

signs, symbols & communication tools:

cross cultural communication in health

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the nsw multicultural health communication service

The 1991 census identified 22.8% of the population of NSW as having been born overseas, 14.9% born in non-English speaking countries and that people of non-English speaking backgrounds had migrated to Australia from over 100 different countries world wide.

The census also showed that 16.1% of people over the age of five years spoke a language other than English at home. Of these, many had quite poor English language proficiency. 19.9% (or a total of 183,464) reported that they spoke English "not well" or "not at all" .

The average age of the overseas born population at the time was older than that of the Australian born population. This was particularly so for the Northern and Southern Europeans who were early immigrants to Australia after World War II. However, there were groups, particularly those more newly arrived, who had a high proportion of their population in the younger age groups compared to the Australian population as a whole.

Though diversity within and across non-English speaking background communities was apparent from the demographic data, our understanding of the health status of Australians from non- English speaking backgrounds was very limited. These populations have often been excluded from health research due to cost considerations and methodological difficulties. Consequently, the information available to help assess the health information needs or the service requirements of non-English speaking background communities was scant.

However, the literature clearly identifies that people of non-English speaking background face additional hurdles in accessing health services, in obtaining health information and in gaining control of their own health.

In response, NSW Health, in its Implementation Plan Health Services for a Culturally Diverse Society included as one of its key outcomes, access and equity for all people and groups irrespective of their cultural or linguistic background or English language competence. The plan identified the need for the development of a coordinated statewide approach to reach people who speak languages other than English, particularly those living in rural areas.

To give effect to this recommendation, NSW Health, in 1996, endorsed the formation of the NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service, a statewide service tasked with the role of:

- improving the quality of communication between the health system and non-English speaking background community groups.
- providing advice to the health system on issues raised by non-English speaking background communities
- providing information directly to non-English speaking background communities by the most effective means.
- providing a central point for the collection and exchange of knowledge about multicultural communication for health.

Beginning operation in December 1996 the Services' initial focus was on establishing processes, systems and the strong knowledge base needed to support future capacity building as well as clarifying and communicating its role and purpose to future partners and stakeholders. On this foundation substantial achievements have been made, including:

- updating all available multilingual health information.
- producing over 200 health fact sheets each translated into between 10 and 35 community languages.
- developing the NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service Website for which the Service was awarded the Australian Financial Review/Telstra Australian Internet Awards for the best Professional Services Site, and
- the recent launch of the innovative Health fax-back service.

The NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service has prioritised capacity building within the health sector as a key area within its current strategic plan and continues to provide an important coordinating role in the development and dissemination of multilingual health related resources within NSW. In addition, the Service plays an important role in developing culturally specific health related research and culturally appropriate health promotion campaigns.

signs, symbols and communication tools

In a society made of many cultures and speaking many different languages, health care facilities and health care workers have needed to develop a range of tools to help them communicate important information to non-English speaking service users. Chief among these tools are professional interpreters, accredited through the National Accreditation Authority for Translators (NAATI), providing both on site and telephone interpreting for both health care workers and service users in need of language assistance across NSW.

In addition to the above, health services and staff have relied on a range of multilingual signs, symbols and other communication tools to aid communication with non-English speaking service users in the absence of a translator. Commonly these tools have included multilingual signs, universal symbols, pictograms, multilingual phrase books/cards, and interactive multi-lingual computer technology to name a few. Although the acceptance and use of these tools vary between Area Health Services, health facilities and individual health professionals, as a whole, they represent an important element in cross cultural health communication.

The lack of standardisation across the sector and the potential for duplication and use of poor quality or outdated communication tools prompted the NSW Multicultural Health Coordinators to propose a state wide project with the specific aim of;

- collecting examples of the types of signs, symbols and communication tools in current use within the NSW Health system.
- acquiring an understanding of their use in cross cultural health communication.

Accordingly, in November 2000, the NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service was funded to undertake research in the area.

