

SPECIALIST MEDICAL INTERPRETERS FOR THE SYDNEY 2000 GAMES

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The provision of language services has been an integral part of previous Olympic Games, but the Sydney 2000 Games will be the first Games in Olympic history to be supported by specialist professional medical interpreters.¹ To facilitate communication with members of the Olympic Family (athletes, officials and the volunteer workforce serving the Games) and spectators, specialist medical interpreters will be available to SOCOG medical staff at the Olympic Village Polyclinic and other Olympic and Paralympic competition and non-competition venues. The Olympic Medical Interpreter Service (OMIS) will be responsible for providing all medical interpreter services, drawing on the existing NSW Health Care Interpreter Service (HCIS) network of interpreters.

NSW HEALTH CARE INTERPRETER SERVICE

The NSW Health Care Interpreter Service is the largest on-site interpreter service provider in Australia. It was established in 1977 to meet the health needs of ethnic communities, and to improve their access to public health facilities. Its high quality professional interpreter service is provided on a 24-hour seven-day-a-week basis to all facilities within the NSW public health system. The HCIS network spans eight area health services, including rural NSW, and employs the equivalent of 186 full-time staff and approximately 850 sessional-contract interpreters. During 1998–1999 it provided 330,626 occasions of service in 98 languages, predominantly to hospitals (outpatients and inpatients), community health centres and early childhood centres.² The most common method of service delivery is face-to-face interpreting, with back-up telephone interpreting provided in emergencies by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs Translation and Interpreter Service (TIS).

HCIS interpreters have recognised qualifications from the National Accreditation Authority of Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) and undertake ongoing professional development in medical terminology, mental health, and other areas of health, to equip them to work in the diverse range of health care settings in the NSW public health system.

All health care providers working in NSW public health facilities are bound by the NSW Health Department policy, *Standard Procedures for the Use of Health Care Interpreters*, Circular 94/10,³ to ensure that non-English speaking clients with English language difficulties have access to professional health care interpreters when attending public health facilities.

MEDICAL INTERPRETER SERVICE PROVISION DURING THE SYDNEY 2000 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

Under a contractual arrangement between SOCOG and the NSW Department of Health, the OMIS will be the sole provider of medical interpreter services at the Olympic Village Polyclinic (a comprehensive assessment and emergency care clinic) and all competition and non-competition Olympic and Paralympic venues where the SOCOG medical program will operate.

All OMIS staff and contract interpreters have been recruited from within the current HCIS. Furthermore, existing HCIS criteria for employment have been applied in selecting staff and contractors, including: NAATI accreditation, completion of medical terminology training and adequate experience in interpreting in the public health system. All OMIS staff will undergo a brief orientation program before the Games.

The OMIS will operate from the Polyclinic within the Olympic Village between the hours of 7.30 a.m. and 10.30 p.m. seven days per week between 2 September and the closing of the Paralympic Athletes' Village on 1 November. On-site interpreters will be present to provide services in the Arabic, French, Cantonese–Mandarin, Russian and Spanish languages. Approximately 68 additional languages will be provided for by sessional-contract medical interpreters by telephone to the Polyclinic and all other SOCOG venue-based medical facilities.

The existing area HCIS will provide interpreters if a patient is transferred from any SOCOG venue to a NSW hospital.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Data on medical interpreter activity will be provided to the Health Olympic Coordinating Centre on a daily basis during the Games. To assist planning for future Games, a comprehensive report on the OMIS will be prepared at the conclusion of the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

REFERENCES

1. Chesher, Terry. *Health Care Interpreting for Sydney 2000. A review of language services organisation and utilisation during the Barcelona and Atlanta Olympics to assist NSW Health in planning for the support of the Sydney 2000 Games by the Health Care Interpreter Service*. Report to NSW Department of Health 1997. Unpublished
2. NSW Department of Health Ethnic Affairs Priority Statement Report (EAPS). 1998–99.
3. NSW Health Department. *Standard Procedures for Use of Health Care Interpreter Services Circular 94/10*. ☒