



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

---

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION  
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Chair), Mr Jonathan Davis MLA (Deputy  
Chair), Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into access to services  
and information in Auslan

**Submission Number: 16**

**Date Authorised for Publication: 6 September 2022**

Submission to the

Inquiry into access to services and information in Auslan

Committee: The Standing Committee on Education and Community  
Inclusion

Author: Lou Farrer

Postal address: [REDACTED]

Contact number: [REDACTED]

Email address: [REDACTED]

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into access to services and information in Auslan. I am a hearing mother of a deaf child, aged 3 years old. My son is the only deaf person in our family, and prior to his birth, our family had virtually no exposure to the Deaf community, Deaf culture, and Auslan. Having our son in our family has completely opened up our world, and as his parents, our aim is for him to grow up with full and unrestricted access to culture and language that will ensure he is safe, can communicate fully, and will help him to build a strong Deaf identity.

Since his birth, our son has had excellent access to early intervention services to assist him to develop spoken language. Our son received bilateral cochlear implants at 10 months of age, and has received intensive speech therapy and other supports since that time. Our family are incredibly grateful and fortunate to receive this excellent care. However, one critical piece of the puzzle that has been missing in our son's care has been his (and our family's) access to learning Auslan. As hearing parents, we have needed to take it upon ourselves to investigate how to learn Auslan and how to assist our son to learn Auslan, which has been in stark contrast to the guidance and support we received for our son to develop spoken language. We believe that access to Auslan is critical for our son because, despite his access to cochlear implants, these devices don't provide a perfect replacement for hearing. He will always be deaf, and there will be times when our son will not have access to his devices. As a child, he needs to be able to communicate with us at all times. We believe that he needs access to Auslan to communicate with us, and for us to communicate with him, when he is not wearing his devices. We also believe that it is important for our son to grow up with a way to connect with other Deaf children and adults, as research suggests that Deaf children are at increased risk of mental health issues due to isolation from hearing peers and a decreased sense of belonging in a hearing world.

Ideally, mechanisms to assist families to connect with Auslan and the Deaf community in Canberra should be put in place for Deaf children from the point/time of their hearing loss diagnosis, as is the case for other supports. Not all families of Deaf children will want to take this up, but it would have been an enormous help to us if this information/access were made available to us.

This raises an additional issue, which is the current lack of available Deaf instructors/educators to assist families and Deaf children to learn Auslan in the ACT. There is currently a waitlist for Auslan in the Home services in the ACT, which is problematic for young children, as we know early access to language is critical. Investment in building capacity in the ACT for instruction in Auslan would be an enormous benefit to families of Deaf children in the ACT.

In addition, there is currently a critical gap in access to bilingual Auslan/English early education services for Deaf children in the ACT. There is currently no bilingual preschool/early education provider in the ACT that offers Auslan and spoken English. Several families of Deaf children in the ACT have connected to develop a parent-run Auslan playgroup, and this small grassroots initiative demonstrates the interest and demand from families in the ACT for access to early education in Auslan. A playgroup or preschool would also be a mechanism for families to connect with one another and for Deaf children to form a supportive peer group. An Auslan pathway should be made available to babies through Auslan/English playgroups run by teachers of the Deaf and Deaf adults, and continue through to preschool and primary school. Ideally, we would love our son to have access to Auslan curriculum throughout his education. In addition to a bilingual preschool, a demonstration primary school site in the ACT could be established that teaches Auslan as a second language, with priority access made available to Deaf children (or the ability for Deaf children in other schools to visit the school to access lessons). Access to Auslan as a second language in ACT schools would not only benefit Deaf children, but hearing children as well.

To summarise, I would like to make the following recommendations to improve access to Auslan in the ACT, from the perspective of a hearing family of a Deaf child:

1. Information about how to learn Auslan and how to connect with the Deaf community in the ACT should be provided to hearing families of Deaf children from the point of diagnosis of their child's hearing loss.
2. More Auslan educators/instructors need to be recruited into the ACT to provide Auslan in the Home services.
3. Bilingual Auslan/English playgroups for babies/toddlers should be established that focus on Auslan development in conjunction with general child development.

4. A bilingual Auslan/English public preschool in the ACT should be established. Private early education providers should also be encouraged/incentivised to offer Auslan.
5. A demonstration primary/high school site in the ACT should be established that specialises in offering curriculum in Auslan as a second language. Access for Deaf children should be facilitated, either through priority enrolment or the ability for Deaf children to travel to attend for lessons. An alternative model would be a 'roving' Auslan curriculum unit that travels to schools where Deaf children are enrolled and provides Auslan education.

Thank you again for holding this inquiry and for the opportunity to contribute.

Best wishes,

Lou Farrer