



# Office of Multicultural Services

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## Fast facts

- ▲ Minnesota is home to:
  - More than 140,000 Hispanics or Latinos.
  - 106,000 Asians and Pacific Islanders.
  - Over 34,000 Africans.
  - A growing numbers of Russians and Eastern Europeans.
- ▲ Hennepin County is home to 70 percent of immigrants in the state.
- ▲ Hennepin County has the largest Somali, Tibetan and Hmong populations; growing Spanish-speaking, Liberian and Ethiopian communities; and what is thought to be the largest Oromo population in the U.S.
- ▲ Approximately one in five Hennepin County residents primarily speaks a language other than English. Spanish is the second most spoken language in the state.
- ▲ More than 150 languages are spoken in Minneapolis Public Schools.
- ▲ To reach the Office of Multicultural Services, call 612-348-2193

## What is Hennepin County's Office of Multicultural Services?

Hennepin County established the Office of Multicultural Services (OMS) in January 2000 to address the emerging needs of refugees and immigrants, many of whom struggle with significant language and cultural barriers and are unaware of the services that exist to help them resettle. The staff in OMS reflect the refugees and immigrants they serve. Their role is similar to that of an ambassador – helping clients with limited English proficiency in all county departments and throughout the community. OMS staff:

- ▲ Assist clients with understanding and accessing county services in areas such as health care, housing, child care and employment.
- ▲ Assist clients with immigration issues, such as adjusting status.
- ▲ Provide referrals to culturally appropriate community-based agencies and services.
- ▲ Provide in-person interpreting services for clients who need cash, food and health care assistance.
- ▲ Provide countywide telephonic interpreting assistance in Hmong, Somali and Spanish as well as in-person American Sign Language interpreting services.
- ▲ Provide cultural competency training to county staff.
- ▲ Assist county staff with program eligibility questions related to immigration status.

## Why is the Office of Multicultural Services needed?

Over the past 15 years, Minnesota's demographics have changed to reflect the diversity of the United States' population. Each year, Minnesota is the destination for more than 3,000 refugees, as well as many other immigrant populations.

New residents face cultural and language barriers to meeting their basic needs. These struggles can be overwhelming for individuals trying to adjust and adapt to a new culture, learn English, understand values that sometimes conflict with their own, find child care and gain employment, and other challenges.

- ▲ From 2000 to 2006, 87,183 legal immigrants were admitted in Minnesota.
- ▲ Many have immigrated to the United States as a result of persecution in their homelands.
- ▲ Many left all of their personal possessions behind while fleeing persecution.
- ▲ Most do not have an understanding of the services that the government can provide.

## What language services are provided?

All clients – including those with limited English proficiency – are entitled to equal access to government services through executive order and Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act. In complying with this mandate, Hennepin spends about \$6 million annually for language services.

In addition to contracting with outside interpreting vendors, Hennepin County tries to meet the growing demand for language services by hiring bicultural and bilingual staff. OMS staff are fluent in many languages, including Spanish, Russian, Bosnian, Amharic (Ethiopian), Oromiffa (Oromo), German, Hmong, French, Arabic, Somali, Swahili, Tigrinya, Laotian, Thai, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Vietnamese and Khmer.