

Language Service Provider (LSP) endorsement model: interim report

September 2025



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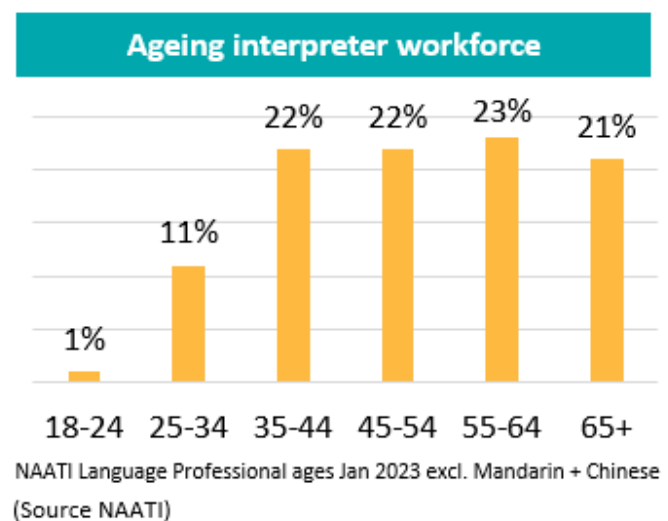
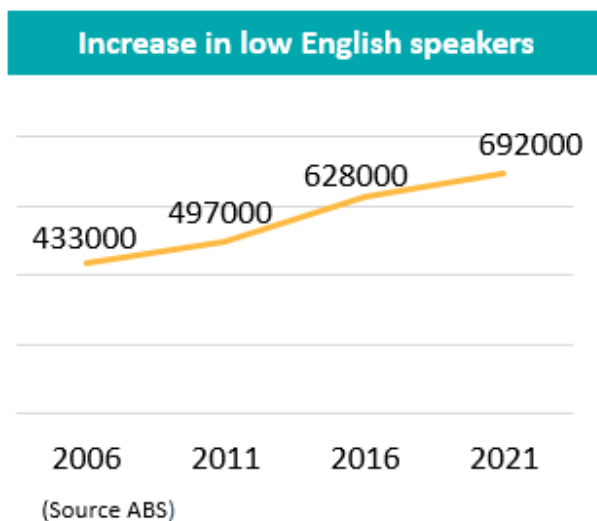
The following materials represent a portion of the information provided to Australian, state and territory government ministers for multicultural affairs in August 2025, to support their deliberations into the establishment of an LSP Endorsement Model.

Background

Language services are essential for equitable service delivery and social participation, enabling all levels of government to engage with Australians regardless of English proficiency. Today, more than 700,000 people over the age of five – or about three per cent of the population – have low or no English proficiency (2021 ABS Census). This number is growing. By 2033, there are expected to be over 877,000 individuals over five with low or no English proficiency.

While many individuals can improve their English language proficiency over time, some face lifelong language barriers. Even people with a functional level of English language proficiency may need language services in highly stressful, technical or high-risk situations¹, or as their language abilities decline with age or health.

The Problem: it has become harder today than any other time in recent history to find a skilled translator or interpreter. This is having serious consequences for individuals, and major productivity impacts for governments.



Government procurement practices are designed to foster competition, drive value for money, and improve service delivery. However, in the absence of remuneration standards, coordinated oversight, or regulation, these market-based approaches have had unintended consequences in the language services sector.

¹ For example, health, legal, emergency services and national security matters.

Contracts are often awarded to the lowest bidders, driving down pay and conditions for interpreters and translators. Combined with the high cost of obtaining and maintaining credentials, this has forced many qualified professionals out of the industry. Today, over 44% of NAATI-credentialed practitioners are aged 55 or older, while only 12% are under 35.

A 2023 Department of Home Affairs survey of 2,000 practitioners found that about 25% had no formal qualifications, and at least 20% held no NAATI credential. Additionally, of those who responded:

- 45% know of poor-quality interpreting in high-risk assignments (e.g. health and legal matters)
- 69% believe lack of regulation needs to be addressed
- 89% say poor remuneration is having a significant impact on the sector; and
- 60% wouldn't recommend a career to others, with 33% saying they'd leave in the next 2-5 years.

Current market structures and an absence of monitoring have meant that not all LSPs are incentivised to adhere to government language services policy expectations, including prioritising the engagement of NAATI-credentialed practitioners.

Low quality translating and interpreting is having a significant impact on individuals and governments.

Inadequate access to skilled interpreters and translators has serious consequences, including delays in service delivery, medical errors, miscommunication in legal settings, and poor decision making. These failures lead to higher costs such as prolonged hospital stays, and repeated court hearings. In some cases, even severe outcomes, such as death. The Australian Government's COVID-19 Response Inquiry Report² highlighted this risk, finding that mortality rates among CALD communities were 1.4 times higher than for Australian born individuals, with poor access to reliable information identified as a contributing factor.

