



**Emergency Services Telecommunication Issues for Deaf People**  
**Discussion Paper**



## **Why is this paper about Emergency Services Telecommunication Issues for Deaf People?**

Since the National Relay Service was established in May 1995, we have seen the start of 106 Emergency Relay Service number and the introduction of some dedicated Short Message Service (SMS) Emergency Service numbers especially WA Police's SMS Assist and some Roadside Emergency associations SMS services. We are pleased to see the initiatives taken by these service providers. We are interested to see whether emergency services are available in every State and Territory and to find out your thoughts about the services currently available.

It is hoped that many Deaf people will respond to this particular discussion paper as emergency services are an important part of our life. The earlier and the easier we can access emergency services without any degree of confusion or delay, saves us from threatening situations or in severe cases, life threatening scenarios. It also creates peace of mind knowing that we have emergency services to assist in any situation, be it driving across the Nullabor or the imminent birth of a child.

### **What is an emergency call service?**

If you are witness to an emergency, or are involved in an emergency situation, you may need to contact the police, fire or ambulance service. The emergency call service is an operator-assisted service that connects you to an emergency service organisation in **a life-threatening or time-critical situation**. All you have to do is dial 106 and you will be connected.

As mentioned earlier, some state based emergency services make their services available by SMS. It is hoped that people who have used these alternative emergency services will be able to share their experiences with AAD by completing this discussion paper questionnaire. Your responses are very important to AAD and are **very helpful** for us because we will then have **facts** to support our advocacy efforts.

***It is important to remember that Australian Communications Authority (ACA) states that SMS is not to be relied on during emergencies because it is not real-time communication. (Real time means two people having a conversation at the same, like a TTY phone call where you can talk to someone.)***

This discussion paper is designed so that when we receive replies to the questionnaire attached, we can see the levels of use and opinions of emergency services currently available to Deaf people. It will also assist us to identify areas that may require AAD to lobby further.

After we receive responses from Deaf people to the questionnaire, it is intended to collate all the data and make it available on our website. Information gleaned from the responses will help us identify the level of emergency services available to Deaf people and can help AAD lobby more effectively for improved services and work with the telecommunications industry for suitable solutions to any issues that may arise from this paper.

This discussion paper looks at a few different issues that are relevant to current emergency services telecommunication issues.

**Emergency Services for Life threatening or time critical situations:**

- 106 Emergency Relay Service
- Mobile Phone Emergency 112 Number

**Non-life threatening Emergency Services (SMS Emergency Services & Car Breakdowns, etc)**

- Police, Fire and Ambulance Services
- Roadside Emergency Services

**Other**

- Future Emergency Services for Deaf people

Before we go into the discussions, please look at the Questionnaire and complete the information about yourself. This information will help us to see the different issues, in order of male or female, age group and which State or Territory. We do not need you to give us your name or address.

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## SECTION 1 – 106 Emergency Relay Service

The 106 Emergency Relay Service available in Australia provides a toll-free emergency number for people who are Deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment. You are able to ring Police, Fire and Ambulance on 106 directly through your TTY. 106 provide the same service as the 000 emergency service, but it is only for people who are Deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment. **106 is available 24 hours, 7 days a week.**

### How it works



Source: [www.aceinfo.net.au](http://www.aceinfo.net.au)

Simply dial 106. This is a toll-free number. A Relay Officer will ask you if you want Police, Fire or Ambulance. The Relay Officer will dial the correct emergency service and wait for a reply from the emergency service. The Relay Officer will stay on the line to relay your conversation. The emergency service will ask you questions and decide on the best way to help you.

We would like to know more about Deaf people's experiences of using 106 Emergency Relay Service and for which situations you have used the service.

*Please answer the questions below in the Questionnaire attached.*

- 1.1 Have you ever used 106 Emergency Relay Service?
  - i) If you answered Yes, which services did you need?
  - ii) Can you tell us a little bit of what the situation was when you needed the 106 Emergency Relay Service? For example; 'my child needed to go to the hospital when he/she had an asthma attack'
  
- 1.2 Was the 106 Emergency Relay Service easy to use?
  - i) If you answered No, can you tell why it was not easy to use?
  - ii) Was the service quick?
  
