



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into access to services
and information in Auslan

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CONVO AU

**INQUIRY INTO ACCESS TO SERVICES AND INFORMATION IN AUSLAN
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

Inspire and nurture equitable communication and opportunities for the Deaf Community

Submitted by:

Mr Kyle Miers - Chief Executive Officer



14 July 2022

Executive Summary

Convo Communications Australia Pty Ltd (Convo Australia) appreciates the opportunity to present our services that address the need to access services and information in Auslan.

Convo Australia is a Deaf-owned company, and our understanding of human connection is different than most. In a rapidly-advancing world, technology is often developed on the basis of spoken communication. We offer a different perspective: sign-centric communication solutions that just feel right.

In our submission, we will explain why Convo Australia is different, responsive and is socially responsible for the Deaf community, offering governments, providers and businesses a sustainable and cost effective model that will enhance improved accessibility to Auslan interpreting services through digital communication platforms.

Auslan (Australian Sign Language) was recognised as a community language by the Australian Government in 1987 in a white paper on the language of Australia (Lo Bianco J, 1987), yet to this date, many Deaf people struggle to access Auslan in their everyday lives and be informed.

Access to interpreters, for many Deaf people is a necessity, yet their access is subjective to the interpretation of 'reasonable accommodation' under the discrimination legislation and often having to lodge a complaint for what is simply a basic right to access information.

Lack of access to services often leads to a myriad of issues that are mostly associated with mental health, employment advancements and/or education opportunities.

With the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Auslan users suddenly had access (and funding) to interpreters in community activities that they never had before. This places a significant pressure on the supply of interpreters to meet growing demand for interpreting services.

Over the years, traditional Auslan interpreting service providers continue to offer services through advanced bookings, yet even with advance notice, Auslan users are forced to accommodate an interpreter's availability to have their communication needs met (rather than the other way around). In many instances, bookings go unfulfilled, increasing the vulnerability of Auslan users.

The Australian Census 2021 has seen the Auslan population in the ACT grow from 166 citizens (Census 2016) to 244 citizens which represents a massive 68% increase. At the same time, the level of certified interpreters in the ACT has remained stagnant (NAATI, 2022).

It is clear that the current provisioning of interpreting services is not sustainable.

Convo Australia offers a unique and innovative solution.

About Convo Australia

We connect humans through universal communication solutions shaped by cultural experience.

In September 2021, Convo Australia launched Australia's only dedicated online and on demand Auslan interpreting service. Since its inception, we have scaled up and are currently providing Auslan video interpreting services from 8:00 am to 11:00 pm (AEST) Sunday to Saturday including public holidays, serving the Deaf community throughout Australia.

We will soon be offering a 24/7 Auslan interpreting service making Convo Australia the only interpreting service provider in Australia that provides on-demand Auslan interpreting services any time.

The Deaf community has been using Convo Australia to access a wide range of services they never thought possible; creating opportunities and breaking down the barriers that were created through lack of Auslan interpreters, poor policy design and lack of provisioning of services.

Through Convo Australia, Auslan users have used our online and on demand interpreting services for, but not limited to:

- Health, well being and mental health services
- Government services (e.g. Medicare, Centrelink)
- Banking and financial services
- Legal services
- Meetings and training
- Religious activities
- Emergency services (including Emergency Department and Triple '0')
- Family, friends and neighbours
- Community events and activities.

Our online and on-demand interpreting services allow Deaf customers to interact with the community or services through one of two ways:

- Making and receiving video calls (emergency, telehealth, counselling, etc), or
- In the same room (or virtual interpreting) (visiting the hospital, mental health support, etc).

Our Interpreters are all National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) certified (either as Certified Practitioner Interpreter (CPI) or Certified Interpreter (CI)) and work remotely.

In the future, our service will employ NAATI Certified Deaf Interpreters (CPDI) to work alongside CPI or CI to work with Auslan users who may have low literacy skills, and/or Deaf migrants, and employ Certified Specialists (Health or Legal) and assigning skill/ expertise ensuring that Deaf customers are getting what they need through our online interpreting services.

What do we do differently?

Convo Australia is committed to ensuring Deaf customers have access to interpreters when they need them, on demand, eliminating the need for advance bookings that incur minimum booking charges. Our service model allows for flexibility to meet the communication needs for Auslan users in a way that makes fiscal sense.

This is achieved through our specifically designed video interpreting platform using tailored apps available on smartphones, tablets and computers (Apple iOS, MacOS, Android and Windows) and WebRTC.

Subscription vs Booked Services

Convo Australia is a subscription-based service - allowing for interpreters to be available on-demand without the need for advance bookings. Convo Australia invests in securing and employing high quality interpreters working on an ongoing basis working at their preferred hours during the day/ evening or weekend from anywhere in Australia during our hours of operation.