Case Study 1: *"I came cross [sic] a woman who was holding a nearly newborn baby and holding coughing syrup in her hand in front of the Childers hospital chemist. I approached her and asked, 'what is wrong?' She said 'I have just a bottle of syrup and the interpreter told me give the baby whole bottle, if I do, I need to buy another bottle'."*³ – **Interpreter X.**

Advice to the Department of Home Affairs from Deloitte Access Economics in June 2025 estimates the costs to governments, individuals and societies associated with language services erosion, which includes poor quality services, and unmet demand, to have been between \$738 million - \$1.3 billion in 2023, with those costs estimated to potentially increase by a further 10% by 2033.

² <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/covid-19-response-inquiry-report.pdf>

³ 2023 Department of Home Affairs interpreter survey

Case Study 2: *“A trial by Jury had to be abandoned after poor interpreting by another interpreter led to the jury being dismissed. This came to light when I was asked to replace another interpreter on a different case, where it had become apparent that the previous interpreter had not been able to fully convey the testimony of a witness⁴.” Interpreter Y.*

The current state of the sector runs contrary to the Australian, state and territory government’s joint efforts going as far back as the 1970s, when NAATI was first established, to ensure language services were delivered in a timely and high-quality manner, by professionally qualified interpreters and translators.

The proposal – an LSP endorsement model

NAATI is jointly owned by the Australian, state and territory governments to set and maintain high national standards for the translating and interpreting sector. Its certification system is considered the industry standard for Australian translators and interpreters,⁵ and serves as a critical risk management and quality assurance framework. As governments are the largest purchasers of language services in Australia, they can exert major influence over the state of the sector.⁶⁷ A full draft of these measures is outlined at **Attachment A**.

Next steps

NAATI will establish an industry working group to detail and refine each measure. In parallel, NAATI would develop and operationalise an internal process for the endorsement of an LSP. NAATI Members (Australian, state and territory government ministers) will be asked, later in 2025, to give final agreement to implement the first phase of the LSP endorsement model.

NAATI anticipates the endorsement of LSPs to commence from January 2026. NAATI would evaluate the first phase of implementation across the 2026/27 financial year, with support from appropriately qualified professionals.

Broader structural reform not in scope

Language service quality and access is a key issue for Australia’s linguistically diverse communities, featuring prominently in Chapter 6 of the Multicultural Framework Review.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ As stated in the Multicultural Framework Review.

⁶ The Department of Home Affairs has estimated Australian, state and territory governments to have procured approximately \$1 billion on language services over the last five years.

The LSP endorsement model will go some way to addressing service consistency, but is not designed to address:

- a lack of standards governing minimum pay and conditions for translators and interpreters
- access to affordable formal training pathways
- the prevalence of private labour-hire arrangements in the absence of establishing and/or the full utilisation of in-house government owned language services
- the absence of enforceable rules or regulations to set broader standards or monitor service delivery; and
- internal government procurement practices and cultures if/where decisions are driven by an overly excessive focus on price.

Attachment

- A LSP endorsement model measures

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Attachment A: Draft LSP endorsement model measures

Intended objectives

Australian, state and territory government agencies would require an LSP to be endorsed by NAATI as a prerequisite requirement in all government tender documentation where the panel relates to the procurement and delivery of translating and interpreting services. Establishing this requirement would, over time, ensure a minimum level of service consistency and organisational accountability nationally; introduced in a phased approach across tendering arrangements, as panels are refreshed.

Definitions

A language services provider (LSP) is defined, for the purposes of this document, as an organisation or business area that offers translating and interpreting services to facilitate cross-cultural communication as its sole or majority business activity, or a full-service communications agency that includes the delivery of translating and interpreting services. Any LSP bidding for government language services contracts would be required to be endorsed by NAATI, including both public and private providers, covering all language groups.

Draft measures – for consideration

It is proposed that an LSP would be required to:

| # | Detail |
|---|--|
| 1 | <p>Ensure that all language practitioners employed and/or contracted to provide language services on behalf of the LSP have obtained the minimum level of NAATI credential available within their field and language within 12 months of the LSP having been endorsed⁸.</p> <p>LSPs would be expected to work with their practitioners and NAATI to provide the necessary support to facilitate the credentialing process. Practitioners who remain uncredentialed after 12 months' time should no longer be assigned work, unless unavoidable.</p> <p><i><u>Note:</u> each level of credential, including RPI, have pre-requisite requirements. Practitioners who have not met those requirements will not be credentialed by NAATI.</i></p> |
| 2 | <p>Prioritise assignments going to the NAATI-certified practitioner with the highest level of credential/s, subject to the appropriateness of the assignment and their ability to complete the task.</p> |

⁸ Extensions beyond the 12 months can be granted by NAATI upon request, considered on a case-by-case basis.

