

# Multicultural health-culturally responsive practice and working with interpreters

Zoom webinar – 30 June 2025, 7pm-8pm

# Acknowledgement of traditional owners


We acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional owners and ongoing custodians of the land on which we are meeting today. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We would also like to acknowledge Aboriginal people who are joining us today.



# Learning outcomes

After this session, I will be able to:

- Increase understanding of culturally responsive practice in health care
  - Identify situations where you need an interpreter
  - Increase confidence in working with interpreters
  - Develop skills to improve cross cultural communication
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# Some housekeeping

- Tonight's webinar is being recorded.
- Please use the Zoom Q&A feature to ask questions.
- Where necessary we will take questions on notice.
- At the end of the webinar your browser will automatically open an evaluation survey. We appreciate you taking the time to complete this to help us improve our events programme.
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<https://www.primaryhealthtas.com.au/for-health-professionals/events/>

# Presenter

- Ms Aimen Jafri





# Cultural competence in healthcare: Enhancing care for diverse communities in Tasmania.

June 2025  
Aimen Jafri



# Tasmania's cultural diversity landscape

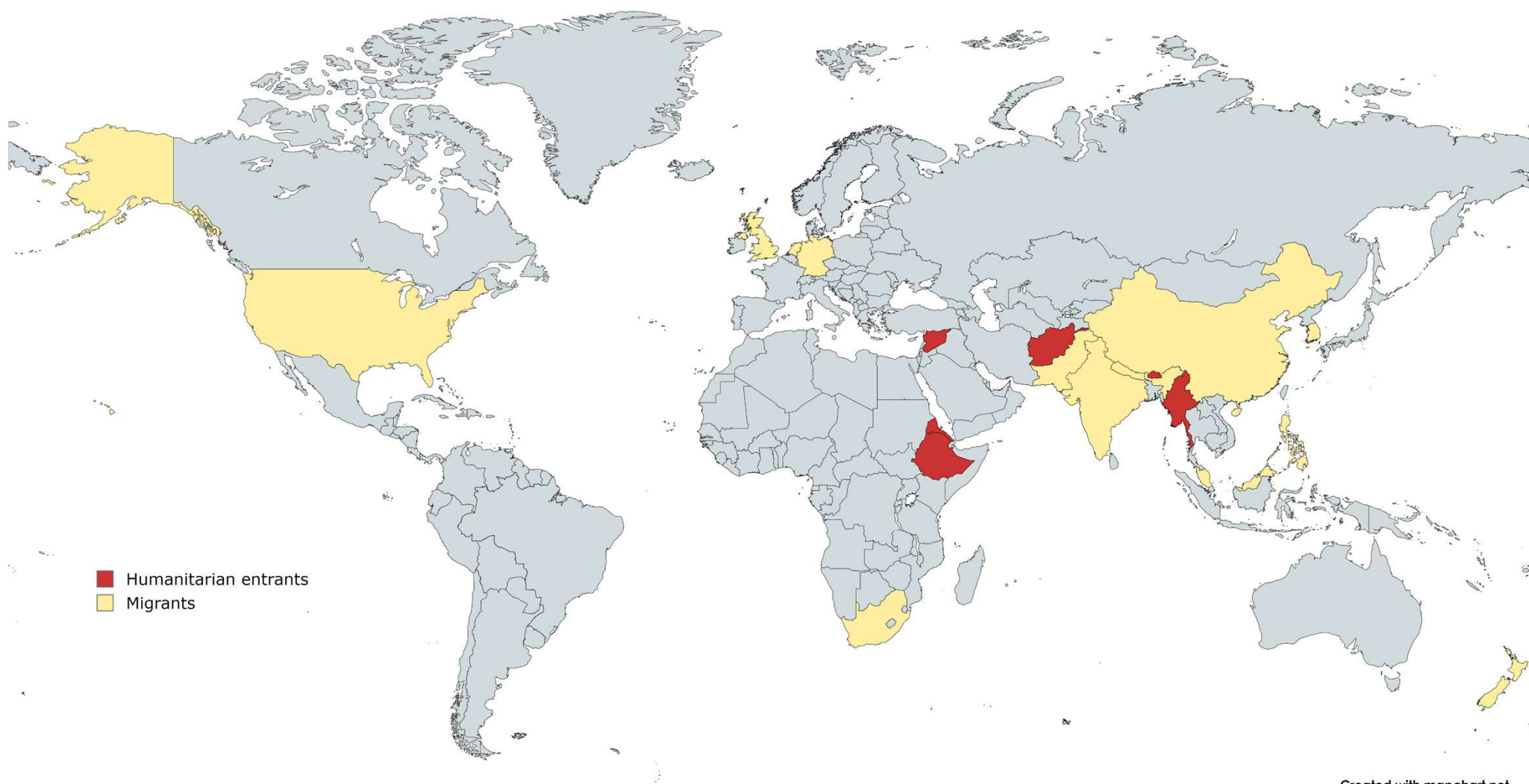
20% people  
were born  
overseas

More than 260  
different  
ancestries

More than 170  
languages, other  
than English are  
spoken

14% of people  
speak a  
language other  
than English







# Migration pathways and health implications

## Refugee pathway (Subclass 200)

- Name: Amir
- Arrived from: Syrian refugee camp
- Visa: Humanitarian
- Medicare: Eligible
- Private Insurance: Optional
- Medical History: Often limited pre arrival healthcare. May have chronic conditions, potential infectious diseases.
- He experiences post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and has limited knowledge of Western healthcare systems.
- Despite full Medicare eligibility, he faces significant language barriers and may be hesitant to disclose trauma history.
- Significant health risk from country of origin: War related injuries, chronic pain syndrome, TB, hepatitis A & E, polio and measles, renal failure



# Migration pathways and health implications

## Skilled migration (Subclass 498-491)

- Name: Wei
- Arrived from: China
- Visa: Skilled Migrant
- Medicare: Eligible – depending upon visa
- Private Insurance: compulsory
- Medical History: May present with "Western" lifestyle-related issues (sedentary work, diet change). Potential for untreated chronic conditions from home (e.g., dental, vision). Different cultural understanding of mental health.
- Familiar with formal healthcare systems but may expect different doctor-patient dynamics (e.g., more hierarchical, expectation of prescriptions/tests).
