

Friday 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2011

To whom it may concern;

I am writing on behalf of ASLIA Victoria who wishes to make the following submission to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into Disability Care and Support.

The Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association Victoria (ASLIA Victoria) is a non-profit body, and the state peak organisation representing the needs and interests of Australian Sign Language/English Interpreters in Victoria. ASLIA Victoria was established in 1986 and is comprised of a Executive Committee and members. ASLIA Victoria's vision is to lead and promote best practice in sign language interpreting across Victoria. To achieve this, ASLIA Victoria works closely with key stakeholders in developing and maintaining professional standards.

We believe it is imperative that access to Australian Sign Language (Auslan) Interpreting be included in the range of support services available through a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Auslan is the means by which many profoundly deaf people access the activities of daily life. Just as people with profound physical disabilities may require modified access arrangements in order to enter buildings for daily transactions, or in order to participate in community events, employment, or education and training, so it is that deaf people who are unable to hear or speak English require Auslan/English interpreting in order to participate in the activities of daily living. The following outlines how and where Auslan/English interpreting is required:

- Equity – it is imperative that deaf people are treated equally in all aspects of day to day life e.g. going to the bank and making a transaction; or simply seeing a lawyer to complete a will. In all circumstances deaf people need to be treated with respect and equality in order to access information and communication via the provision of Auslan/English interpreters.
- Access to information – Deaf people require Auslan/English interpreting to access information whenever they are transacting with people who do not speak Auslan, or exchanging information from such people. Without Auslan/English interpreting deaf people fail to gain full access to vital information, which prevents them from engaging in community life as equal citizens.
- Access to community participation and social inclusion – Deaf people require Auslan/English interpreting to participate in community events, social activities and exchange information with people who can hear but do not speak Auslan. Many community events exclude deaf people as no

Auslan/English interpreting access is provided. Deaf people continue to be marginalised and excluded through this lack of access, and miss out on broad life opportunities and inclusive experiences.

- Access to education and training – Deaf people require Auslan/English interpreters in order to gain access to education and training opportunities. These opportunities form the foundation for achieving one's aspirations and making a contribution to society. Without Auslan/English interpreters, deaf people are locked out of education and training, which contributes to their marginalisation in society and opportunities.
- Access to employment – Deaf people require Auslan/English interpreters in order to realise their employment goals and perform in their roles to their maximum abilities. Without Auslan/English interpreters, deaf people cannot gain, maintain and further their employment in a competitive marketplace.

A scoping study to identify supply and demand issues in Auslan/English interpreting was conducted on behalf of the Australian Government (Orima, 2004) and found that the majority of Auslan/English interpreting is within the following settings: education, employment, public medical, private medical, legal/financial and other settings (e.g., weddings, funerals, etc.).

Access to Auslan/English interpreters ensures that deaf people can participate in all aspects of community life on an equal footing with their peers who can hear. The National Disability Insurance Scheme is an ideal vehicle through which deaf people can access this vital service. We urge the Productivity Commission to ensure that Auslan/English interpreting services are a core part of any National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Deafness is the second most prevalent health condition affecting Australians. The barriers associated with deafness are significant, but many of these can be addressed through the provision of support services. The provision of Auslan/English interpreting services to profoundly deaf people is one such example. There are also large cohorts of deaf and hard of hearing people that are bilaterally deaf and use hearing aids and other assistive devices. They also require support with the use and maintenance of these devices.

We urge the Productivity Commission to consider the needs of deaf and hard of hearing Australians as a key part of this strategy.

Kind regards,

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