter health, safety and wellbeing, and that interpreters are briefed prior to the language service session and after the session has concluded. Related documents: Language Services Procedure and Language Services eLearning module amended to reflect the policy requirement changes. Related document: Language Services Annual Reporting template updated to include indicators 4.1 and 4.2. Compliance monitoring updated to align with the inclusion of indicators 4.1 and 4.2 within the Language Services Annual Reporting template. Supporting information: Language Services Guidelines updated hyperlinks and inclusion of the Engaging Interpreters Checklist. Policy contact changed to Director, Health Networks Directorate, Clinical Excellence Division to reflect policy ownership. 			

10. Approval

Approval by	Dr David Russell-Weisz, Director General, Department of Health
Approval date	24 March 2017

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

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