The process of collecting the resources was not intended to be exhaustive, however it was extensive. The search for resources involved three phases:

- i. formal requests were made to all relevant services and stakeholders within each NSW Area Health Service and, to a lesser extent, interstate health services.
- ii. Individuals, community groups and organisations involved in multicultural health were contacted through their existing networks directly.
- iii. Finally, two Sydney, two regional and two interstate Health Services were nominated for more intensely targeted searches.

In addition, referrals and leads were followed up in all cases. This process led to various individuals and organisation previously not contacted and often outside the health sector.

The communication tools that emerged as a result of the search were various but can be broadly divided into the categories of multilingual signs, universal symbols, pictograms, bilingual or multilingual phrases books/cards and a final category of various resources designed to alert the system to a language need. The criteria for inclusion in the collection were that the resources must be in current use in a health setting and intended for use in an immediate "face to face" communication. Translated "take home" patient information and health campaign materials such as posters and brochures in other languages were not included under these criteria.

The materials listed in this catalogue are intended to be representative of the types of communication tools in current use in NSW Health settings and to offer some insight into their quality of and diversity. The NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service was not involved in the production of the resources included in either the catalogue or the conference display, there inclusion should not be considered an endorsement by the Service.

pictograms

Communicating through pictures is a common strategy, particularly on general nursing wards within the health system. The Pictograms concern themselves almost exclusively with the "creature comforts" of patients. They include simple diagrams representing common patient needs and wants such as "hot/cold", "food", "bed pan/urinal", "nurse/doctor" and personal items such as "comb/brush". Basic needs and wants are communicated simply by pointing to the appropriate pictogram. All of the Pictograms are labeled in English; some are also translated into other languages and may include simple words and phrases.

The Pictograms vary widely in quality of production ranging from professionally produced books to simple hand drawn sheets, by and large, the pictograms are black and white A4 sheets of paper that are photocopied and faxed between wards and individual health care workers and discarded when the patient leaves the ward.

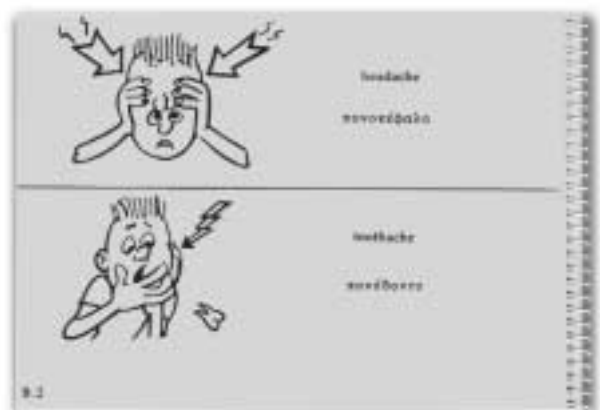
The communication tools collected under the category of Pictograms include:

- Ward Communications, which were the most common, deal exclusively with the comfort and care of patients in hospital wards. (23, 29, 30, 71, 74, 75, 77, 79, 82)

- Procedure Specific pictograms intended to convey information specific to a health condition or procedure, "demonstrating the correct precautions" for total hip replacement patients for example. (67)

- Context Specific, resources were collected from aged respite care services that were specific that context. These resources were more comprehensive and dealt with more complex communication needs and combined pictograms with audiocassettes, photographs and translated text. (68, 69, 70)

- Community Educators Resources use photographs and drawings in large flip charts with English and translated text. The Images in these resources are more complex than simple pictograms and are used in communities with, or by, a bilingual worker. (86 +FPA Flip Chart)



pictograms

- 23 *Multicultural Phrase Book*
Bruno Ciancio RN, BAppSc(Ed)
Royal Australian Nurses Federation, 1998.
- Nursing
Ward communication
Booklet
5 languages.
- 29 *Ward Words Hospital Kit*
South Pacific Publishing, 1997
(<http://www.spp.com.au/ww.htm>)
- Nursing
Ward communication
A4 laminated card
20 languages
- 30 *Ward Words Bedside Edition*
South Pacific Publishing, 1995
(<http://www.spp.com.au/ww.htm>)
- Nursing
Ward communication
Laminated cards
20 languages
- 56 *Talking Pictures*
South Western Sydney Area Health Service
Health Care Interpreter Service, 2001.
- Nursing
Ward communications
2 double sided A4 photocopies
5 Languages
- 68 *Untitled*
Siew-Ling Lo, Service Development
Multicultural Access Worker
Aged Respite Service, 2001
Blacktown/Mt Druitt Health
- Residential Aged Care
Photo Album
10 languages

