



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION  
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## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into access to services  
and information in Auslan

**Submission Number: 19**

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## Submission to the Inquiry into access to services and information in Auslan

*Regarding term of reference 2: Options to strengthen and enforce legislation and policy to increase provision of services and information in Auslan across the public and private sectors in the following settings: aged care; education and training; emergency services; employment; health care; justice; media (including Government announcements); and social opportunities.*

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My role has been to assist them to change NDIS support coordination service providers; and to access health, legal and housing services.

Based on this experience, I've learned that there is not enough understanding among services and agencies of the role and importance of Auslan interpreters for deaf people. I believe this to be true in relation to translators and interpreters generally.

I have also learned that there are not enough deaf interpreters and deaf support workers in the ACT to meet the needs of deaf people accessing services.

Ensuring an interpreter is available should be a priority for any public health, policing/legal or social services appointment, however, on many occasions it seemed that this requirement was treated as a second thought, desirable but not necessary, or the role of the patient/client rather than the service/agency.

For a vulnerable, disabled and unwell member of our community, these assumptions can be detrimental to physical and mental health, and wellbeing.

For example:

- when ACT policing delivered a notice to attend court to my client, I explained that they are deaf and could not read English. The police officer responded that their responsibility only extended to delivering the notice;
- at a scheduled hearing at the Magistrates Court, the interpreter cancelled on the day and the hearing had to be re-scheduled because an alternative could not be found;
- for a mental health assessment with Access Mental Health, I booked the Auslan interpreter for the client, using their NDIS funding. Although the client finds in-person interpreting easier to understand and more comfortable, we could not provide this service because the cost was prohibitive due to interpreters needing to travel from regional areas. For example, in addition to the in-person fee of \$675 for a Canberra-based interpreter, we would have needed to pay an additional \$238 travel fee. I made the request for an interpreter four weeks in advance of the appointment;
- for a dental appointment at the Belconnen Health Centre, no interpreter was booked by the service, even though this had been requested;

- when making an application for social housing, Housing ACT told me that they were concerned about offering a tenancy to the client because they were unsure how they would understand the tenancy agreement in order to sign it.

In working with this client, I have also learned that one of the major support coordination service providers for deaf people receiving NDIS funding, Deaf Connect, has no office in Canberra.

For my client, this meant that their support coordinator worked from Tasmania and contacted them via video. This arrangement led to, what I believe to be, serious neglect of the client's mental and physical well-being.

Unable to find a deaf support worker for four months, the support coordinator left the client without any assistance or help. When this came to our attention, the client had experienced a severe mental health breakdown and required urgent medical attention for a number of conditions. I am in the process of lodging a complaint with the NDIS Commission in relation to this.

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