

ACCESS TO INFORMATION RELATED TO THE
COVID -19 OUTBREAK AND CONTAINMENT EFFORTS

Deaf Australia and the Australian Sign Language Interpreter Association (ASLIA) wish to stress the importance of ensuring highly skilled, NAATI certified, and conference level credentialed Auslan-English interpreters and Deaf Interpreters be employed for all media broadcast and all public emergency announcements nationwide. Text-based resources, such as captioning, do not have the same capacity to deliver the accurate information in this rapidly changing environment, and many Deaf people require information to be delivered in Auslan – a visual language.

Every person in Australia, including deaf people, have the right to access information, communication and knowledge on an equal footing as others as well as the right to receive accessible health care services.

The Australian Government is obliged to make information accessible to all citizens as per Articles 9 and 21 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and Article 11 which states:

State Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights laws, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.

The dissemination of the current pandemic of COVID-19 has seen the Australian Deaf community excluded in many instances. Deaf people reliant on Auslan require access to important information simultaneously with the wider community. This information is imperative for deaf people to make informed decisions and take the actions necessary to protect themselves, their families and the wider community.

Due to growing health concerns with COVID-19, Deaf Australia and ASLIA have some concerns and suggestions outlined below to support the Australian Government to ensure equitable provision of access during public addresses:

Concern 1:

Availability of interpreters – some areas throughout Australia do not have a pool of readily available, skilled and NAATI credentialed interpreters (e.g. Northern Territory, rural and remote areas).

Solution 1:

We suggest the authorities consider employing skilled interpreters and arranging the interpreter practitioner/s on a roster in a studio (or at home, due to increasing movement restrictions). This would

ensure all information is interpreted via televised broadcast media and be linked in and displayed on a split screen alongside all footage (as occurs with journalists based in different locations).

Concern 2:

Social distancing policy – currently interpreters required to stand a ‘safe distance’ from individuals providing announcements means camera operators tend to zoom to the presenter only consequently the interpreter is not included in the screen during the televised/social media broadcast announcement.

Solution 2:

- a. We suggest that distancing measures are put in place to ensure the safety of interpreters is considered when working at media broadcast announcements.
- b. In addition, all broadcasters be instructed officially to include the interpreter in all broadcasts to the public.

Concern 3:

Positioning of interpreters on screen and broadcasting– when two cameras are used in situ, the interpreter has recently been seen superimposed on the main screen using Picture in Picture (PIP) format, however this viewing has been hampered by obstructions on screen.

Solution 3:

- a. This PIP needs to be clear of any obstructions such as captioning, or information displayed on the lower portion of the screen of the broadcaster. Ideally, the interpreter be displayed using 1/3 of the screen, as happens in the UK (see image below).



- b. Broadcasters be instructed to take additional care to ensure that the interpreter is included in the broadcast footage and included on online digital networks (e.g. websites, social media posts and during repeated broadcasts after the actual announcement).

Given the seriousness of the current situation, we urge all governments (Commonwealth, state and territory) and broadcast media outlets to ensure that up-to-date information, importantly the public announcements regarding the COVID-19 outbreak and its containment efforts include equitable access for all Australians. This also includes reliable accurate captioning and text-based information for those who are Hard of Hearing or Deafblind.

We share the same concern for the serious risks facing everyone at this time. We hope that you also share the belief that all information should be provided in an accessible format.

Deaf Australia, ASLIA and the Australian deaf community wish for improved collaboration through mutual cooperation to combat discrimination and provide best practices for full enjoyment of the rights to information by all Australian citizens, without exception, in their everyday life and especially in emergency situations.

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About Deaf Australia:

Deaf Australia is for all deaf, hard of hearing and non-deaf people and organisations (not-for-profit, for profit or government) that use and/or accept and respect Auslan (Australian Sign Language).

Deaf Australia is the deaf-led peak organisation representing deaf people in Australia. We promote the advancement of human rights and equality for deaf people by collaborating with our members and stakeholders in implementing the United Nations Conventions and the National Disability Strategy.

Deaf Australia is a national representative member to the World Federation of the Deaf (www.wfdeaf.org).

Web: www.deafaustalia.org.au
Facebook: DeafAustraliaInc
Twitter: @deafaustalia

About the Australian Sign Language Interpreting Association:

The Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association (ASLIA) is a not-for-profit body and is the national peak organisation representing the interests of Auslan-English Interpreters and Deaf Interpreters in Australia. ASLIA is a volunteer led organisation representing the profession of Auslan-English and Deaf Interpreters around the country. Our members facilitate communication between individuals who use signed languages and those who do not. This service is provided in many contexts, government departments, in medical settings, in the justice system and for social communication between individuals and in a variety of other domains.

Professional Auslan/English interpreting is a relatively new profession, has been developing over the last thirty years with the inclusion of Auslan as one of Australia's community languages alongside spoken languages incorporated in the NAATI (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters) certification system.

ASLIA is a national member representative member to the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (www.wasli.org).

Web: www.aslia.com.au