

**Rural, regional or remote access telecommunications issues for
Deaf People**

Discussion Paper



What is a Discussion Paper?

A discussion paper is a document that is sent to the Deaf community, for you to read and think about things that are in this Discussion Paper. At the end of the Discussion Paper, there is a separate page/attachment with all the questions in the document, ready for you to fill out and send to AAD. Information on how to send to AAD is on the last page of this document.

When we receive all the replies from you, we will put together all the details and it will show us what you all feel and think about the questions we are asking you. This helps us to show to the people who provide services & telecommunications and those who work in the telecommunications industry, industry regulators or Government Departments what the Deaf community feels. It is always important to be able to show what the Deaf community really feels by having some real facts. Your feedback will be very important to us!

We look forward to knowing how you all feel about the issues in this Discussion paper so that our knowledge about access and equity in the telecommunications area can be kept up to date.

The information we receive from you will be protected under the Privacy Act and cannot be used by anyone else outside AAD.

What is DTAN?

This project builds on the work done by AAD's Telecommunications Access Subcommittee (TASC) since 1986. The project has been operating with funding from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) since October 2001.

Activities of the project for 2003-2004

- National community consultation with the Deaf Community
- Publish 2 articles/research reports aimed at Government, industry and regulators
- Disseminate 3 discussion papers aimed at the Deaf Community
- AAD representation at various telecommunications committees and forums
- Collaborate with other peak disability groups to increase telecommunications access
- Lobby for equitable access to telecommunications products and services for the Deaf community

This project is exciting for AAD as more time and energy can be devoted to ensuring we are able to disseminate information and lobby stakeholders for increased access to telecommunications.

Why is this paper about Rural Telecommunications for Deaf People?

Services available to people in the 'bush' – rural, regional or remote locations have been discussed in a lot of detail especially at the beginning of the new millennium. Many improvements have occurred and disadvantages have emerged since the Regional Telecommunications Inquiry. Australian Association of the Deaf needs to know whether Deaf people who live in the 'bush' are able to access telecommunication services fairly and effectively.

Australian Association of the Deaf is very interested in making sure that Deaf people in rural, regional or remote locations are able to access telecommunications on the same level as those Deaf people who live in cities. There is not enough information available about how Deaf people access telecommunication services in rural, regional or remote locations. This discussion paper will hopefully find out what work needs to be done in making sure access is available to all Deaf people.

We know that Deaf people still do not have the same access to telecommunications equipment or services as our hearing peers. Some telecommunication carriers provide more access than others and we want to find out which areas may need improving.

This discussion paper is designed so that when we receive replies to the questionnaire enclosed, we can see the difference in services between the bush and metropolitan areas and to identify areas that may require AAD to lobby further, effectively. Can you please make sure that you tick on the Questionnaire whether or not you live in a rural, regional or remote area. This is important so that we know which ones come from the rural, regional and remote areas so that we can identify the difference in access, if any.

After we receive responses from our Deaf members 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 level of services available to Deaf people in the 'bush' and can help AAD lobby effectively for improved services or work with the telecommunications industry for suitable solutions to any issues that may arise from this paper.

This discussion paper looks at different issues that are relevant to current rural telecommunication issues.

- Universal Service Obligation & Customer Service Guarantee
- Telstra Countrywide
- Internet & Broadband
- Payphones
- Mobile Phones
- Emergency Service Access

Before we go into the discussions, we would like you to tell us a little bit 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.

Please look at the Questionnaire and complete the information about yourself.

SECTION 1 – Universal Service Obligation & Customer Service Guarantee

Telecommunication consumer rights in Australia are underpinned by law through Universal Service Obligation (USO) and the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG).

The USO makes sure that all Australians have access to a standard telephone service (including TTY or modem) no matter where they live or work.

The CSG says that if phone connection and repairs are not carried out within agreed timeframes, consumers may be entitled to compensation.

