



# health

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Department of Health  
**NORTHERN CAPE**

## Policy on Language

### *Version control*

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Responsible Manager : Provincial Manager - Communication

Approved by Head of

Department

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'G.E. Matlaopane', written over a horizontal line.

Date 18/03/14

G.E. Matlaopane

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## **Policy Aim**

1. The policy further seeks to adopt English as the working language for both intra and inter-departmental communication purposes; provided that where practically possible no person will be prevented from using the language of his or her preference.

## **Policy Scope**

2. This policy applies to all employees of the Northern Cape Department of Health, including all contracts with private service providers, non-governmental organisations and other agencies for the supply of services.
  - 2.1. The principles described herein are applicable to all forms of communication, including spoken and written.

## **Policy Statement**

3. In cognisance of the Constitution which states that:
  - 3.1. "The State may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth" and
  - 3.2. " Everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights", and
  - 3.3. "Everyone has the right of access to any information held by the state"
4. It is the policy of the Northern Cape Department of Health that:
  - 4.1. The day to day working language of record for both intra and interdepartmental communication purposes is English. Where practically possible no person will be prevented from using the language(s) of his or her preference.



- 4.2. For the purpose of conducting meetings or performing specific tasks every effort will be made to utilise language facilitation facilities such as translation and/or interpreting (consecutive and simultaneous, as well as whispered interpreting) where practically possible
- 4.3. Official correspondence with members of the public will, as far as is practically possible, be in the language of the citizen's choice.
- 4.4. Oral communication with members of the public will ideally take place in the preferred language of the target audience. If necessary, every effort will be made to utilise language facilitation facilities such as interpreting (consecutive, simultaneous, telephone and whispered interpreting) where practically possible.
- 4.5. Official publications (including leaflets and similar literature) will, as far as is practically possible, be in at least two of the languages most used in the locality. Taking into account issues of practicality, expense and the balance of the needs, official publications should ideally be produced in the four provincial languages most used in the province, namely English, Afrikaans, Setswana and isiXhosa.
- 4.6. International communication will normally be in English or ad hoc in the preferred language of the country concerned.
- 4.7. The Department will make the means available to assist and advise patients/ stakeholders in their language of choice at all clinical facilities.
- 4.8. In order to operationalise this policy, the Department will make full and proper use of the provincial government language unit (s) to manage:
  - a) Intra and interdepartmental oral communication;
  - b) Intra and interdepartmental written communication;
  - c) Oral communication with the public;
  - d) Written communication with the public and
  - e) International communication where applicable.
- 4.9. When using interpreting and translating services, the department will:
  - a) Acknowledge that there are minimum standards for using interpreters and translators to facilitate the delivery of services as well as minimise legal risks;
  - b) Use interpreters and translators who either accredited at the professional level or have obtained formal qualifications;

- c) Be responsible for ensuring clients are aware of the availability of interpreting and translating services and are encouraged to use these as a means of improving access to departmental services; and
- d) Ensure that client and patient confidentiality is maintained by all interpreters and translators.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **5. The Provincial Manager - Communications will:**

- 5.1. Facilitate and coordinate the implementation of this policy with the Provincial Language Unit who will provide the translation, editing, interpreting, language training and terminology development services.
- 5.2. Conduct regular language surveys and audits to assess the appropriateness of the existing policy and practices of the department and make recommendations for improvements;
- 5.3. Report annually via the Provincial Language Unit to the relevant language control bodies; e.g. the National Language Forum and PanSALB, on progress with the implementation of the policy;
- 5.4. Promote good language management for efficient public service administration to meet clients' expectations and needs.

### **6. Health Establishment Managers will ensure that, as far as is practically possible:**

- 6.1. The team on duty at any given time incorporates the four provincial languages;
- 6.2. All communication with patients/ clients is in their preferred language;
- 6.3. No patient/ client is refused assistance because she / he is hearing impaired;
- 6.4. In serious and life threatening situations, where competent interpreters may not be readily available within clinically appropriate timeframes, that an accompanying adult family member or friend or bilingual health professional assists in the interpretation;
- 6.5. Provide an alternative interpreter where possible if a client prefers to utilise services of a particular interpreter.

7. All **Senior Managers** will ensure that, as far as is practically possible:

- 7.1. The Department fulfils its responsibilities in promoting multilingualism in the province where possible;
- 7.2. Employees are allowed to work in the languages regulated by this policy;
- 7.3. Employees have access to language training and development opportunities.

### **Review and Distribution**

- 8. The Provincial Manager - Communications is the responsible Manager for this policy and for ensuring it is reviewed and updated.
- 9. This Policy will be reviewed within 3 years after the publishing date. If necessary an update version will be issued, if not a formal cover letter will be issued (providing a date indicating that the policy was reviewed).
- 10. The Director for Policy & Planning will distribute updated versions to:
  - Member of the Executive Council for Health
  - Head of Department of Health
  - All Chief Directors, Directors, Deputy Directors, Programme and District Managers (who will in turn distribute to their staff as appropriate.)

### **Acknowledgements & Sources**

- 11. This policy draws upon the following legislation and guidance:
  - 11.1. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (No. 108 of 1996)
  - 11.2. The Pan South African Language Board Amendments Act (No 10 of 1999)
  - 11.3. Department of Arts and Culture: National Language Policy Framework (2003)
  - 11.4. National Department of Health: Policy on Language Services. 2001