LSP endorsement model

| # | Detail |
|---|--|
| | <i>Note: LSPs would need to demonstrate to NAATI as part of the endorsement process how they intend to comply with this requirement.</i> |
| 3 | Agree to an LSP Code of Conduct. The Code would establish a set of professional and ethical expectations to support government confidence in the delivery of services through an intent to deliver services in accordance with a government's guidelines, and a commitment to adhere with existing legislative requirements (working with children checks, WHS, ATO requirements etc). |
| 4 | Have in place cyber security and information privacy practices consistent with relevant Australian standards. |
| 5 | Establish and maintain mechanisms for service quality assurance and client and customer feedback. |
| 6 | Report de-identified data to NAATI periodically, including: the services delivered to government agencies by language, location and format, including whether services were met, delayed or unmet (including whether they were cancelled within or beyond 24 hours prior) and the number of complaints; and engagement of non-NAATI certified practitioners, by language, assignment and location, with reasons why a practitioner without a NAATI certification was assigned. |
| 7 | Display on their website/s in a prominent area that they are an Endorsed Language Services Provider (precise terminology and logo to be developed by NAATI and agreed to by Australian, state and territory governments). |

Separately to the endorsement model's requirements for an LSP to meet, NAATI has agreed to deliver the following complementary initiatives:

| # | Detail |
|---|---|
| 1 | Cover the credentialling costs, during the first 12 months of endorsement model implementation, for all currently uncredentialed practitioners working with LSPs to apply for a Recognised Practising credential and/or sit relevant tests. |

| # | Detail |
|---|---|
| | <p>Individual practitioners or their employer/s would be required to cover the costs associated with meeting any credentialing prerequisites (e.g. study), and would be⁹ for their own credential costs on or after 1 January 2027¹⁰.</p> <p><i>Note: NAATI, as well as a number of state and territory governments, have separate scholarship programs to support practitioners with their studies. Practitioners who are interested in these scholarships can write to NAATI. NAATI will consider applications on a case-by-case basis. Questions regarding access to a particular government's scholarship should be directed to them.</i></p> |
| 2 | Establish a monitoring and compliance function for the endorsement model, including managing complaints alleging practitioner breaches of the AUSIT or the ASLITA Code of Ethics, and investigating any alleged non-adherence with the endorsement model by LSPs. This would include NAATI taking on a greater advocacy role on the benefits of access and equity, and expanding the NAATI complaints policy to include members of the public who may struggle to gain access to a translator or interpreter. |
| 3 | Provision of scholarships through a dedicated program covering credentialing and recertification – in collaboration with existing scholarship arrangements in jurisdictions – with priority given to languages in highest demand languages, as well as a commitment to increase overall pass rates among applicants sitting the tests. |
| 4 | Introducing a new suite of professional development (PD) content, to be made available to all NAATI-credentialed practitioners. |
| 5 | Publish a language services national map, based upon LSP reporting and NAATI's internal credential information, with details on met and unmet demand and service quality by language type, location and format, as well as the general location and specialisation of credentialed practitioners. Data would be commercially and personally de-identifiable and serve as an evidence base for NAATI's scholarship program and future PD offerings. |
| 6 | Establish an EAP-style program to provide free, professional, and confidential counselling services available 24/7 for NAATI-credentialed practitioners. |
| 7 | Provide a modest amount of annual funding to AUSIT and ASLITA to support attendance at industry events, strategic issues management and to deliver current and/or new sector initiatives if and as required. |

¹⁰ Extensions beyond the 12 months can be granted by NAATI where requested, considered on a case-by-case basis.

| # | Detail |
|----|---|
| 8 | Develop a public awareness campaign, with input from experts, on the value of NAATI-credentialed practitioners. This would include promoting a list of the LSPs that are endorsed. It would also include publishing a set of resources for consumers of translation and interpreting services. |
| 9 | Take on a strengthened two-way policy advisory and community liaison role to support governments, settlement providers and essential service providers by reviewing practitioner availability by language in specific geographic locations, assessing current and emerging language needs, and leveraging other measures to improve communication access. |
| 10 | Establish strengthened post-certification professional networking and employment pathways by referring practitioners onto interested LSPs. This would include establishing a mentoring program for practitioners based on levels and areas of experience. |

NAATI will agree to implement these activities for an initial 24-month period, with ongoing delivery subject to NAATI's financial capacity and NAATI Board approval.

Monitoring process

It is anticipated that NAATI annually review an LSP's endorsement through a sequence of system checks, meetings with the provider, and by the LSP confirming its compliance formally through the portal.

NAATI would also monitor compliance by investigating any complaints it may receive, and/or undertaking occasional 'spot checks' if necessary.

Potential breaches by LSPs

In the event of a breach (i.e. an LSP failed to meet a requirement as set out in this model), NAATI would prioritise supporting the LSP and its practitioners in the first instance, and as part of a continual improvement cycle to deliver good practice.

More punitive approaches would only be taken as a last resort, wherever possible, dependent upon the nature of the breach and the willingness of the LSP to respond appropriately. In those cases, the breach may result in NAATI writing to the relevant business owner/s of government panels with which that provider is endorsed, with recommendations. Those recommendations may include that any LSP dis-endorsed by NAATI be removed from a panel. The decision to remove an LSP from a panel would ultimately be the responsibility of the business area and the government/s responsible for those Panels.