These and other consumer protection laws are overseen and enforced by the Australian Communications Authority (ACA) www.aca.gov.au

Where problems occur between consumers and their phone or Internet company, they can turn to the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) www.tio.com.au, an independent umpire who can investigate complaints at no charge to the consumer.

The Federal Government has produced a new booklet 'Your Phone Service. Your Rights', about your rights under the USO & CSG and it is available free of charge from newsagents across regional and rural Australia. It can also be obtained by phoning free call 1800 883 488, fax: 02 6271 1886 or downloaded from www.telinfo.gov.au

It will help tell you what your rights are under the USO and CSG. Let us know if you have problems in getting copies or understanding the information in the booklet.

One of the things provided under the USO & CSG is access to a standard telephone service, which means you can request a TTY instead of the standard voice phone.

At the moment, only Telstra and Optus provide a Disability Equipment Program for those who rent Telstra or Optus phone lines. In the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Telecommunications Report prepared by William Jolley in 2003, it was recommended that a centralised **Disability Equipment Program** be investigated. AAD sits on several telecommunication committees and a centralised disability equipment program is on the agenda, however this issue is only at a discussion level at this stage. It might take some time before it can be developed and implemented.

Please look at the Questionnaire and complete the information.

- 1.1. Are you happy with the present Disability Equipment Programs?
- 1.2. Which equipment do you use?
- 1.3. Which company do you use for your equipment?
- 1.4. Does the Disability Equipment Program give you enough choice of equipment for your needs?
- 1.5. If not, what other equipment do you think the Disability Equipment Program should include?

SECTION 2 – Services from Telecommunication Carriers

Some telecommunication carriers have a higher presence than others in the 'bush' and one of the issues for them is to provide equitable telecommunication services to everyone.

TTY Enquiry Phone Services

At the moment, both Telstra and Optus provide a TTY phone line for Deaf people to phone about services, Disability Equipment Programs and billing services.

TTY Phone numbers are listed below for Telstra and Optus:



Disability Enquiry Hotline: 1800 808 981



Optus: 1800 550 002

Telstra Country Wide

Telstra has Telstra Country Wide stores in regional areas and most of these stores have some of the Disability Equipment Program items on display for Deaf or hard of hearing customers.

Have you been offered a look at any of the Disability Equipment available through some of the Telstra Country Wide stores? We are interested to get your feedback about this as AAD wants to see the Deaf community enjoying the same services regardless of where you live. Sometimes AAD does not know if people are having problems getting a telephone service until you tell us about it.

Please look at the Questionnaire and complete the information.

- 2.1 Have you used any of the TTY enquiry numbers provided by Telstra or Optus?
- 2.2 Were they helpful?
- 2.3 Have you been able to see any of the equipment available through the Disability Equipment Program at Telstra Country Wide stores?
- 2.4 Were you happy with the service provided at Telstra Country Wide stores?
- 2.5 If not, can you tell us why you were not happy with the service?

SECTION 3 – Internet & Broadband

Australia at the year 2000 reported that we were the country with the fastest growing number of people (43% of population) connected to the Internet, at 37.2% growth rate. However, in the same report, it shows that people in the over 55 year old group are less likely to have Internet access at home than those in the 24 – 54 years old group. Also there is a difference in how many of those are connected to the Internet in cities than those who live in the 'bush'. (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 8147.0 Feb 2001)

AAD is interested to know how many Deaf people have Internet access and whether you use Broadband or dial-up services for your Internet connection. The information that we receive from you will help us to lobby for increased and cheaper access so that when video over Internet protocol equipment is readily available Deaf people will be better able to afford it. When Video communication equipment using the Internet becomes easier to use and is widely available, it is possible that a Video Relay Service option could be included in the current National Relay Service. Did you know that video relay service is available in several countries now? It would be very useful for people living in 'the bush' to access interpreter services through a video relay service, for example medical interpreting. A picture of a video relay service is shown below:



Picture source: Sorenson VRS, USA

More information about Video Relay Services/Interpreting is available on the Internet. Listed below are some website addresses for you to visit for further information.