- 1.3 If you have not used the 106 Emergency Relay Service yourself, can you tell us why not?
  - i) Have not needed to use it – there have been no emergencies
  - ii) Have not needed to use it – there was a hearing person who could call for me
  - iii) Did not know about it
  - iv) Do not like it. If so, can you tell us why?
  - v) Other (please write details)

## **SECTION 2 – Mobile Phone 112 Number**

On mobile phones, users are able to access emergency services by dialing 112 on their handset **by voice ONLY**. This service enables people to phone emergency services using 112 regardless of which telecommunications service provider (Telstra, Optus etc) is actually transmitting the call. 112 is like 000 for mobile phones.

At the moment, there is no TTY or SMS services available for 112 because SMS messages cannot be relied upon during times of emergency (see page 2). There is some research currently being done in Sweden to look into alternative services using mobile phones for Deaf and hard of hearing people. The Australian Communication Authority is interested in the results from this research before looking into introducing a similar service in Australia.

In the meantime, we are interested to know what Deaf people think about 112 mobile phone emergency service and whether you think it would be useful to have an alternative real time emergency service accessible from our mobiles.

*Please look at the Questionnaire and complete the information.*

- 2.1 Have you heard of the 112 mobile phone emergency service before?
  
- 2.2 If an alternative emergency service for mobile phones was available in Australia for Deaf and hard of hearing people, would you use it?
  
- 2.3 Do you have any ideas about other alternative emergency service access from mobile phones that Deaf people can use? **For example, Instant Messenger from some mobile phones**

## **SECTION 3 – Police, Fire and Ambulance Services**

Currently the safest and best way to contact essential emergency services, Police, Fire and Ambulance is to dial 106 Emergency Relay Service and your call will be transferred to the appropriate service you need.

However, the Western Australia Police has introduced the **SMSAssist**© service for people who use SMS only. The service is provided for people who live in WA only. Further details about this service are available on their website:

<http://www.police.wa.gov.au/Services/SMSAssist.asp>

The **SMSAssist**© is a service for people who are Deaf, hard of hearing or unable to speak clearly to contact the police for reasons such as: to arrange police attendance and/or to report matters to police. A police operator will then send a prompt detailed reply and you send in information that you need them to know. They will then instruct you on what they will do.

As this service is only available in WA, AAD wonders whether Deaf people think this type of service should become available in every State and Territory. We also want to know whether Deaf people think it should be available for Fire and Ambulance services as well as Police. The WA Police **SMSAssist**© service is the only alternative SMS Emergency Service available in Australia that AAD knows of, but if you know of any other emergency SMS services that you are able to access, we are interested in your feedback.

*Please answer the questions below in the Questionnaire attached. Only **WA Members need to complete the first question. If you live outside of WA, please complete Question 2 onwards.***

- 3.1 Have you used the WA Police **SMSAssist**©?
  - i) If you answered yes, can you tell us a bit about the situation you used it for? For example 'I had a burglary and used **SMSAssist**© to call the police'
  - ii) Did you find **SMSAssist**© useful? If so, can you tell us why?
- 3.2 Do you think a similar Police **SMSAssist**© service should be introduced in every State and Territory?
- 3.3 Do you think a similar **SMSAssist**© service should be provided by Fire and Ambulance services in each State?
- 3.4 If you answered yes to any of the questions above, can you tell us why you would use the service? *For example: 'I do not have a phone at home and only have a mobile phone and it is the only way I can use Emergency Services'*

#### **SECTION 4 – Roadside Emergency Services**

The Royal Automobile Clubs of Victoria, SA and Tasmania (RACV, RAA and RACT) are currently the only three roadside assistance centres who provide SMS roadside emergency services in Australia that AAD is aware of. The service in Victoria requires Deaf and hard of hearing members to register with RACV before using the service, whereas in SA and Tasmania, there is no need to register prior to using the service.

Further information about these services can be found on these websites:

<http://www.racv.com.au/members/impaired.asp> and <http://www.tasdeaf.org.au/newslett.htm>

Deaf people drive cars, just like everyone else. In the event of a breakdown, if there is no SMS roadside assistance available we either have to contact family or friends via SMS and ask them to call for roadside assistance for us or we have to try and wave someone to stop and ask them to phone the roadside emergency services. SMS services such as those provided by RACV, RAA and RACT are innovative and very helpful to people who rely on their mobiles for SMS usage only.

There is not enough information about whether Deaf people actually use the services currently available and whether they have found them to be helpful. With feedback from people in Victoria, SA and Tasmania, we will be able to develop an idea of how useful they are, what works well and what could be improved. This will be useful for people in other States who might wish to have further information to help with their lobbying efforts to introduce similar services in their State or Territory.

