



MEDIA RELEASE

5 APRIL 2018

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT SIGNS OFF TENDER FOR A SUBSTANDARD NATIONAL RELAY SERVICE

Australia's National Relay Service (NRS) has been one of the world's best relay services since 1995 however, on 4 April 2018, the Australian Government released a Request for Tender (RFT) for the next NRS contract, a tender that will see the NRS slip from the world's best to potentially the world's worst relay service.

Consumers who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind or who have speech impairment rely on the National Relay Service as a natural bridge to vital services and the wider community. The Government now sees the NRS as a 'safety-net' rather than the equivalent phone service for consumers with disability as it has traditionally been.

Australia's NRS consumer organisations have repeatedly made key recommendations to improve the NRS however; it appears that none of those recommendations have been incorporated into the Government's recently released tender documents.

In 2016-17, the actual cost of operating the National Relay Service was close to \$32m a year. The RFT proposes a \$22m per annum cap on the service for the three years of the new contract. This does not support the recommendations made by consumer organisations in which the NRS needs to be funded on a cost recovery basis.

While access to emergency services remains a 365 days/24 hours requirement, the RFT does not stipulate operating hours required for all other services. This puts at risk those current relay services which are operating at 365/24 and critically ignores the recommendation that Auslan Video Relay become a 365/24 service.

The Outreach Program, a vital community education and NRS training program, dramatically de-funded in 2017 and will not be reintroduced in the next NRS contract.

Additionally, the new contract will require all deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind and who have speech impaired relay users to register to use the NRS, however, people wanting to contact these relay users will not need to register to use the service. Many NRS users believe this is a breach of fundamental disability anti-discrimination principles - requiring only people with disability register in order to access an essential service.

Kyle Miers, Chief Executive of Deaf Australia, said 'The Government and Department of Communications took no notice of consumer's concerns with the essential service', adding 'the new National Relay Service will not address the issues of isolation and social exclusion'.

Australian NRS users call on the Government to ensure the NRS of the future does not decrease their access to this vital service.

To view consumer's recommendations, please visit this link (<http://deafaustalia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Coalition-Position-Paper.pdf>).

- End

Media Contact:

Kyle Miers, Chief Executive

0458 256 796 (text only) – info(at)deafaustalia.org.au