- Significant health risk from country: hypertension, diabetes, stroke, TB, hepatitis B, H Pylori, Cancer risk, mental health



# Culturally responsive healthcare practice

- An **ongoing commitment** to understanding how culture shapes experiences, and adapting care to be respectful, effective, and equitable.
- For **individual practitioners**, it means developing specific communication skills, building knowledge about common cultural health beliefs, and practicing cultural humility.



# Barriers to healthcare access for CALD communities

## Communication barriers

- Language differences and lack of interpreter access

## Health literacy challenges

- Unaware of the health systems, prevention, chronic disease management

## Cultural misunderstandings

- Different health beliefs and practices, concept of illness, treatment, mental health, family roles, modesty



# Barriers to healthcare access for CALD communities

## Financial barriers

- Especially for temporary visa holders, fear of cost deter care

## Discrimination and mistrust

- Past negative experiences

## Structural barriers

- Medicare limitations, transportation and costs



# Understanding culture

Understanding a patient's cultural background involves recognising both visible and invisible aspects of culture.

Healthcare interactions are particularly affected by deep cultural elements such as:

- Different understandings of disease etiology,
- Attitudes toward preventive care,
- Expectations about provider-patient relationships.

***Recognising these differences without judgment is essential for effective care.***





# THE CULTURAL ICEBERG

## SURFACE CULTURE

Food  
Flags Festivals  
Fashion Holidays Music  
Performances Dances Games  
Arts & Crafts Literature Language

## DEEP CULTURE

### Communications Styles and Rules:

Facial Expressions Gestures Eye Contact  
Personal Space Touching Body Language  
Conversational Patterns in Different Social Situations  
Handling and Displaying of Emotion  
Tone of Voice

### Notions of:

Courtesy and Manners  
Friendship Leadership  
Cleanliness Modesty  
Beauty

### Concepts of:

Self Time Past and Future  
Fairness and Justice  
Roles related to Age, Sex,  
Class, Family, etc.

### Attitudes toward:

Elders Adolescents Dependents  
Rule Expectations Work Authority  
Cooperation vs. Competition  
Relationships with Animals Age  
Sin Death

### Approaches to:

Religion Courtship Marriage  
Raising Children Decision-Making  
Problem Solving



# Key elements of responsive healthcare practice

## **Cultural Assessment:**

- Gather relevant cultural information without stereotyping

## **Self-Awareness:**

- Recognise your own cultural lens & biases.

## **Respect:**

- Value diverse beliefs and practices without judgment.

## **Communication:**

- Use plain language, active listening, check understanding. Support patients in making choices.