pictograms

- 67 *Untitled*
Producer Unknown
Submitted by Occupational Therapy
Fairfield Hospital
- Occupational Therapy
Total hip replacement
A4 Photocopies
5 languages
- 69 *Untitled*
Siew-Ling Lo, Service Development
Multicultural Access Worker
Aged Respite Service, 2001
Blacktown/Mt Druitt Health
- Residential Aged Care
Photo Album
9 languages
- 70 *My Word: A Communication Aid Kit.
(Greek Version)*
NSW Clustering Services, Commonwealth
Department of Health and Family Services,
June 1996 2nd Edition
- Residential aged care needs.
Booklet
10 languages.
- 71 *Patient Communication Card*
Doctors Hospital, Toronto, ON, Canada, 1992
- Nursing Ward Communication
Double sided A4 Card
5 Languages
- 74 *Untitled*
Producer Unknown
Submitted by Speech Pathology
Braeside Hospital
- Nursing ward communications
14 page A4 booklet
English
- 75 *How Can You Help Me?*
Producer Unknown
Submitted by Speech Pathology
Braeside Hospital
- Nursing
Ward communication
Double sided A4 sheet
English.
- 77 *Untitled*
Producer Unknown
Submitted by Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital
- Nursing
Ward communications
A4 photocopy
English.
- 79 *Untitled*
Producer Unknown
Submitted by Oncology and Geriatrics
Royal Prince Alfred Hospital
- Nursing
Ward communications
5 A4 pages
English/French
- 82 *Wong-Baker Faces Pain Rating Scale*
Harcourt Health Sciences, 1998.
- Patient pain rating scale
A4 Sheet
7 languages
- 86 *Baby giving birth to baby, The story of Aisha:
Yara da haihuwa. Abin mamaki! Labarin Aisha*
Gender Health and Communication Team,
Nigeria.
UNDP/World Bank/WHO Special Programme
for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases
(TDR). 1996
- Vesicovaginal Fistula Education
Booklet
English/Hausa

bilingual words and phrases

One of the few options available to communicate, in the absence of an interpreter, is through bilingual phrase cards and books. Bilingual Words and Phrases in use in health settings range from professionally produced, comprehensive booklets through to hand written A4 sheets, made by the health care worker together with the non-English speaking client and an interpreter (often a family member). These tools attempt to anticipate the words and phrases needed for basic communication within a specific health setting or context. Bilingual Words and Phrases in this collection include:

Procedure Specific such as those associated with x-rays and ultrasounds which are intended to facilitate the communication of specific diagnostic or procedural information. (WA13, 38, 43, 50)

General Nursing which varied widely in the quality of their production, ranging from laminated cards and printed booklets to hand written sheets of paper. Few of these resources include medical words or phrases and are largely limited to questions requiring a yes or no answer and single words that deal with patient comfort. (WA14, 62, 72, 76, 84, 85)

Context Specific, dealing health information associated with particular health settings such as refugee health, emergency and post-natal care. (VIC1, 18, 42b, 61)



