

# INTERPRETING OLDER AUSTRALIANS' NEEDS CULTURAL & LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE



Australian-Polish Community Services and Polish  
Professional Interpreters' view

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# Outline

- Communication and how does it happen
- Why we should bother with interpreters and ethno specific community services
- Statistics on 'Old Folks' in Australia with focus on Polish older persons
- Historical truths about communication with older CALD Australians
- DHS Language Link (response to aiding in communication between services providers and CALD Australians)
- The age factor (dementia, reverting to languages learnt at a young age)
- The level of education factor (diverse levels of education within the same ethnic group)
- The importance of being earnest in understanding older CALD Australians



# Communication and how does it happen

- Basic communication principle: the meaning is not in the message;  
**the meaning is in the persons who are communicating.**



# Communication and how does it happen cont.

- Every message has two levels:
  - *content* and
  - *relationship*.

The content level consists of what is actually said and made up primarily of the verbal code....the relationship level is often established more by how a statement is made (non-verbal cues) than by what is said (verbal cues)<sup>1</sup>.

1. Stech and Ratliffe (1985)



## Why we should bother with interpreters and ethno specific community services

- Ultimately it is about the 'fair go' concept synonymous to many with the essence of Australian philosophy
- It is also about the equality in accessibility of information to all clients and professionals



# Why we should bother with interpreters and ethno specific community services cont

- Ethno-specific community organizations are treasuries of information on needs and aspirations of older CALD Australians, capable, given the resources and opportunity, to deliver invaluable culturally and linguistically appropriate services



# Why we should bother with interpreters and ethno specific community services

- It is becoming and should be encouraged as best practice to involve staff of main stream service providers in ethno-cultural training sessions and the use of professional interpreters. (spleen)
- The 'Old Folks will not go down quietly' should be the motto of all CALD Australians; their numbers are growing and it is time now to prepare for the future
- Lets see the statistics

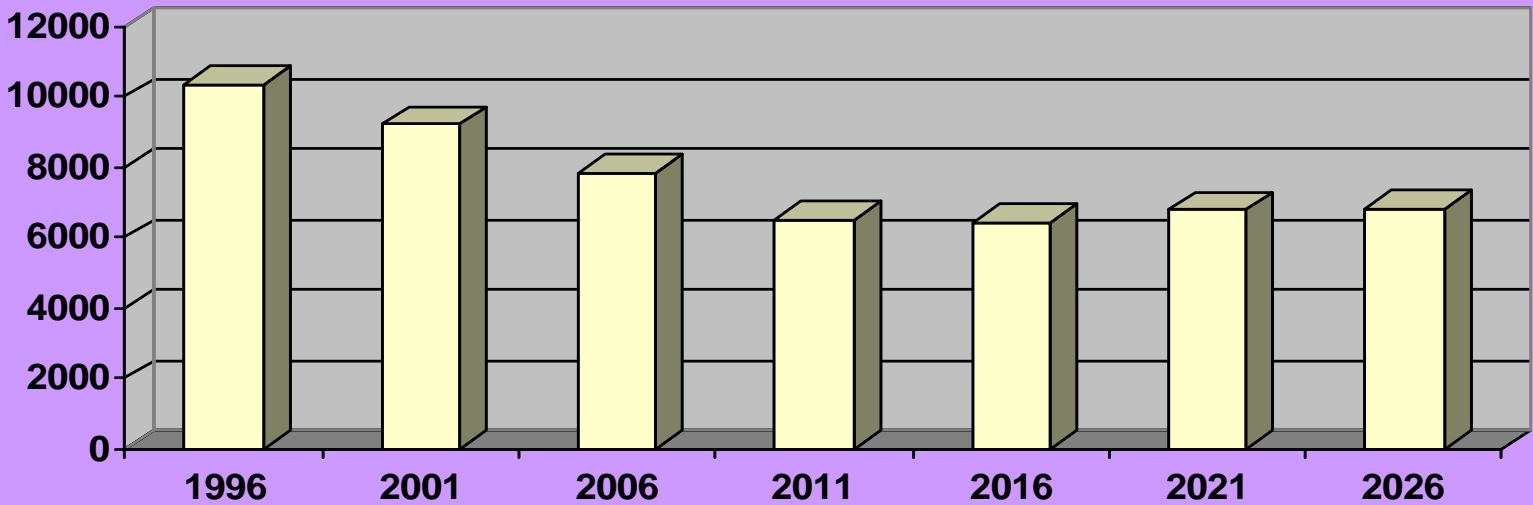


# Statistics on 'Old Folks' in Australia with focus on Polish older persons

- The number of older persons aged 65 or older in Australia was estimated to be 2.6 million, or around 13% of the total population (ABS 2005).
- The proportion of older people is projected to increase over time to 26% in 2051, and to 27% in 2101 (ABS 2005).



# Projections for Polish 65+ in Victoria



Western Metropolitan Region	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021	2026
65+ Polish	10,356	9,212	7,851	6,540	6,451	6,781	6,846

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2001



# Historical truths about communication with older CALD Australians

- Historically it has been common practice to use family members sometimes young children to interpret their parents' and grandparents' issues to doctors, housing, financial or other officials
- The lay person's/child's vocabulary would not be sufficient to cope with the majority of the pressing issues, the parent's/grandparent's role as the authority and source of knowledge would often suffer loss of respect
- 'Ask the children...' attitude to obtaining information on their elderly parents wishes, needs and hopes is also changing to a more inclusive way of communication, where practitioners involve, as much as possible, their older CALD clients in the decision making process.



# DHS Language Link

- Late last year Minister Bronwyn Pike launched the long awaited unified system of booking interpreters using DHS Language Link
- Innovative idea, works well for larger organisations/service providers who are capable to forecast and book interpreters well ahead
- For smaller providers there is not much left in the kitty and often they have to go without or find interpreters through other sources
- There is no system to check how much funds is left to use the system by service providers who are eligible to use it; it serves first in.



# The age factor

- As we all know communication with older people is not equally easy
- Some older people stay very alert and active and easy to converse with
- Some due to illness, depression, dementia, WWII traumatic experiences, are very difficult to communicate with
- Add to that cultural and linguistic diversity and we have a real barrier



# The level of education factor

- Within the same ethnic groups there are differences in the level of education
- For example Polish migrants after the WWII had predominantly very low level of education but there were also some from very well educated intelligentsia
- Those Poles who came during the 1980s, after Solidarity movement had usually very high level of education or vocational skills and good knowledge of English



# The importance of being earnest in understanding older CALD Australians

- Professional interpreter will always facilitate good communication, that is interpret nuances, assist with explanations about cultural differences, barriers, appropriateness
- Older Poles, like many other older CALD persons often get by with conversing in English but lack completely in even rudimentary medical terminology or ability to describe pain and symptoms.
- Often they do not wish to appear needy or vulnerable and only ask for assistance when they needed it 'yesterday'



# The importance of being earnest in understanding older CALD Australians

- Admitting to pain especially for older Polish men is the same as dancing a classical ballet, often it will not happen
- In general, older Poles are not used to seeking help
- As an example I would like to talk about Mrs. Kowalski (same as Smith). I met her at a senior citizens club. She came up to me asking if I would help her find a place in a nursing home. As a HACCC access officer with the APCS I proposed an assessment of her needs at her home and in a week time we met at her place....

We all will be old some day,  
now is the time to make  
changes, improve  
communication and put  
services in place the way we  
would like to have them for our  
selves and our loved ones.



Lets work together.

To wszystko. Dziękuję.

That's all. Thank you.