



## **GUIDELINES FOR MEETING THE COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF OR HAVE A HEARING IMPAIRMENT**

When communicating with people who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment it is important to recognise, and respond appropriately, to their special communication needs.

### ***Strategies***

When speaking with a person with a hearing impairment, there are various strategies that can assist. Firstly, ask the person about their communication needs. Most people will be happy to explain their needs and provide advice about how best to effect communication with them.

### ***Telephone Contact***

When contacting people who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment, establish (and use) the most appropriate communication system. It may be telephone (voice, SMS, TTY, or via the National Relay Service), or may be e-mail, fax, or mail.

If organising an event that will be attended by people unable to use standard voice telephones, arrange for the venue to provide for their needs. That may include voice telephones with adequate volume control, or TTYs.

### ***One to One Communication***

Always speak directly to a person with a hearing impairment. Do not address questions to an accompanying interpreter or note-taker or computer-aided real-time transcription (CART) operator, family member, or friend. If possible, find a quiet area away from background noise.

Do not shout at a person with a hearing impairment. This does not help them to hear any better. Shouting distorts lip patterns and makes lip-reading more difficult. Speak clearly but do not over enunciate speech as this also distorts normal lip patterns.

If asking questions, use open-ended ones that do not require a yes or no response. This helps to ensure that questions are being understood. If a

response indicates that the deaf person has not understood, do not repeat the same words. Rephrase what was initially said, using different words.

Written communication is also an effective communication method. If other methods are not appropriate or not provided (for example, no interpreter or CART is available), writing down comments and questions can be a simple and effective alternative.

### ***Communication in meetings and events***

At all face-to-face meetings or events involving people who are Deaf or hearing impaired, there must be:

- a) Professionally qualified Auslan interpreters (para-professionals should only be used when professionals are not available and only as part of an interpreter team; people who are not accredited must never be used), and/or
- b) a properly functioning assistive listening system, and/or
- c) computer-aided real-time transcription (CART)

as necessary to suit each (and all) of the individuals involved.

In order to ensure the assistive listening system is functioning properly, it should be tested on a regular basis and checked prior to the meeting or event.

The provision of CART only is generally not sufficient. It must be remembered that Auslan-users need the opportunity to ask questions and speak with other participants who do not know Auslan. They cannot do so without an interpreter. The same is true in reverse. In addition, since Auslan does not use the same grammar and sentence construction as English, CART is not the ideal way for Auslan users to follow proceedings.

If the meeting or event exceeds two hours, then there must be at least two Auslan interpreters (preferably three) and at least two CART steno-captioners. This is primarily for occupational health reasons, ensuring that no one interpreter or steno-captioner has to work for too long without a break.

For Auslan interpreting, best practice is three interpreters working in twenty-minute rotations (one interpreting, one providing backup, and one resting).

At the beginning of proceedings, all participants must be (diplomatically) asked whether their communication access needs are being adequately met.

Note: lead times for bookings for assistive listening system equipment, Auslan interpreters, and CART steno-captioners can be extensive. The short supply of professional Auslan interpreters, particularly in non-metropolitan areas, means that it may be necessary to bring them to the event from another city.

## ***Lighting and Viewing Requirements***

It is important, in any situation, to ensure that there is sufficient indirect lighting to allow effective lipreading or the reading of an interpreter. This may mean the provision of supplementary lighting in some situations.

To facilitate effective lipreading, it is important to make sure lips are always visible to the person who needs to lipread. If a person cannot see the lips then he or she cannot lipread.

It is also important to ensure that Auslan-using participants have a clear view of the interpreter, and that CART-users have a clear view of the CART display. Lighting should not lessen the clarity of the CART (or any other visual) display.

## ***Audiovisual Material***

Whenever a television broadcast, DVD, video, or any other audiovisual material is screened to any audience that includes a Deaf or hearing impaired person ensure that it has captions and that they are displayed. If that simply is not possible, then it is essential to ensure the soundtrack is provided via both CART and Auslan interpreters. When producing DVDs, videos, or TV Community Service Announcements ensure they are all captioned and, have Auslan interpreters on them.

Display monitors or projection screens used for audiovisual material must be large enough to ensure captions can be clearly viewed by the entire audience.

## ***Literacy***

When communicating in writing, remember that people (including some deaf people) have different English literacy skills and prepare the written material accordingly (but without being patronising). When an Auslan-using person writes something for publication, publish it as provided, with the only exception being grammatical/orthographical corrections. These comments also apply to Websites, which are just another way of communicating in writing.

When preparing an oral presentation for another person who will give it using Auslan, prepare the material in a simplified English format to facilitate its delivery in Auslan.

## ***Breaks***

During all meetings and events ensure short breaks (minimum of 10 mins) are taken approximately every 45 minutes. The time between breaks should never be extended beyond an absolute maximum of 60 minutes. This is because the added stress involved in listening can cause Deaf and hearing impaired people to tire more quickly.

It is also extremely important that Auslan interpreters and CART steno-captioners have scheduled breaks. In particular, it is not fair to expect interpreters to work during breaks, or to shorten scheduled breaks (e.g. by proposing that refreshments be brought back to the table so that a meeting can continue without a real break). Apart from anything else, interpreters and steno-captioners need refreshments and the opportunity to use toilets just as much as do other participants.

### ***Videoconferences and Teleconferences***

Do not assume that all people are able to participate in telephone conferences or videoconferences. Find out whether all needed participants can make use of such technologies and, if so, what special requirements must be met. If any participant cannot use the technology, then use an alternative (such as a face-to-face meeting, real-time Internet-based discussion) or make appropriate adjustments (such as interpreters at the location of the user).

If all participants are able to be involved in telephone or videoconferences, ensure all participants (especially the person chairing the conference) understand the particular needs of every other participant.

### ***Accommodation***

There are particular communication issues when people who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment are staying at a meeting or event venue.

If a volume control phone user is staying at a meeting or event venue, they must be provided with a volume control phone in their guestroom.

If a TTY user is staying at a venue, they must be provided with a TTY in their guestroom and there must be a TTY at the venue's reception or event area enabling them to contact venue staff.

Also, people who need captioning in order to watch television must be provided with a working Teletext-enabled television facility in the guestroom that they occupy at the venue. Easy to follow instructions (preferably on a card accompanying the television) on how to display the captioning on the particular television should be provided. In order to ascertain guest requirements, it is important to have an appropriate question on the event's registration form.

The venue must have a method of individually alerting each user, particularly those who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment, in the event of an emergency, such as a fire or a bomb threat, etc.

**Last updated: 28 April 2006**