bilingual words and phrases

VIC1	<i>Multilingual guide for emergency care.</i> Ambulance Services Victoria	42b	<i>I would like a place to pray.</i> South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service
	Ambulance workers 7 languages		Communication card Prayer Room English/Arabic
13	<i>Untitled</i> Producer unknown (HCIS -W 058)	43	<i>We need to have your urinary bladder full in order to perform an ultrasound examination. Is your bladder full?</i> South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service
	X-ray Department 12 A5 laminated cards 12 languages		
14	<i>List of Words for Communicating with Patients with Poor English</i> Produced by Nursing Unit Manager, details withheld.		Radiology Department A4 sheet 5 languages
	Nursing Ward communication A4 photocopy English/Greek	50	<i>Suctioning: This will help you cough and breathe better...</i> South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service.
18	Baby Care Ethnic Obstetric Liaison Unit South Western Sydney Area Health Service		Patient information card Physiotherapy 5 Languages
	Nursing Ward communication Double sided A4 English/Vietnamese	60	<i>List of Medication Instructions</i> SWSAHS, HCIS and Operation Safe Haven, 2000
18a	<i>Post Natal care of Mother</i> Ethnic Obstetric Liaison Unit South Western Sydney Area Health Service		Comprehensive list of pharmacy labels and instructions Twelve A4 pages English/Albanian
	Nursing Ward communication Double sided A4 English/Vietnamese	61	<i>Untitled</i> SWSAHS, HCIS and Operation Safe Haven, 2000
			Medical questions and phrases One A4 page English/Albanian
38	<i>Common Phrases to Assess Brain Injury</i> South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service.	62	<i>Untitled</i> SWSAHS, HCIS
	A4 Sheet 15 Languages		Nursing ward communications 12 A4 pages 16 languages

bilingual words and phrases

- 72 *A Patient Staff Communication Aids while Awaiting the Arrival of the Interpreter.*
New England Medical Center, Interpreter Service, 1997
- Health related phrases
12 page booklets,
7 languages.
- 76 *Untitled*
Producer Unknown (HCIS - W - 043)
- Nursing
Ward communications
A5 Card,
English/Polish
- 84 *Untitled*
Producer - anonymous English Speaking nurse and Cantonese patient.
Submitted by nursing unit manager, details withheld
- Nursing
Ward communications
Hand made
A4 Sheet
English/Cantonese.
- 85 *Untitled*
Submitted by details withheld.
- Numbers, alphabet and happy and sad faces
A4 photocopies

multilingual signs

The examples of multilingual signs collected through the course of the project are as diverse in style as they are in content and purpose. The majority were sourced from public hospitals with only a few examples from community health services. Generally health care facilities develop comprehensive signage in line with NSW Health guidelines, Signposting for Health Care Facilities, NSW Health. Translations are conducted by professional translators and languages are chosen based on local needs.

The signs in this collection have been divided into three categories based on the purpose of the communication:

Facility Signs concerned with identifying areas within the facility and instructions about the associated behaviours or procedures within the facility. (41, 47a, 47b, 40, 79, 78, 42b, 46, 93, 95)

Patient Care Signs convey information important to a patient's care to both visitors and other health care professionals and are generally located in or around patient care areas such as wards. (54, 59, 48, 94)

Safety Signs alert clients, staff or visitors to a potential hazard associated with a particular piece of equipment, an area within the facility or a procedure. (92, 44, 39, 58, 49, 45)



multilingual signs

<p>WA15 Health Information in Your Language The Health Department of West Australia, Reproduced by The Health Translation Service NSW Health, 1991.</p> <p>Interpreter service sign Waiting rooms and reception areas. 18 Languages</p>	<p>45 If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant, inform the person..... South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service.</p> <p>Radiation Department Sign 15 Languages</p>
<p>39 Sunscreen Lotion SPF 30+ South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service.</p> <p>Swimming Centre Sign Sunscreen instructions. 7 languages.</p>	<p>46 BIRTHING UNIT: Strictly no visitors. Labouring women and support persons only. South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service</p> <p>Door Sign Birthing Unit 3 languages</p>
<p>40 Please report to the receptionist before taking a seat in the waiting room. South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service.</p> <p>Waiting rooms and reception areas 7 Languages</p>	<p>47a The Removal of Hospital Property From this Hospital is STRICTLY PROHIBITED OFFENDERS WILL BE PROSECUTED. South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service</p> <p>Facility Sign Maternity Ward 4 languages</p>
<p>41 Please note that....you may have to wait a few minutes for the nurse to open the door. South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service.</p> <p>Entrance Door Early Childhood Service 7 Languages</p>	<p>47b PLEASE PUT SOILED "PADS" IN YELLOW PLASTIC BINS THANKYOU South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service</p> <p>Facility Sign Maternity Ward 4 languages</p>
<p>42a Muslim Prayer Room South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service</p> <p>Prayer Room Door English/Arabic</p>	<p>48 Patient Menu: Helal Meals South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service</p> <p>Hospital Food Services Hospital Wards 4 languages</p>
<p>44 WARNING Electrical Stimulation Treatment. South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service</p> <p>Safety sign Physiotherapy 17 languages</p>	<p>49 Warning for Tilt Table: If you feel sick or dizzy.... South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service.</p> <p>Caution sign Physiotherapy 5 Languages</p>