# Culturally responsive practice

- Do not assume people from the same cultural heritage are the same
- Do not assume health/education/child safety literacy or understanding of systems
- Ensure consent or permission is based on clear understanding
- Allowance for differing attitudes to time and punctuality
- Understand expectations of prescription and tests



# Culturally sensitive health care

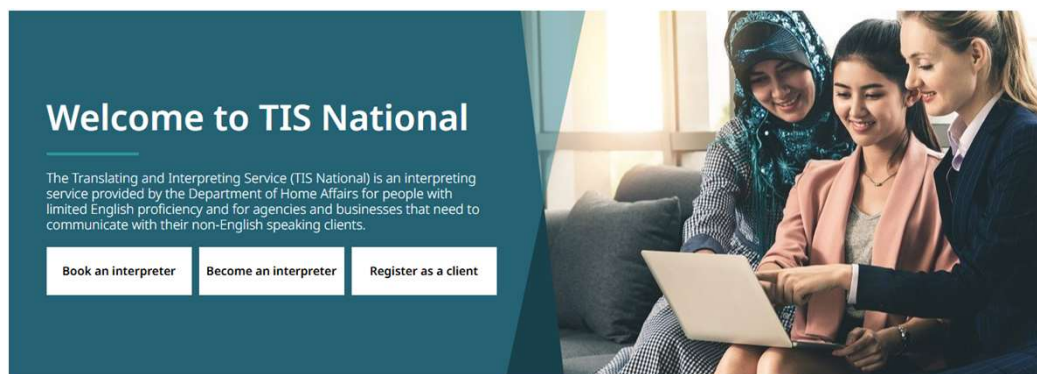
- Family members will often attend to support wives/mothers/parents
- Understand cultural and religious norms around gender
- Be prepared for cultural sensitivities around some women's health and reproductive issues
- Be sensitive to presence of children
- Be aware of differences in communication practices and styles
- Understand when and how to use interpreters effectively



# Free Interpreting Services: TIS National 131 450

Private medical practitioners can use the Free Interpreting Service to access interpreting services delivered by TIS National, including:

- [Immediate phone interpreting](#)
- [Automated Telephone Interpreting Service \(ATIS\)](#)
- [pre-booked phone interpreting](#)
- [on-site interpreting](#)
- [video remote interpreting](#).



# Working effectively with interpreters

## When Do You NEED an Interpreter?

### ALWAYS when:

- Patient requests one
- Limited English Proficiency (LEP) is observed
- Complex history/diagnosis/treatment is discussed
- Informed consent is required
- Sensitive topics (mental health, DV, sexual health) are addressed.
- Discharge instructions
- Medication management





# Assessing the need for an interpreter

- Patients' ability to communicate in English (**Don't assume that people will feel comfortable to ask even if they need help**)
- Purpose of the communication and complexity of information to be conveyed.
- Patients' ability to effectively communicate in a stressful or unfamiliar environment.
- Whether the patient prefers to communicate in another language even though they can communicate in English.
- Health / tiredness / stress



# Risks of using family and children as interpreters

## Using family and children to interpret is not appropriate in healthcare settings

- Accuracy – no guaranteed information will be understood or clearly presented
- Potentially undermines agency
- impartiality risks
- Cultural mores around certain conditions
- Family might choose to change information (e.g. not reveal severity of illness)
- Potential for disclosure that can impact family relations



# Working effectively with interpreters

- Consider country of origin not just language (e.g. Farsi)
- Gender appropriateness for sensitive topics
- Be aware of potential cultural or political conflicts
- Be aware that some communities are small, raising confidentiality concerns (Ask for interstate interpreters)
- Be aware of body language, and appropriate communication

**YOU CAN ALWAYS REQUEST A NEW  
INTERPRETER**



# Working effectively with interpreters

***Always speak in first person directly to the patient, not the interpreter***

- Maintain eye contact with patient
- Use short phrases and leave pauses
- Clear simple English where possible
- Normal tone of voice
- Ask for clarification if needed
- confirm understanding with teach back principles
- Allow extra time for interpreted sessions



# Teach Back Technique

- Clinician or worker explains to the patient a new concept, diagnosis or treatment plan in small chunks.
- Client explains, or ‘teaches back’, what was said.
- If the patient cannot show that they have understood, the worker explains in a different way and again asks the patient to teach-back.

The cycle of explaining and checking continues until the clinician is confident in the patient’s understanding.



# Cross-cultural communication





# Culture and communication styles



<b>Low-Context</b>	Good communication is precise, simple, and clear. Messages are expressed and understood at face value. Repetition is appreciated if it helps clarify the communication.
<b>High-Context</b>	Good communication is sophisticated, nuanced, and layered. Messages are both spoken and read between the lines. Messages are often implied but not plainly expressed.

From Erin Meyer's The Cultural Map



# Strategies for cross-cultural communication



**Minimize Jargon:** Use plain English.



**Active Listening:** Summarise, paraphrase. "So, what I hear you saying is..."



**Ask Open & Culturally Sensitive Questions:** "Tell me about..." "How do you understand this problem?" "What treatments have you tried?"