At present, Convo Australia provides services from 8:00 am to 11:00 pm (AEST) everyday of the week including public holidays. In the coming weeks, Convo Australia will commence operating 24/7 making us the only Auslan interpreting service provider in Australia to offer full access to on-demand interpreting services.

Our subscription model means that customers can access an interpreter anytime during the month. For example, if a customer subscribes to a 4 hour plan (240 minutes) can access a total of 240 Auslan interpreting minutes for the month at any time.

See [Annexure A](#) for example usage and cost comparison between subscription and booked services.

Convo Australia believes that the subscription model offers customers (both individuals and businesses) greater flexibility to access Auslan interpreters at any time. Our service offering leads to a stress-free experience while promoting dignity which consequently improves their wellbeing.

Due to the increase of Auslan users in the ACT and short supply of interpreters in the territory, interpreting services require booking well in advance, or may require an interpreter sourced outside of ACT at great cost.

This places onus on interpreting service providers to meet current demand that they are unable to fulfil consistently, increasing the likelihood of service providers failing to provide 'reasonable accommodation' for Deaf people in the ACT. Furthermore, it forces Auslan users to adjust their schedule according to the availability of interpreters which is neither accommodating nor reasonable.

Convo Australia acknowledges that in some situations and settings it is more appropriate to assign an Auslan interpreter in-person for onsite assignments (such as public events and conferences). Our service does not replicate or replace the need for these services or aim to fulfil these types of bookings. However, our service can help the current situation by freeing up Auslan interpreters from certain

bookings that could be fulfilled by our service, allowing these Auslan interpreters to be assigned to other bookings requiring in-person interpreting services. This facilitates better distribution and use of finite interpreting resources.

Backend Support

Convo Australia also offers backend support for businesses and other providers (such as hospitals) by providing public access to a unique URL which enables businesses and providers to provide access to our service without placing the onus on their customers to download our app and pre-register for accessing our services.

In addition, it reduces (or eliminates) the need for service administrators to make bookings for interpreting services. At times, bookings are made at the last minute or may not have been followed through, creating uncertainty for Auslan users when arriving for their booked appointments and consequently impacting their wellbeing.

This is particularly useful in situations where access to crucial Auslan interpreting services is available in emergency situations.

We have recently provided a URL for the Australian Electoral Commission for the 2022 Federal Election, where over 150 successful connections were made prior to and during the election period.

Convo Australia Solution

Convo Australia can collaborate with the ACT Government and to tailor access to Auslan Interpreting Services for Auslan users in the ACT to access a range of services, such as but not limited to:

- Aged care;
- Education and Training;
- Emergency services;
- Employment;
- Health care;
- Justice;
- Media (including Government announcements); and
- Social opportunities.

Who is Convo Australia?

Convo Australia is part of Convo Global which is an international business division of Convo Communications LLC that provides accessible communications through specialised interpreting services that allow each country and its Deaf community to be its unique self and thrive locally.

The executive team consists of:

- Kyle Miers - Chief Executive Officer
- Todd Wright - Director of Business Development
- Danielle Vicary - Director of Interpreting Services

Kyle was born deaf and to deaf family and has several generations of deaf family and is formerly a Chief Executive of Deaf Australia, a national peak organisation representing deaf people and significant work revolves around de-stigmatising the perspectives and attitudes while promoting inclusion and equality, in particular with the emergence of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and was the first and only person to give a presentation at the National Press Club in Auslan.

Kyle has been instrumental with the recent Census of 2021 which included 'Auslan' in the census questionnaire which saw a jump of the Auslan population from 11,466 (166 in ACT) to 16,242 (244 in ACT).

Kyle received Honorary Life Membership (Deaf Australia) and Hall of Fame (Nebraska Alumni Association of the Deaf) for contribution to the deaf community both Nationally and internationally.

Todd was born deaf and has a Deaf sister and was formerly a senior manager in the IT industry providing workplace infrastructure support to major corporate clients including one of Australia's biggest financial institutions.

Todd served as a Board Director for Deaf Australia for 10 years and as one of the longest serving Chairperson for Deaf Australia and served as a Board Director for the Deaf Society (NSW) for 6 years and as Vice Chairperson/ Chairperson for more than 4 years.

Todd received Honorary Life Membership (Deaf Australia) for contribution to the deaf community.

Danielle is an industry leader in the provision of video interpreting services. She has worked extensively in both the video relay services and video remote interpreting industries in Australia and the UK. She was the Coordinator for Australia's first Video Relay Service, enabling Deaf people to make telephone calls in their own language.