



**Social Security Legislation Amendment
(Strengthening the Job Seeker Compliance
Framework) Bill 2014**

A Submission by Deaf Australia
1 November 2014

Submitted by:
Kyle Miers, Chief Executive

About Deaf Australia:

Established in 1986, Deaf Australia is the deaf-led peak organisation representing deaf people in Australia.

We promote the advancement of human rights and equality for deaf people by collaborating with our members and stakeholders to influence governments in implementing the United Nations Conventions and the National Disability Strategy.

Deaf Australia's vision for 2020 is that Deaf people will have made significant advancements to equality and quality of life through:

1. Full human rights, self-determination and political strength;
2. Full access to communication, language and information;
3. Quality education, educators who are Deaf and who are proficient Auslan users, access to universities and life-long learning programs;
4. Full respect for and widespread use of Auslan by non-Deaf people;
5. Diverse employment, including, for example, teaching, administration, medicine, psychology, business, law and politics;
6. Full interaction through provision of qualified interpreters and information technologies;
7. Full partnerships with families, educators, health providers, bio-ethicists and policy-makers. "Nothing about us without us" will have become the standard;
8. Auslan is recognised and linguistic rights are realised in practice.

Deaf Australia appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Social Security Legislation Amendment (strengthening the Job Seeker Compliance Framework) Bill 2014.

Recommendations:

Deaf Australia recommends the following action:

1. refer the Amendment to Committee to further discuss the implications of the Amendment for deaf and hard of hearing people (and other disability groups) so that the affected groups will not be disadvantaged by the Amendment.
2. ensure that Amendment links to the National Disability Strategy so as to promote inclusion, equity and opportunities (including security and employment).
3. consider expanding the Employment Assistance Fund for employment services to utilise the fund for communication access for Auslan users to:
 - a. attend employment services appointments; and
 - b. participate in workshop and training provided by employment services.
4. consider offering incentives such as travel costs for deaf and hard of hearing people to attend appointments, workshops or training where their employment services are out of their prescribed zone (relevant to Disability Employment Services).

The Amendment:

The general outline of this Amendment is to strengthen the job seeker's compliance framework to provide stronger incentives for job seekers to meet their mutual obligation requirements to attend appointments with their employment service providers.

It is our view that proposed Amendment will greatly disadvantage deaf and hard of hearing people and penalise deaf and hard of hearing people through no fault of their own.

Rationale of our response:

Deaf Australia raises concerns that the onus of this proposed compliance is on deaf and hard of hearing job seekers when employment service providers do not provide for communication access needs for deaf and hard of hearing people on an on going basis.

For many deaf people, English is their second language and it can be difficult for them to read guidelines and work instructions in English.

Deaf Australia produced a report in February 2013 in response to Commonwealth Government's Discussion Paper on *'Improving the employment participation of people with Disability in Australia'*. This report can be found at: <http://deafaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/employment-discussion-paper-feb-2013.pdf>

Deaf Australia has recently undertaken national consultations with our stakeholders on Disability Employment Services and we found the following (consistent with the report produced in 2013):

1. **Access to information** – many deaf people find information difficult to understand.

Information needs to be accessible and available in Auslan to enable deaf people to make informed choices and take on responsibilities that are appropriate for their disability and cultural background.

2. **Access to interpreters** – Not all employment services provide interpreters for deaf job seekers for their appointments.

Access to interpreter/s for these appointments is essential for deaf and hard of hearing job seekers. This include providing access to workshop and training offered by employment service providers.

3. **Availability of interpreters** – it is difficult to source suitably qualified interpreters when deaf job seekers have appointments with their providers.

Suitably qualified interpreters who are registered with National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) must be sourced to facilitate communication between Auslan user and the employment services' case workers.

Depending on the demographic location of services, some bookings require advance booking (up to 4 weeks in advance) to ensure that an appropriately qualified interpreter is sourced.

4. **No-faults** – Deaf and hard of hearing people can be disadvantaged through situations that are no fault of their own because
 - a. interpreter/s cancel at last minute/ or are unavailable; or
 - b. written information is not language appropriate for them.

Supporting argument and evidence:

Through the consultations, Deaf Australia also found that only 15 sites in Australia are specialist Disability Employment Services (DES) for deaf and hard of hearing people. All but 4 of these sites are based in capital cities. This represents less than .01% of Disability Services Providers (out of 2,300 sites Australia-wide) that are accessible for deaf and hard of hearing people.

Many consumers live outside the prescribed zone of specialist DES providers and they often have to travel long distances for an appointment with DES providers and are not compensated for their travel costs.

In many cases, the prescribed zones of employment services are not accessible for deaf and hard of hearing people. Many deaf and hard of hearing people stated that these services are not deaf sensitive and the case managers just want to find them a job and close the case.

This clearly lacks the quality component and a person centred approach.

Employment Assistance Fund (EAF):

The Commonwealth Government provides funding for the Employment Assistance Fund (through Job Access) and many deaf, hard of hearing people and employment services are unaware of this scheme and how funding can be helpful in breaking down barriers in the workplace, such as providing communication devices for potential employers.

However, this scheme is not used for deaf and hard of hearing job seekers for appointments, to participate in workshop or training with employment services.

Lack of financial support to seek and provide appropriate communication support for deaf and hard of hearing people becomes a burden for employment services.