



Australian Government
**Department of Immigration
and Border Protection**



Frequently asked questions for non-English speakers

English

What services does TIS National provide?

TIS National provides immediate phone, pre-booked phone and on-site interpreting services to people who do not speak English and to agencies and businesses that need to communicate with their non-English speaking clients. These services enable non-English speakers to independently access services and information in Australia.

Non-English speakers can access immediate phone interpreters through TIS National by calling 131 450. Alternatively, if you contact an organisation directly they may organise an interpreter on your behalf.

Who can I contact through TIS National?

More than 20,000 agency clients, including the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, are registered with TIS National. Some of our other clients include:

- state and federal government departments
- local councils
- medical and health practitioners
- pharmacists
- utility companies
- telecommunication companies
- emergency services
- legal services
- settlement and community service providers.

TIS National cannot guarantee that the organisation you need to contact accepts interpreter-assisted calls from TIS National.

When can I call TIS National?

TIS National's immediate phone interpreting service is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

The organisation you contact may only be available during their regular business hours and business hours will vary between organisations. Most organisations in Australia operate during standard business hours between 9 am–5 pm, Monday to Friday. Many organisations will not be available on public holidays.

What should I expect when I call 131 450?

When you call TIS National you will be greeted by an English-speaking TIS National operator who will ask what language interpreter you need. After you have requested a language, you will be placed on hold while the operator searches for an available interpreter. Please stay on the line even if there is no hold music.

If an interpreter in your language is available, the operator will connect you with the interpreter and ask you which organisation you need to contact. Please have the name of the organisation, their contact phone number and your client or account number with the organisation (if any) ready when you call TIS National.

Our operators must remain impartial and cannot recommend which organisation you should contact. When you are connected with an interpreter, the interpreter will not engage in informal conversation with you as they are required to remain impartial during all interpreting assignments.

The interpreter will tell the TIS National operator who you need to contact and the operator will proceed to call and connect you and the interpreter to the organisation requested.

If no interpreter is available in your language, the operator will ask you to call back soon. If you speak more than one language, you may like to request an interpreter in another language.

What should I do if I know the interpreter TIS National connects me to?

If you realise you know the interpreter, it is your decision if you want to continue the interpreting session. If you do not want to continue with the same interpreter, tell the TIS National operator or the organisation and discontinue the call.

Can I request a male or female interpreter?

Yes. If you would prefer an interpreter of a particular gender, tell the TIS National operator or organisation you are contacting as soon as possible. TIS National will try to provide you with an interpreter of the requested gender.

Can I request an interpreter of a particular religion or cultural background?

No. TIS National operators allocate jobs to interpreters based on their level of accreditation and availability and cannot select an interpreter based on their religious or cultural background.

I would prefer to use an interpreter in person. Is this possible?

Yes. TIS National provides on-site interpreting services. If you need an on-site interpreter, you should contact the organisation you need to communicate with through TIS National using a phone interpreter and ask them to organise an on-site interpreter for you.

I need to contact emergency services. What should I do?

Always call 000 directly if you need to contact emergency Ambulance, Police or Fire services. The 000 emergency services line will call TIS National and connect you with an interpreter using a priority line 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Are TIS National services free to non-English speakers?

Yes. The majority of TIS National interpreting services are free for non-English speakers. Generally the organisation you are contacting will accept the charges for the service. Some organisations and medical practitioners are eligible for free interpreting through TIS National.

Some organisations may not accept calls from TIS National, however if you call the organisation directly they may be able to call you back with a phone interpreter.

If you want to contact an organisation that is not a TIS National client and the organisation is not willing to accept the charges for the service, you may choose to create a personal account and pay for the service yourself. To do this, tell the interpreter and our operators will assist you to create an account with TIS National. You will need a credit card to create a personal account.

Can I get documents translated through TIS National?

No. TIS National does not provide a commercial document translation service.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) provides a free document translating service for eligible Australian citizens and migrants settling permanently in Australia. To enquire about this service, contact your local Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provider.

You can find information about other translation options by contacting the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI).

What is the role of a TIS National interpreter?

The interpreter's role is to interpret the spoken word in your language as accurately as possible.

Interpreters do not provide advice and should not ask questions other than what is requested by a TIS National operator or the person you are communicating with.

TIS National interpreters are bound by a strict code of ethics. The code governs their professional behaviour and covers various obligations which include:

- professional conduct
- confidentiality
- competence
- impartiality
- accuracy
- clarity of role boundaries
- maintaining professional relationships
- professional development
- professional solidarity.

More information about the code of ethics is available from the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT).

How should I use an interpreter most effectively?

You can use a TIS National interpreter most effectively by:

- preparing all of the information you need for your call before calling TIS National
- being patient and waiting for the interpreter to finish interpreting before speaking again
- using short sentences
- avoiding using slang or jargon that may be difficult to translate
- understanding the role of the interpreter
- not asking the interpreter for advice or to advocate for you
- notifying the interpreter, organisation or TIS National immediately if you are having difficulty understanding the interpreter.

How do I provide feedback to TIS National?

To provide feedback about a TIS National service, interpreter or operator please call TIS National on 131 450. When you are connected with an interpreter, tell the operator you would like to provide feedback to TIS National. Your feedback will be recorded and referred to the relevant team in TIS National for consideration.