**Use Teach-Back:** "Can you explain back to me what we just discussed?"



**Be Aware of Non-Verbals:** Eye contact, gestures, personal space can vary.



**Silence is Okay:** Allows thinking, interpretation.



# Culturally competent practice

## For Reception staff / checklist for waiting room

- Display multilingual welcome signs - Don't assume English proficiency
- Use visual aids for check-in procedures
- Maintain a list of interpreter contacts
- Allow extra time for appointments with CALD patients
- Create a welcoming waiting area with diverse reading materials
- Use images reflecting diversity
- Create a friendly and inclusive environment
- Consider diverse needs (prayer space?).



# Culturally competent practice

## For Clinical Providers

- Practice active listening without interruption
- Explain the reason behind medical questions
- Respect different concepts of time and family involvement
- Use teach-back techniques to confirm understanding
- Acknowledge cultural healing practices respectfully
- Seeing multiple family members



# Key takeaways & commitment

- Understanding migration pathways builds empathy and informs care.
- Culture profoundly impacts health beliefs and experiences (Iceberg!).
- Culturally Responsive Practice is an ongoing commitment, not a checklist.
- Professional Interpreters are **NON-NEGOTIABLE** for safe, effective care with LEP patients.
- Mitigate Bias: Slow down, individuate, reflect.
- Small changes in communication and environment make a **BIG** difference.
- **Commitment:** *"What is ONE action you will take to enhance cultural responsiveness in your practice this week?"*



# Questions & Resources

PHT Multicultural health resources

[Resources in languages other than English \(written and audio\) | Women's Health Tasmania](#)

TIS National (Free Interpreter Booking): 131 450







# Thank you

[www.mrctas.org.au](http://www.mrctas.org.au)

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**migrant  
resource  
centre**

TASMANIA

# Online resources

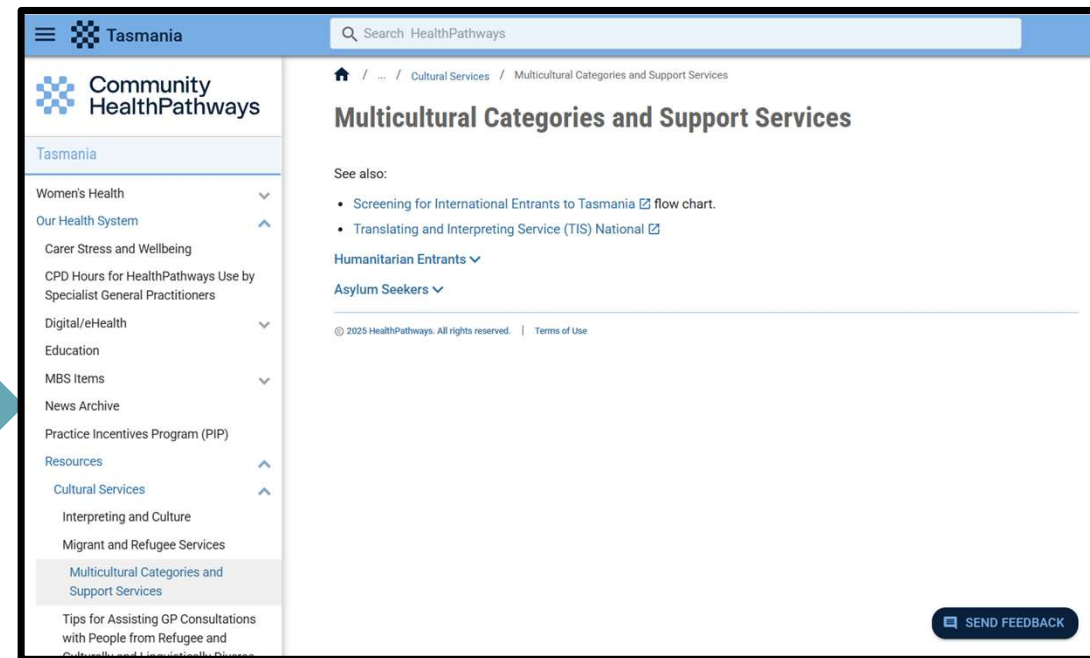
- For health professionals
  - **Guide to working with interpreters**
  - **‘Multicultural health ready’ checklist**
  - **Culture counts poster and fact sheet**
  - **Case studies**
- Multicultural health - Primary Health Tasmania



**Tasmanian HealthPathways** is a web-based information portal developed by Primary Health Tasmania. It is designed to help primary care clinicians plan local patient care through primary, community and secondary healthcare systems.



**[tasmania.communityhealthpathways.org](http://tasmania.communityhealthpathways.org)**



**tasmania.communityhealthpathways.org**


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- Statements of attendance will be emailed to participants.
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**Thank you**

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