<http://www.aceinfo.net.au/Resources/Research/vri.html>

<http://www.s-vision.com>

Broadband Internet access is different to the standard dial-up access. When you use Broadband, you are able to download files and access the Internet at a much faster speed and it allows you to use the telephone while you are online. There are several pricing plans available but it is a good idea to have a look around and check different prices before going ahead with a plan. All dial-up or broadband plans require you to stay with them for 12 or 24 months and if you change your plan before the plan expires, you may have to pay a penalty.

There are a growing number of Deaf Internet TV programs available on the Internet that you can watch on your computer. Listed below are some website addresses for these programs. Some of them use their native Sign Language, for example in Norway.

Norway: <http://www.zoom.coip.no/>

Switzerland: www.focus-5.tv

USA: <http://www.csd.tv/>

Please look at the Questionnaire and complete the information.

- 3.1 Do you have a computer at home?
- 3.2 If you do not have a computer at home, can you tell us why you do not have one?
- 3.3 If you do have a computer at home, do you have a webcam?
- 3.4 Which Internet connection do you have?
- 3.5 If you do not have Broadband, will you get it in the future?
- 3.6 If video over Internet protocol equipment was available in Australia, would you have it yourself?
- 3.7 If video relay interpreting was introduced in Australia, would you use it more than TTY National Relay?
- 3.8 Have you seen the Deaf Internet TV websites? Tell us what you think of them.
- 3.9 Do you think Australia should have a similar Deaf Internet TV service?

SECTION 4 – Payphones

In Australia, there are about 200 TTY Payphones provided by Telstra as part of their Universal Service Obligation (USO). Last year, HREOC conducted a Telecommunications Inquiry into telecommunication services and products access for disabled people. One of the recommendations in the Inquiry was to look at increasing the number of payphones and making sure they are accessible 24/7.

There are a few issues to work through about which equipment would be most suitable and that is sturdy and is reliable. AAD attends meetings of a working party on Payphones accessibility at Telstra and there are some discussions happening about the current number and location of TTY payphones.

Some Payphones (standard ones) now allow you to send SMS messages to a mobile phone. We have heard of some stories where children were able to send SMS messages to their Deaf parents, and people who do not have mobiles can now send messages from a payphone.

AAD would like to know how often Deaf people use TTY Payphones and also whether you send SMS messages from a standard payphone. Information that we receive from you would help us to better understand how many of our members use them. Also, your answers will help us see whether Deaf people in 'the bush' use payphones more than those who live in cities.

Please look at the Questionnaire and complete the information.

- 4.1 Do you use a TTY Payphone?
- 4.2 If you do, how often do you use a TTY Payphone?

- 4.3 Are you happy with the TTY Payphone locations?
- 4.4 Have you used the SMS to mobiles service on a standard payphone?
- 4.5 If you do, how often do you use the SMS to mobile service?

SECTION 5 – Mobile Phones

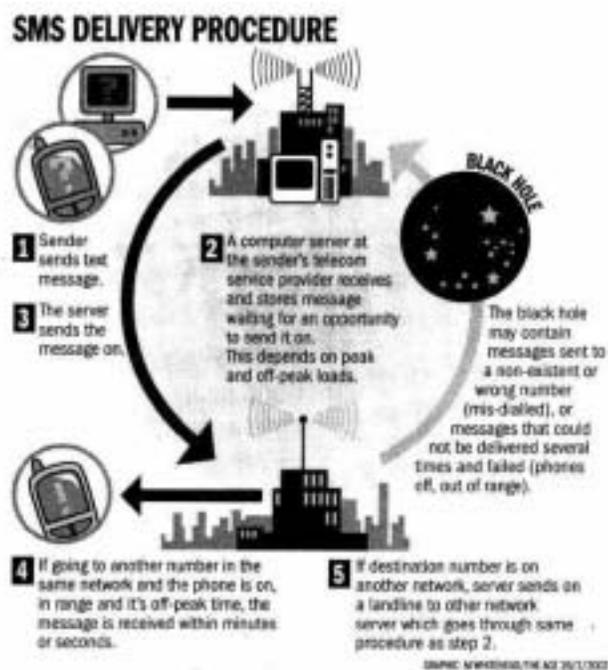
This section looks at mobile phones in 'the bush' and whether they are effective for everyday use especially for Deaf people who use mobiles to send SMS messages.

