



Serving our community.
Sharing our culture.

Exposure Draft – Aged Care Bill 2023

Consultation Paper

Organisation Submission

March 2024

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ABOUT US

[Deaf Connect](#) is a national service provider and social impact organisation which is the product of four organisations coming together to deliver services and create social impact for the Australian Deaf community. Established in 1890 (South Australia), 1903 (Queensland), 1913 (New South Wales) and 1921 (Western Australia), Deaf Connect is a merged not-for-profit organisation supporting the Deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing communities across the country with offices located in twenty locations including Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. Deaf Connect offers a whole life range of services to support the community. Deaf Connect is a proud registered provider of My Aged Care since 2016 providing supports to older deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing Australians across the country.

Our mission is standing with the Deaf community, building capacity, and influencing social change. Deaf Connect is the largest Deaf, Deafblind, and hard of hearing specialist service provider in Australia with over 225 years of collective experience delivering quality services to the community across Australia in Auslan. Deaf Connect is also the largest employer of Deaf and hard of hearing people in Australia. Deaf Connect has a long and proud history of connecting with and engaging the Deaf community.

FACTS

- Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the sign language of the Australian Deaf community.
- Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is an accepted communication method recognised by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters.
- Auslan is recognised as a community language by the Federal Government (Dawkins, 1991).
- One in six Australian have some form of hearing loss, with that number projected to increase to one in four by 2050. Hearing loss is the second most prevalent national health issue yet remains the 8th national funding priority (Access Economics, 2006).
- According to the 2021 Census, which is at the conservative end, there are 16,242 Auslan users in Australia.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this submission, we will be using 'deaf' when referring to all individuals with varying degrees of deafness. This includes members of the community who identify as Deaf, deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing and members of the Deaf community who identify as culturally Deaf and primarily communicate in Auslan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Deaf Connect welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Health and Aged Care's consultation for the exposure draft on the new Aged Care Act Bill to replace the *Aged Care Act 1997* with a rights-based approach following the findings of the Aged Care Royal Commission.

Deaf Connect wishes to draw attention to the issues paper prepared by COTA Australian and OPAN, in partnership with 10 other older people and carer organisations, which we believe addresses the best interests of older Deaf Australians. Our submission will respond to key questions posed in the exposure draft in relations to *Chapter 1 – Introduction and Chapter 2 – Entry into the Commonwealth Aged Care System* by highlighting the issues and challenges facing deaf Australians with the Aged Care System, through a cultural and linguistic lens.

Deaf Connect welcomes COTA Australian and OPAN's Issue Paper, *Issue 12 - Diversity must be further strengthened within the Act* within COTA Australian and OPAN's Issue Paper and strongly supports the inclusion of the following within the Statements of Rights:

1. *equitable access to have their need for aged care services assessed, including in a culturally appropriate manner, and*
4. *communicate in their preferred language or method of communication, with access to interpreters and communication aids as required.*

However it should be noted that the current language list, within the [My Aged Care assessment process](#), does not include Auslan thereby preventing older Deaf Australians from eligibility or indicating their needs for an interpreter. The Australian Census included Auslan as a language option for the first time in 2021. Whilst statistics show Auslan was first recorded in the 2001 Census, the inclusion of Auslan as a specified language increases the likelihood of a Deaf person self-identifying their language preference and need for an Auslan interpreter. Deaf Connect recommends that 'spoken and signed languages' are both referenced in the Act to reflect the diversity of older Australians.

Whilst Deaf Connect supports the rights-based framework of the new Aged Care Act, it lacks clear recognition of rights of older Deaf Australians who are applying for aged care for disability supports such as Auslan interpreters or support workers. Older Deaf Australian's eligibility to access the aged care system for disability supports not due to frailty, ill health or sickness must be clearly outlined. Deaf Connect welcomes *Issue 13 - Disability supports* within COTA Australian and OPAN's Issue

Paper and recommends that the new Aged Care Act consider and refer to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities.

CONCLUSION

In closing, Deaf Connect welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Department of Health and Aged Care's consultation for the exposure draft on the new Aged Care Act Bill welcomes the opportunity to participate in any further consultations to address the needs of older Deaf Australians.

In conclusion, Deaf Connect recommends that the:

- new Aged Care Act consider and references the United Nations Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities.
- 'spoken and signed languages' are both referenced in the Act to reflect the diversity of older Australians.

Deaf Connect looks forward to seeing the consultation findings and expects that this will be accessible in Auslan.

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