

I would like to support the issues raised by my colleague Leanne Wishart from deaf access Gippsland, and add additional concerns, as follows:

- **Access to Australian Hearing's Services cease for Deaf and hard of hearing young people when they 18 years of age.** This leaves young people without a continuum of service and no access to meet their ongoing needs. Those diagnosed with profound hearing loss and those with hearing diagnosed at birth or an early age need all possible supports to assist them as they move into adult life which provides many challenges due to their hearing loss. *Many adults who experience decreasing hearing as a result of aging are often forced to put off acquiring hearing aids until they reach pension age due to the costs involved. This means they suffer many years of decreased communication skills in their work and social lives, with resultant impacts on mental health, work output etc.* **Australian Hearing needs further funding to provide the resources and supports to Deaf and hard of hearing people throughout the life span.**
- **Hearing rehabilitation is an important service when people acquire hearing aids and assistive listening devices.** Clients of hearing services receive very little counseling and rehabilitation support to become accustomed to the new hearing devices and receive very little support with regard to access to and purchasing of equipment to support their every day life i.e. telephones, alerting devices etc. *This frequently results in underutilization of hearing aids, with many aids being relegated to the 'bottom drawer'.* **Adequate training should be provided to Audiologists in this area and emphasis placed on this as an essential aspect of the response to overcoming the effects of hearing loss.**
- **Auslan is the Visual Language of the signing Deaf community in Australia and is indigenous to Australia.** A basic knowledge of Auslan is an important skill for all the community. **The Australian community would benefit if Auslan was a LOTE Language recommended as part of the curriculum for all primary schools in Australia.**
- **Limited or no access to Auslan Interpreting for the signing Deaf community.** In regional areas of Australia there is great difficulty accessing Auslan interpreters. There are too few qualified Auslan Interpreters and most are based in the metropolitan areas. Accessing Interpreters from the Cities is costly as the minimum appointment time is 2 hours and travelling time is charged as well as kilometres travelled. **Auslan Interpreting services must be increased in Regional Victoria by training regional people in these skills and assisting regional people to acquire qualifications in this field.**

- **No access to Auslan Interpreters for community participation.** Deaf people are often unable to participate in community events because, assuming interpreters are available, the deaf person would have to fund them themselves. The cost of interpreters makes this prohibitive. **The Australian community would benefit from interaction between deaf and hearing people if funding was made available for deaf people to participate at all levels of the community e.g. local clubs, sporting groups, school committees, parent groups, etc.**
- **Inadequate funding to Services supporting the needs of Deaf and hard of hearing people.** In Victoria, Vicdeaf provide services to Adults and young people in transition and Deaf Children Australia provide services to young Deaf and hard of hearing children of school age, Aurora provide Early Intervention. These services are stressed and inadequately funded to meet the needs of Deaf and hard of hearing people in regional Victoria. Where support services exist in Regional Victoria they are stretched and, the signing Deaf community in particular, frequently are at crisis point or beyond before service is accessed. **Services for Deaf and hard of hearing people require increased resourcing to meet the needs of the community.**
- **Appropriate education for deaf children needs to be available equally across the state.** Deaf children in remote areas often only have the choice of attending their local school with support from Visiting Teachers (who are often very stretched and therefore unable to visit as often as required for optimal results), whereas students living in metropolitan areas, and some large regional centres, are able to attend specialist settings where they can be offered a bilingual education therefore developing more competent language skills which results in improved educational, social and ultimately employment outcomes. **Deaf children need to be supported to attend school settings that best meet their needs.**

Kind Regards

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