*Please look at the Questionnaire and complete the information.*

- 4.1 Have you used the SMS Roadside Emergency Service in a roadside situation? (**Deaf people in States where such services are available can answer this question only**)
- i) If yes, can you tell us whether the service was helpful?
  - ii) Can you tell us why it was helpful?
  - iii) Did you have any problems with it? If so can you tell us what problems you had?
- 4.2 AAD has asked this question before in other Discussion Papers, but since this Discussion Paper is dedicated to Emergency Services your feedback is valuable. Do you think a similar service should be provided in your State and Territory?
- i) If you answered yes, can you tell us why?
- 4.3 Are you a member of your State roadside emergency service? For example, are you a member of RACQ, RAA, RACV, etc?

## **SECTION 5 – Future Emergency Service Access for Deaf people**

Since 3G mobile phones were introduced in Australia, '3' has been the only mobile phone supplier that provides mobile phone sets that includes video facilities. Next year, Telstra, Optus, Vodafone and other carriers will be joining the 3G technology and we are going to see a large growth of 3G mobile phones. It is hoped that the quality of video images will improve over time and mobile video phones will become easier and clearer to use. In Sweden, they are now seeing a lot of Deaf people using 3G phones and also some phone companies are providing video information services in Swedish Sign Language on their websites.

Some examples of 3G mobile phone handsets are illustrated below:



3G mobile phones use a different technology system that includes new and more powerful applications such as multimedia messaging service (eg; video) as well as voice, data, internet, email and fax.

Video telephony is fast growing in countries like the USA and UK. In our recent Broadband Discussion Paper we showed you a new broadband video phone that is used in the USA and UK. Illustrated below is an example of the broadband video phone.



Picture source: <http://www.dlink.com/products/?pid=8>

AAD is very interested in this new broadband video phone technology and will be looking at ways to explore whether this will be the next big thing for the Deaf community. There are several aspects we need to look into before we can start advocating for the introduction of these broadband video phones.

**If and when** Video Relay Service becomes available in Australia, do you think you would prefer to be able to access emergency services using either 3G mobile videophone handsets or broadband video phone? We are very interested to know whether Deaf people would prefer to use video relay **or** TTY National Relay Service for contacting emergency services. At the moment, little is known about whether 3G mobile phones are compatible with video relay services overseas, but recently there was an article that explains that mobile phones provided by '3' are now able to communicate with computers. For example, people who have 3G mobile phones with '3' can talk to anyone using a computer webcam.

Your feedback and comments about these two future telephone services that would enable you to access emergency services in a different way would be appreciated.

*Please look at the Questionnaire and complete the information.*

***If and when video relay service was available in Australia in the future, would you:***

- 5.1 Use the 3G mobile videophone handset to make an emergency call through video relay?
  - i) If you answered No, can you tell us why not?
  - ii) If you answered Yes, can you explain to us why this would be better than the 106 Emergency Relay Service?
  
- 5.2 Use the broadband video phone to make an emergency call through video relay?
  - i) If you answered No, can you tell us why not?
  - ii) If you answered Yes, can you explain to us why this would be better than the 106 Emergency Relay Service?

- 5.3 Use both 3G and broadband video phone in the future if they were available through the Disability Equipment Program?
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## Comments and feedback

AAD looks forward to your comments on this paper. As you can see it addresses many issues. We may have missed some, so please tell us your ideas, concerns and thoughts.

### The deadline for feedback is Friday 24<sup>th</sup> December 2004.

If you wish to provide feedback or ask questions, you can do one or all of the following:-

1. Fill out this form and fax to:

Andrew Wiltshire  
Community Liaison and Projects Officer  
Fax: 02 9871 8400

2. Fill out this form and post to (FREE POSTAGE):

Andrew Wiltshire  
Community Liaison and Projects Officer  
Australian Association of the Deaf Inc  
Reply Paid 1083  
STAFFORD  
QLD 4053

3. Electronically complete the form by downloading from AAD Website and email to:

Andrew Wiltshire  
Email: [andrew.wiltshire@aad.org.au](mailto:andrew.wiltshire@aad.org.au)

4. Visit AAD's website, go into DTAN Discussion Site and type your comments on [www.aad.org.au](http://www.aad.org.au)

Your feedback and comments are very important for us to show that we know what the Deaf community feels and represent you fairly when we lobby for increased services or goods.

After receiving feedback from the community, we will share your comments with the government, telecommunications industry, mobile phone providers, community services and the other members of the Deaf community as well as on our website.

### **What is DTAN?**

*The Deaf Telecommunications Access and Networking Project (DTAN) has been operating with funding from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) since October 2001.*