Cultural and linguistic diversity and hospital

Summary

- If you prefer to speak a language other than English, interpreters are available free of charge in all health services in Victoria.
- Accredited translators and interpreters must by law maintain privacy and confidentiality.
- All public hospitals must meet specific cultural needs, for example, if you would like to see a female doctor or eat a kosher meal.
- **Health Translations** is a website that provides links to translated health resources and publications in Victoria.

Victoria is Australia’s most multicultural state, with almost 25 per cent of all residents born overseas. Victorians come from 230 countries, speak more than 200 languages and follow 120 different faiths.

The Victorian health system provides significant resources and support services to cater for people from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. All hospitals must meet your specific cultural needs, for example, if you would like to see a female doctor or have cultural dietary requirements such as a kosher meal. It is important to let the hospital know about any requests you may have when you book in and when you arrive for your treatment.

Language and cultural support in hospital

People from all backgrounds can benefit from language and cultural support in Victoria’s health system. The rights you have while staying in hospital are outlined in the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights in Victoria.

According to the Charter, you have the right to:

- access the health services you need
- safe and high-quality health services
- respect from the staff you deal with
- clear, understandable information about healthcare services, treatment, options and costs
- using an interpreter to help communicate with healthcare staff
- being included in decisions so you can make informed choices about your care
- privacy and confidentiality
- provide feedback on any health care service.

Asking for an interpreter in hospital

If you prefer to use a language other than English, accredited interpreters are available for you. Auslan (Australian sign language) interpreters are available for patients with a hearing impairment.

Most major hospitals employ interpreters and can also access a wider range of language services through an agency, which means that interpreters are available in Victorian hospitals for more than 200 languages. You should ask for an interpreter when you book your hospital visit.

Any hospital staff member who feels an interpreter is necessary for effective communication is within their rights to request one.

Privacy and confidentiality

Accredited translators and interpreters are required by law to maintain your privacy and confidentiality. If you are
concerned that you know the interpreter from your community, you can request another interpreter.

**When an interpreter is not available**

If you can’t get access to an interpreter in person, a telephone interpreting service is an option. Telephone interpreting is a professional service for people who speak languages other than English, who need immediate help talking with healthcare staff.

**Family or friends as interpreter**

You must not use family members, friends or carers to be your interpreter. However, sometimes they may have to help you when an interpreter is not available (either in person or on the phone). The decision to use a family member, friend or carer (and why this happened), must be documented by staff in your health record. Interpreting, particularly around medical words, is not an easy task and should be left to highly trained and accredited interpreters.

Accredited interpreters are covered by insurance and they are legally responsible for the interpreting they do. If you are nervous about working with an interpreter, you may ask a family member, friend or carer to attend the appointment with you.

**Requesting a female or male doctor**

All public hospitals must meet your specific cultural needs. If you have specific cultural care requirements, such as wanting to see a doctor of the same gender, tell the hospital staff or nurse when you book in and when you arrive at the hospital.

**Medical translations**

Translations of medical resources, hospital administrative information and publications regarding your rights are available to all patients. Ask your doctor, nurse or hospital staff about how to access translated information.

**Health Translations Directory**

**Health Translations** is a website that provides links to translated health information resources and publications in Victoria. You can search through lots of resources by either language or topic.

**Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights in Victoria**

The [Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights in Victoria](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/Cultural-and-linguistic-diversity-and-hospital) describes the rights of patients, consumers and other people using the Australian healthcare system. It is available in 25 languages, as well as in easy English, Auslan, braille and audio versions.

**Where to get help**

- Your GP (doctor)
- Your hospital