



Frequently Asked Questions

Who uses sign language interpreting services?

Sign languages were not ‘made up’ but developed naturally, just as spoken languages did. This is why there is no ‘universal’ sign language. The sign language used in Australia is Australian Sign Language Auslan). Auslan and English are quite separate and different languages. English is very much a second language for many Deaf people for whom Auslan is their first or preferred language. There are an estimated 15–20,000 Deaf people who use Auslan (Australian Sign Language) in Australia (Hyde and Power, 1992¹) Many of these individuals will require or prefer an interpreter in order to achieve meaningful communication with hearing people.

However, it is important to remember that our hearing clients require the interpreter as much as the Deaf person does. After all, most Deaf people are more fluent in English than the average hearing person is in Auslan.

Hearing professionals also have a responsibility to ensure that their Deaf clients or patients give informed consent. In many if not most cases, this means that both parties need the services of an interpreter. Either party – Deaf or hearing – can request an interpreter.

Auslan Interpreting Services Australia (SLC) has the largest register of interpreters and provide interpreters throughout Australia. It is the only interpreting service where all profits are invested back into services which benefit the Deaf community.

Why do I need two interpreters?

Where an assignment be in excess of two hours duration or is particularly demanding, two interpreters will normally be required. (The number of interpreters required will be at the discretion of the Manager, Interpreting and Advocacy.)

The provision of a team of interpreters is necessary to:

- Ensure a continual flow of accurate information
- Reduce interpreter fatigue, and
- Reduce the likelihood of Occupational Overuse Syndrome

For more information on this go to our **[fact sheet on Team Interpreting](#)**.

Whose responsibility is it to pay for interpreters?

The Deaf Society believes that Deaf people should not cover the costs of access by paying for Auslan interpreting in any situation.

Some areas of interpreting are funded, for example private medical appointments, public hospital appointments and police and criminal court settings. The Deaf Society considers that all Government departments, both Commonwealth and State, must make a budgetary allocation to cover the cost of interpreting service.

Training providers and organisations that provide training are under legislation responsible for providing access at all times. There exist the Disability Standards for Education that clearly outlines training providers responsibilities.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992), training providers, employers and service providers must provide access for people with disabilities, including Deaf people.

In certain situations – for example, where a small business does not have the financial means to pay for interpreting – the fee is negotiable. In a small number of situations, the Deaf Society will fund the provision of an interpreter. In both situations, the requesting organisation must show that paying for this service would constitute an unjustifiable hardship. It is important that Deaf people receive the same level of service as any other person.

What qualifications do interpreters have?

The service endeavours to provide accredited interpreters for all assignments. There are two levels of accreditation available through the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI).

NAATI Interpreter Level interpreters (formerly Level 3) are required for court work, conferences and all large group meetings.

NAATI Para-professional Level interpreters (formerly Level 2) are suitable to be used for smaller groups/meetings and one-to-one appointments. In some situations which would normally require a practitioner of Interpreter standard, a Para-professional interpreter may be contracted, as long as the consent of all parties is sought and received.

Our service also provides Deaf relay interpreters that work with Deaf clients who:

- Have minimal skills in Auslan, due to educational or linguistic disadvantage, or
- Have minimal skills in Auslan, due to intellectual disability, or
- Have minimal skills in Auslan, having recently migrated to Australia, or
- Are Deafblind

Deaf relay interpreters work in teams with Hearing interpreters in order to facilitate communication. For more information go to the fact sheet on **Relay Interpreters**.

All interpreters contracted by the SLC are expected to adhere to ASLIA Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct. Further information about ASLIA (NSW) Inc. can be obtained at **www.deafsocietynsw.org.au/asliansw**.

I haven't worked with an interpreter before, how does it work?

Working with a sign language interpreters is not difficult but it does take a little practice and knowledge. The following points are designed to assist your interaction with the Deaf person.

The most important points to remember are:

- Maintain eye contact with the deaf person
- Speak clearly and at a normal speed
- Avoid asking the interpreter for their opinion
- Don't make asides that you don't want interpreted
- Allow a little extra time for the deaf person to answer any questions you have asked

For more detailed information please go to the fact sheet on Tips for Working with Sign Language Interpreters.

How will I know once an interpreter is confirmed?

You will receive an email or a fax confirming the interpreter/s that you have booked. If you are not sure you can contact our service via email, fax, TTY or phone.

If the Deaf persons mobile phone number has been provided then the Deaf client will also receive an SMS confirming the interpreter that has been booked.

What are Video Remote Interpreting Services?

Some state offices provide video remote interpreting via both Video conferencing and D-Link technology.

The advantage to video remote interpreting in contrast to onsite interpreting provision is that it is an on-demand service available in most instances. Additionally, here is a lower minimum charge time than for onsite interpreters and it provides increased access for deaf people in regional and remote areas.

Video conferencing equipment is required for the ISDN option with a minimum speed of 384kbps. The D-link option requires the use of a DVC1000 device and a dedicated broadband connection with a minimum 512kbps upload.

For more information please go to the VRI information sheet.

What is the role of a Relay interpreter?

A relay interpreter is a person who is extremely fluent in Auslan, has skills in interpretation and is expected to abide by the same Code of Ethics as Auslan interpreters. Deaf relay interpreters work in tandem with Auslan interpreters interpreting for Deaf individuals who lack fluency in Auslan or English.

The person who potentially could benefit from a relay interpreter is a person who is deaf and is not fluent in English or Auslan for numerous reasons including:

- They may be a migrant where they have some use of another country's sign language;
- They may have been socially isolated and use "home signs";
- They could have an intellectual disability (mild or more severe) or multiple disabilities such as deaf and blind; or
- They could have attended a school for the Deaf and just did not acquire language skills.

Usually, a relay interpreter is deaf as deaf people anecdotally have had to rely on visual cues for most communication. They are better equipped to discern idiosyncratic gestures/signs and understand the meaning of different signs out of context that a Deaf person who is not a fluent Auslan user may use.

For more information please go to the fact sheet on [Relay Interpreters](#).

What kind of preparation material is necessary to provide to the interpreter?

When the interpreter has an opportunity to look at preparation materials they are much better equipped to interpret for the assignment. It helps the interpreter better provide effective communication between Deaf and hearing clients. The person requesting the service should provide the following information in advance:

- Paperwork – agenda of the meeting, minutes of meetings (preceding and current), subject matter to be discussed, names of those attending meeting/interview/conference etc, copies of speeches/papers to be given and scripts of videos to be used (if the video/s is not subtitled)
- Terminology/specific language, jargon or acronyms commonly used
- Relevant information regarding the appointment – for example, specialisation of doctor; whether a male or female interpreter is required.