multilingual signs

52	<p>Health Care Interpreter Service: A free and confidential interpreter service is available 24 hours 7 days a week. Ask the staff to arrange an interpreter for you. South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service</p> <p>Hospital waiting rooms and reception areas. 32 languages</p>	59c	<p>FREE FLUIDS ONLY. South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service</p> <p>Bed Signs Hospital wards 5 languages</p>
54	<p>No thin drinks/soup allowed due to swallowing difficulty..... South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service.</p> <p>Swallowing disorder caution sign. In patients, visitors and staff 6 Languages</p>	78	<p>Thank you for not smoking at this table. Australian Chinese Community Association and QUIT</p> <p>Cardboard table stands. No smoking areas Chinese/English</p>
58a	<p>ICE THERAPY South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service</p> <p>Occupational Health and Safety Sign Physiotherapy Department 6 languages</p>	79	<p>Please Don't Smoke Drug and Alcohol Services South Western Sydney Area Health Service</p> <p>Sticker No smoking areas Vietnamese/English</p>
58b	<p>HEAT THERAPY South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service</p> <p>Occupational Health and Safety Sign Physiotherapy Department 6 languages</p>	92	<p>If You Could Be Pregnant Please Let Us Know Before Being X-Rayed. Sydney Hospital</p> <p>Wall sign X-ray department 4 languages</p>
59a	<p>NIL BY MOUTH, South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service</p> <p>Bed Signs Hospital wards 5 languages</p>	93	<p>Admissions Please Take a Seat Sydney Hospital</p> <p>Admissions Waiting room sign 10 languages</p>
59b	<p>CLEAR FLUIDS ONLY South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service</p> <p>Bed Signs Hospital wards 5 languages</p>	94	<p>NOTICE Wash Your Hands Sydney Hospital</p> <p>Hospital Wards Wash basins on wards 11 languages</p>
		95	<p>Directional Information The New Childrens Hospital - Westmead</p> <p>Computer touch screen Main entrance 6 languages</p>

symbols

Signposting For Health Care Facilities, (NSW Health, 1994), encourages the use of symbols as part of an integrated, rational sign system aimed at helping to overcome language difficulties and assist the identification of services. The same guidelines recommend that, where possible, the use of symbols be restricted to those included in Standards Australia publications, which provide universal symbols as well as recommendations for size, colour, location and, where appropriate, accompanying text.

The symbols collected during the course of the project are, as expected, largely Australian Standard symbols. The two exceptions to the Standards were a needle exchange symbol in use in the ACT and the National Association of Accredited Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) symbol.

The number of Australian Standard Symbols relevant to health services is too great to list each one individually, most can be found in the following three Australian Standards publications:

- Symbols - Health Care in Hospitals (AS 2786 - 1985) which includes symbols for Admissions, Casualty, Dental, Occupational Therapy, Outpatients, Pathology, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, and X-ray. (89)
- Safety Signs for the Occupational Environment (AS 1319) - 1994) which include symbols for Prohibition Signs (e.g. "smoking prohibited"), Mandatory Signs (e.g. "eye protection must be worn"), Hazard Signs (e.g. "Fire Risk") and Emergency Information Signs (e.g. "First Aid"). (91)
- Public Information Symbol Signs Part 1 - General Information Signs (AS 2899.1 - 1986) which includes a large number of symbols in commonly use in all public access areas identifying disabled access areas, elevators, public toilets etc. (90)

The individual symbols within each publication are 'public domain' and can be used freely.

