
Pregnancy and birthing services for different language or cultural needs

Summary

- If you are pregnant and have specific cultural or language needs, the first step is to tell your local maternity hospital about your needs.
 - All public hospitals in Victoria provide free access to interpreters either in person, over the phone or via videoconferencing.
 - The Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Program is for pregnant women who struggle to access antenatal care services because of their culturally and linguistically diverse background, or for other reasons.
 - Refugee health nurses are located in community health services across Victoria and can help pregnant refugee women to access local maternity services.
 - Many of Victoria's public hospitals have specific Aboriginal pregnancy support programs in place. Check with your hospital's Aboriginal hospital liaison officer or patient representative to find out more.
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In the Victorian public hospital system all women are cared for equally. However, language or cultural barriers can sometimes make it more difficult for pregnant women to have a fully informed and rewarding birthing experience.

If you are pregnant and have specific cultural or language needs, the first step is to notify your local maternity hospital about your requirements and ask how they can help. All hospitals have staff members who are specially trained to help in this area.

Using an interpreter

If you misunderstand what healthcare professionals tell you it can be confusing, upsetting or, at worst, dangerous. For example, if you misinterpret instructions or you agree to a care option where you do not fully understand its impact.

All public hospitals in Victoria provide access to interpreters. Some have interpreters on staff, but all can access interpreters either in person, over the phone or via videoconferencing. Interpreter services are always provided free of charge to the patient and can be better coordinated if arranged prior to your appointment.

It is better to use a qualified interpreter than a family member or friend for several reasons. Qualified interpreters are required to communicate information accurately and to maintain confidentiality, so your privacy will always be protected. Family members and friends are not bound by these requirements. Using a qualified interpreter also helps to avoid conflict of interest and prevent important information being left out or miscommunicated:

- by accident
- due to a lack of adequate medical terminology
- due to a lack of understanding
- to protect their relative or friend
- because of embarrassment at what is being discussed
- because the family member or friend decides the healthcare professional does not need to know some of what their friend or relative is saying.

If you need an interpreter to be available in person when you are meeting with a healthcare professional, you will need to arrange this when you make the appointment. Make sure you are clear about the language or dialect you speak. 'Chinese', for example, could mean Mandarin or Cantonese.

Accessing translated health information

Many Victorian health services (including hospitals and community health centres) and migrant resource centres provide printed health-related information in languages other than English.

Health professionals in Victoria also have access to around 15,000 multilingual resources via the [Health Translations](#) directory. The site links to multilingual online health resources from government departments, peak health bodies, hospitals, community health centres and welfare agencies.



The National Interpreter Symbol shows where you can get translated information or help from an interpreter.

You may see this symbol used at places that deliver government or community information and services.

Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Program

The Victorian Government's Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Program aims to improve the health and wellbeing of mothers and babies by providing:

- access to antenatal, postnatal and other health services
- support to women throughout their pregnancy
- information that encourages healthy behaviours during and after pregnancy.

The program targets pregnant women who are unable to access antenatal care services or require additional support because of their socioeconomic status, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, age or residential distance to services.

The program does not provide clinical antenatal care. Its focus is to link women who are pregnant and need extra support with access to antenatal care and other services that will improve their health and wellbeing.

The Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Program is available through local community health services, which allows women to connect with a broader range of services that operate through community health such as counselling, allied health and dental services.

For more information visit health.vic

Maternity care for refugees

Women from refugee backgrounds can experience a variety of challenges when trying to access maternity care services. These can include:

- unfamiliarity with service options
- not understanding the roles of different healthcare professionals
- difficulties with transportation
- language and literacy barriers
- differing cultural practices and beliefs relating to childbirth
- a lack of cultural competency among some service providers.

Refugee health nurses are located in community health services across Victoria in areas of significant refugee settlement. Their role is to:

- work directly with refugee communities
- provide quick access to a health assessment, particularly with a doctor (general practitioner or GP)
- ensure the woman's care is well coordinated
- educate other healthcare practitioners about refugee health and wellbeing matters.

Find your local community health centre using the [Find a Health Service](#) on this website.

Koori Maternity Services

Koori Maternity Services (KMS) were developed by the Victorian Government in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. KMS aims to improve access to culturally appropriate maternity care for Aboriginal women.

KMS offers flexible, non-judgmental care to women through ongoing and trusting relationships with KMS midwives and Aboriginal health workers. It actively provides outreach services and encourages women to access services early in their pregnancy.

The main objectives of KMS are to:

- increase access to, and participation in, antenatal care services and postnatal support
- develop relationships between women and birthing hospitals.

In doing this, KMS aims to:

- identify and manage health risks for women and their babies, particularly early in pregnancy
- optimise the health and wellbeing of women and their babies
- reduce health risks to babies including the incidence of preterm birth and low birthweight.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Koori Maternity Services
- Your hospital's patient representative or social worker

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