

Why does this matter?

Women from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds may face significant barriers when accessing maternity services.

Common Challenges

- Difficulty understanding medical information
- Reduced confidence in asking questions
- Delayed consent during emergencies
- Fear or mistrust of healthcare systems
- Reduced engagement with antenatal care

Poor communication can contribute to:

- Delayed decision-making
- Reduced informed consent
- Lower patient satisfaction
- Poorer maternal outcomes

Communication is a patient safety issue:

- Effective communication improves:
- Maternal safety
- Informed decision-making
- Patient experience
- Adherence to treatment plans

Principle 1: use professional interpreters

- Improve understanding
- Reduce communication errors
- Support informed consent
- Protect confidentiality
- Avoid Using Family Members for:
 - Caesarean section, Induction of labour counselling

Principle 2: cultural beliefs influence decisions

- Women may have different beliefs regarding:
- Pain relief during labour
- Induction of labour
- Operative birth
- Religious practices
- Preferences regarding male healthcare professionals
- Explore concerns respectfully
- Ask open questions
- Avoid assumptions

Principle 3: communication reduces health inequalities

- Women from migrant and minority ethnic communities experience higher rates of:
- Maternal mortality
- Severe maternal morbidity
- Late booking for antenatal care
- Poor pregnancy outcomes
- Language barriers contribute significantly to these inequalities

Principle 4: trauma-informed and respectful care

- Some women may:
- Be refugees or asylum seekers
- Have experienced conflict or trauma
- Have experienced Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- Fear authority systems

Sensitive Communication Promotes:

- Trust
- Engagement with services
- Psychological wellbeing
- Continuity of care

2025maternity services standards framework highlights

- Equity
- Delivering fair and accessible maternity care
- Personalised Care
- Supporting individual preferences and needs
- Accessible Communication
- Ensuring information is understandable
- Inclusive Pathways
- Reducing barriers to engagement
- Reducing Inequalities
- Improving outcomes for vulnerable populations
- Service Recommendations
- Interpreter pathways
- Cultural competence training
- Translated resources
- Equitable consent processes

Who principles of respectful maternity care

- Women have the right to:
- 1)Dignity
- 2)Privacy
- 3)Informed choice
- 4)Freedom from discrimination
- 5)Effective communication

Key take-home message

- Cross-cultural communication is not simply about language translation.
- It is a patient safety intervention that promotes:
- Equitable maternity care
- Better informed consent
- Improved maternal experience
- Reduced healthcare inequalities
- Better maternal and neonatal outcomes

REFERENCES

World Health Organization (WHO). Standards for Improving Quality of Maternal and Newborn Care in Health Facilities. Geneva: WHO; 2016.
Maternity Services Standards Framework. Communication, Equity and Inclusion Standards. December 2025.