The process for the development and use of non-Standard symbols such as the NAATI and the needle exchange symbols are clearly outlined in both Signposting for Health Care Facilities, (NSW Health 1994) and Development, Testing and Implementation of Information and Safety Symbols and Symbolic Signs (Australian Standard, AS 2342 -1992)



symbols

- ACT1 *Sharps Hotline 132281*
ACT Department of Urban Services
- Stickers
Syringe disposal containers.
English
- 73 *NAATI Interpreter Symbol*
National Accreditation Authority For Translators and Interpreters and Centre For Teaching and Research Design, 1998.
- Waiting rooms, reception areas, other public access areas
- 89 *Symbols- Health Care in Hospitals*
Standards Australia, AS 2786 - 1985
- Australian standard symbols for signage in health care settings including symbols for; Admissions, Casualty, Dental, Occupational Therapy, Outpatients Department, Pathology, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, X-ray
- 90 *Public Information Symbol Signs, Part 1 - For General Information Signs*
Standards Australia, AS 2899 .1 - 1986
- Includes symbols for public facilities such as toilets, waiting rooms, elevators and disabled access
- 91 *Safety Signs for the Occupational Environment*
Standards Australia AS 1319 - 1994
- Australian standard symbols for signage in the workplace and public buildings, includes symbols for Prohibition Signs, Mandatory Signs, Hazard Signs, Emergency Information Signs, Danger Signs

alerting the system

The miscellaneous communication tools collected under the category of Alerting the System are those that aim to draw the attention of all parties to the need for language assistance. The health care worker is alerted to the fact that a particular client may require an interpreter, the service user is alerted to the fact that free and confidential interpreter services are available and how to proceed. Communication tools in this category include:

- Wallet Cards produced at Commonwealth, State and Local levels, carried by the service user and shown to the service provider, drawing attention to the need for an interpreter and giving brief instructions on how to proceed. (81a, 55, QLD4, 83)

- Interpreter Service Posters and Signs in multiple languages, usually displayed near reception or admissions areas inform the non-English speaking service user that an interpreter service is available. (52, WA15)

- Language Identification Charts shown to non-English speaking service users who identify the language they require assistance in. (81a, 36)

- Client File Stickers, placed on all files and documents associated with a particular client, draw attention to the need for an interpreter, the language required and the interpreter service number. (WA12, WA 1)

- Check Lists, in English and one other language, left inside a patients file or near the patients bedside alert carers and visitors alike to the communication needs of the patient, associated with more complex communication needs such as speech disorders. (3, 7)



alerting the system

WA1	<p><i>LANGUAGE ALERT; Language Spoken</i> Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital</p> <p>Sticker Patient/Client files English</p>	55	<p><i>I require the assistance on an "... " Interpreter.</i> South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service.</p> <p>Wallet Card 21 languages</p>
QLD4	<p><i>I Need and Interpreter</i> Queensland Government Bureau of Ethnic Affairs Department of Community Services</p> <p>Client Wallet Card English</p>	81a	<p><i>TIS Wallet Card</i> Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs Translating and Interpreting Service</p> <p>Client wallet card Interpreter Service Phone number English</p>
3	<p><i>Helping with Communication</i> Speech Pathology Department - Lidcombe Hospital and The Health Translation Service</p> <p>A4 Sheet Patients Bedside English 7 languages</p>	81b	<p><i>Language Card: Please indicate which language you speak and we will try to obtain an interpreter to help us</i> Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs Translating and Interpreting Service</p> <p>Card Language identification 23 languages</p>
7	<p><i>Helping With Swallowing</i> Speech Pathology Department - Lidcombe Hospital and The Health Translation Service</p> <p>A4 Sheet Patients Bedside English 7 languages</p>	NT83	<p><i>I need an interpreter. I speak</i> Northern Territory Government Office of Ethnic Affairs</p> <p>Client wallet card English</p>
WA12	<p><i>INTERPRETER REQUIRED</i> Fremantle Hospital and Health Service</p> <p>Sticker Patient/Client files English</p>		
36	<p><i>Health Care Interpreter Service Language Identification Chart</i> South Western Sydney Area Health Service Health Care Interpreter Service.</p> <p>Health Facility Sign 70 languages</p>		

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