

**The Standing Committee on Health
Aged Care and Sport**

PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

15 January, 2017.

Dear Committee Chairperson

Submission to the inquiry into the Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia

We would like to address the issues of community awareness and Auslan (Australian Sign Language) interpreting services.

We offer the following submission as an index of unmet need and a call for equity for every Australian who lives with hearing loss or impairment, a chronic ear disorder or tinnitus; are deaf or deafblind; and their families.

We are happy to provide further information at the request of The Committee about interpreting services that are a vital component of hearing health and wellbeing for the Deaf Community in Australia.

Yours sincerely



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Submission to the inquiry into the Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia

Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport

**Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association
(ASLIA)**

15 January 2017

Introduction

The Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association (ASLIA) is the peak organisation that represents the needs and interests of professional Auslan-English and Deaf Interpreters across Australia. Our vision is to lead and promote best practice in sign language interpreting and maintain high industry standards by providing professional development opportunities to our members.

As such, we have interest in this Inquiry as it will have an impact on the provision on quality interpreting services across Australia. Auslan-English and Deaf Interpreters play a significant role in providing language services to the Deaf Community, which should be readily accessible for all.

We would like to offer comments and recommendations to this Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport Inquiry - specifically in relation to sections 2-4 of the terms of reference for this Inquiry into the Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia.

2. Community awareness, information, education and promotion about hearing loss and health care.

There are many costs involved for Australians who are deaf or have a hearing loss. There are economical costs, but more importantly there is the potential to cause damage to an individual's emotional and social wellbeing and education as a result of delayed language acquisition.

Traditionally, health professionals have encouraged or even enforced a medical approach that focuses on curing an individual's deafness as opposed to giving communication options. This has meant that cognitive development, a healthy identity, and sense of self have potentially been neglected, resulting in significant mental health issues and developmental delays. Without a doubt this in turn exacerbates the economic burden not only within the medical system, but potentially through government financial support of those experiencing lower employability as a result of lack of access to education in their preferred language mode.

It is often unknown why a child may be born deaf; it could be due to a number of factors – including genetics or prenatal illness. Globally we know that approximately 90% of deaf babies are born into families where everyone else can hear. For these families it is imperative that parents and caregivers are well informed about all possibilities and approaches to raising a deaf child, not just the medical approach.

To assist families to receive well-balanced information, the medical profession should undertake compulsory Deaf Awareness Training, lead by deaf individuals. Training would include information about identity, language (Auslan - Australian Sign Language), education options, etc. More importantly, they would benefit in hearing about the lived experiences of deaf people.

Programs are available across the country where a deaf person provides Auslan classes to the families of deaf people in the home ensuring communication within the families and communities. This has a direct impact on the holistic wellbeing of the person improving mental health by reducing feelings of isolation, and improves cognitive development and age appropriate language which impacts ability to understand concepts in the education system.

Recommendations:

ASLIA recommends that the Australian Government

- i. Implements a program to ensure Deaf Awareness Training supports a well-balanced approach in diagnosing, assessing, and treating by advising families about the Deaf Identity, Deaf Community and their language, Auslan;
- ii. Commits to making vital health care and wellbeing information available in Auslan; and
- iii. Funds home-based Auslan training for families under the NDIS.

3. Access to, and cost of services, which include hearing assessments, treatment and support, Auslan language services, and new hearing aid technology.

In regards to Auslan language services - access to information in an accessible language is a human right. Deaf consumers need to have access to interpreters and vital hearing health information in Auslan. There should be no exemptions. Without access to information in Auslan, those who rely on this mode of communication are at risk of isolation and misinformation. There should be no age limit, geographic or economic barrier in accessing language services.

Whilst technology support such as hearing aids and cochlear implants can be beneficial for some, it is not a viable option for all and should not be enforced without exploring the full array of possibilities. For those who are over the age of 65, the need for medical attention often increases and therefore increases costs and the need for Auslan-English and Deaf Interpreters.

Unfortunately, while the demand for Auslan-English and Deaf Interpreters has increased, the supply has not. Often members of the Deaf Community are left without access to interpreters, either in person or via video remote interpreting services.

In order to meet the demand created by the NDIS for professional interpreting services, the Australian Government needs to work with industry to devise and implement a National Strategy to significantly increase the pool of qualified professional interpreters across Australia. Given the urgency however, an interpreter training initiative scheme could help to alleviate the concerns of prospective students about the costs associated with training.

There is currently a significant amount of confusion among the Deaf and Interpreting Communities regarding the future of NABS (the National Auslan Booking and Payment Service) for those who are, and those who are not eligible for NDIS funding. This confusion leaves interpreters without an

understanding of their future work or job security.

Recommendations:

ASLIA recommends that the Australian Government

- i. Reconsiders the criteria for gaining access to interpreting services, to make them accessible to all who require it;
- ii. Provides clarity on the future of NABS and how funded interpreting services can be accessed by those who are eligible and not eligible for the NDIS; and
- iii. Works with industry to increase the supply of appropriately qualified Auslan-English and Deaf Interpreters.

4. Current access, support and cost of hearing health care for vulnerable populations, including: culturally and linguistically diverse people, the elderly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people living in rural and regional areas.

The Deaf Community are a culturally and linguistically diverse people using Auslan as their primary and preferred method of communication.

There is a shortage of Auslan-English and Deaf Interpreters in major metropolitan centres and unfortunately, those living in rural and regional areas have even less access to interpreting services and information available in Auslan than their city peers.

Video remote interpreting has begun to assist those who live in areas where there is good infrastructure and technology available.

Recommendations:

ASLIA recommends that the Australian Government

- i. Commits to infrastructure and technologies in rural and regional areas that will connect vulnerable people with video remote interpreting and other language services; and
- ii. Ensures that interpreters are funded to travel to work in rural and remote settings.