

The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion
ACT Legislative Assembly

Via email: LACommitteeECl@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Inquiry into access to services and information in Auslan

Advocacy for Inclusion writes to provide a submission to the Inquiry into access to services and information in Auslan.

Background

AFI provides independent individual, self and systemic advocacy for people with disability. We are a Disabled Peoples Organisation (DPO), meaning most of our board, members, and staff are people with disability. We represent all people with disability nationally from the ACT in our policy work.

AFI works within a human rights framework and acknowledges the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability and is signed onto the ACT Human Rights Act 2004.

Introduction

AFI welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to Inquiry – we commend the ACT Legislative Assembly and the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion

AFI would like to acknowledge the hard work and advocacy of the deaf community and their leadership and expertise in this space, including the petitioners to the Assembly who called for the Inquiry.

AFI endorses the recommendations made by Deaf Connect in their [DRC submission](#), especially their recommendations regarding early intervention, health and mental health, workforce shortages, transport, emergency planning and response, justice and ageing deaf communities and access to services

Context

This submission will use deaf to refer to Deaf / deaf and hard of hearing people

We come from the starting point that access is a human right for all people with disability, and the deaf community have distinct requirements. The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability under Article 9, Accessibility requires States Parties to provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public and to promote other appropriate forms of assistance and support to persons with disability to ensure their access to information.

Article 21 on Freedom of expression and opinion and access to information requires that States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disability can exercise the right to Freedom of expression and opinion, including the Freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice, as defined in article 2 of the present Convention, including by:

a) Providing information intended for the general public to persons with disability in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disability in a timely manner and without additional cost;

b) Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disability in official interactions;

c) Urging private entities that provide services to the general public, including through the Internet, to provide information and services in accessible and usable formats for persons with disability;

d) Encouraging the mass media, including providers of information through the Internet, to make their services accessible to persons with disability;

e) Recognising and promoting the use of sign languages.

Access to services in Auslan is also required to meet obligations under other articles, including those relating to emergency responses, justice, health, habitation, education, work and employment and the rights to maintain relationships and form families.

Policy responses must acknowledge the history and culture of the deaf community and the importance of Auslan.

Specifically, commentary and policy work should recognise that Auslan is a distinct language with its own grammar, not just signed English and be based on a social or cultural-linguistic model of deafness. The social or cultural-linguistic model of deafness is similar to the social model of disability. It treats deafness

as a difference, not a deficit, as opposed to the medical model of deafness, which sees deafness as a deficit to be corrected with treatment to achieve normalcy.

Workforce deficiencies

A lack of sufficient and available interpreters is the pivotal barrier, but not the only barrier, to the availability of information and services in Auslan. More needs to be done to ensure that the community's needs can be met.

Interpreters, translators, teachers of the deaf and awareness trainers are essential workers, and the ACT government needs to recognise this area as a priority workforce area

We need to make sure a pathway exists in the ACT to achieve NAATI accreditation. Particularly higher-level qualifications, including certified specialist conference interpreter, specialist health, and specialist legal interpreter.

It is also important that those currently working in the education sector as interpreters without sufficient qualifications receive training to achieve NAATI certification. All interpreters working in the education system should be NAATI Certified Interpreters (previously called level 3) or Certified Provisional Auslan Interpreters (formerly level 2).

The workforce issues include a lack of interpreters, teachers of the deaf, and people qualified to give deaf awareness training. We are informed it is especially difficult for deaf people to attain these qualifications.

This is causing significant issues in accessing interpreters in education, healthcare, justice and social settings. It drives and compounds a lack of deaf awareness.

Recommendations

More routes must be available for attaining qualifications, including making:

- *certificates II-IV in Auslan*
- *diploma of Auslan*
- *diploma of Interpreting and*
- *advanced diploma of Interpreting*

Available at CIT in Canberra or providing a mechanism and support for ACT-based students to study this program through TAFE NSW.

Work should be undertaken to ensure representation from groups like the Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association or other Auslan interpreting services at job fairs for school leavers. Pathways into interpreting work must be advertised to ACT students.

Funding to provide interpreters should be factored into Budget bids, Directorate resourcing, bids for programs and projects which involve shared Territory and Commonwealth financial, procurement processes and included as an expectation when outsourcing services

Government services

There is a need for more ubiquitous, routine and broad use and availability of AUSLAN across Government services and announcements.

Auslan needs to be a feature of Governments' communications outside of emergencies, and communications specifically created for or targeted to the deaf community.

The learning, delivery and availability of information in Auslan should be normalised and become business as usual. For instance, public sector workers on the front line and in leadership positions should routinely learn Auslan.

There should be more visibility of Auslan – within Government CSA's, shareable social material and events like doorstops used to communicate Government policy. There is a need for Auslan to be used consistently – at the moment, if a deaf person is not present at an event, Auslan interpreting is often ceased. This is despite the fact that the event may be recorded and accessed later.

Specific settings need extra focus and attention – especially health care and aged care. No one should be denied health care and communication of their health needs because their language is Auslan. All health care settings need remote video interpreting (VRI) equipment. Given staff shortages, it is essential that Auslan translation can be facilitated when the translator cannot be physically present and allow the use of out-of-state interpreters when needed.

Knowledge of the National Relay Service should be widespread and available. Consideration should also be given to text lines and other non-verbal pathways to communicate with first responders for people who may not be aware of the NRS or be able to set up a call including for non-verbal people who cannot use Auslan.

A program of work in aged care is needed, including mandatory deaf awareness training for aged care staff and VRI in aged care settings – this is a federal issue however, it could usefully be progressed through meetings with Aged Care Ministers in National Cabinet.

Recommendations

Government workplans should aim to increase Auslan translation of a range of ACT government announcements, not just emergencies

ACT Health should ensure no one is unable to communicate in health settings and develop workarounds that acknowledge current workforce supply issues – these include providing the equipment necessary for

and implementing remote video interpreting (VRI) in health care settings and allowing out-of-state interpreters

All resources need to have Auslan translations, not just easy English or closed captions, especially health resources, covid guidelines, emergency planning instructions

There should be mandated deaf awareness training for first responders, healthcare workers, justice system staff, and DV and sexual assault services.

Thank you for considering our submission. Please feel free to discuss this submission with me on 0477 200 755 to arrange a meeting.

Best regards

(Sent by email)

Craig Wallace

Head of Policy

Advocacy for Inclusion

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