Mobile phone carriers like Telstra, Optus, Vodafone, Orange, Virgin and '3' are constantly trying to improve mobile phone coverage in the rural areas and AAD wonders if you have seen any improvement.

The following is a very simple explanation of how an SMS call delivery is completed:

1. A sender sends an SMS;
2. A computer server (carrier) receives and stores the SMS waiting to send on (speed depends on peak and off-peak periods);
3. Server sends SMS;
4. SMS if sent to someone in the same network is received and stored within seconds / minutes;
5. If SMS is sent outside the network, the SMS is sent to a computer server (same as 2) then sent and stored.

A diagram of how SMS works is shown below.



The above process raises two issues:

- SMS calls cannot be considered safe as an emergency call tool because of the possibility of delay in receiving a message. The Australian Communications Authority

(ACA) has recently publicly warned people not to consider using SMS for emergency calls.

- Mobile phones only let the user know that the SMS has been sent. It does not tell you when the message was received. This can confuse people and lead them to think incorrectly that if an SMS has been successfully sent then it is automatically received.
- Some mobile phones such as Nokia 3310, has a feature of notifying the users when the messages are:-
 - > pending to be delivered; and
 - > delivered at other end.

[Note: this service now charges 5c for message notifications and can add up on your phone bill].

Service access issues

People in the bush often experience problems with adequate coverage for mobile phone services and are usually offered alternative equipment or handsets for example, satellite phones which also have a SMS messaging facility. Satellite phones are usually much more expensive to purchase and are suitable for farmers or those who travel a lot in the outback.

In addition, some Mobile phone services are in the larger rural towns, which means a Deaf person who lives in a rural area has to travel to find out about what services and equipment are available to them if you do not have a TTY at home.

For Deaf people who live in rural areas where there is inadequate coverage, it raises further problems accessing SMS services and therefore means there are less access options available. AAD is interested to know whether you have any coverage issues. Your feedback is important to us to tell us whether we need to lobby for increased services to 'the bush'.

SMS Relay

Australian Communication Exchange (ACE) conducted a research trial into SMS Relay Service for Deaf people who use SMS in 2003 for 3 months.

SMS Relay allows people who are Deaf, or have a hearing or speech/communication impairment, to use text messages (SMS) via mobile phones, to communicate with others who have a standard telephone or TTY.

SMS Relay is quite different to regular NRS. SMS Relay is a 'messaging service' and does not offer real-time communication. With the regular NRS service, two people can have a conversation at the same time. But with SMS Relay Service, it is not a conversation back and forward. SMS Relay just passes on your SMS and sends back the answer to you as an SMS message.

This SMS Relay Service could be useful for Deaf people who do not have TTYs at home and only have mobile phones. At the moment, this service is not available, it was only a short term trial.

AAD is interested to know if you think this service would benefit those who live in rural areas. Your feedback about this will help us to know whether we need to lobby for this service to be included in the Relay Service.

Mobile phone pricing issues

The monthly total cost for making SMS calls for people who frequently use it (which applies to most of Deaf people who use mobiles) is often high. Mobile phone services provide for special rates/discount periods enabling cheaper (free in some cases) voice calls; however there are very few similar deals for people who use SMS frequently. In Canberra last year at Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Telecommunications Forum, HREOC advised all present that SMS pricing plans currently in place are discriminatory for those who rely on SMS only. AAD is interested in knowing whether Deaf people in the bush are paying higher mobile phone bills.

An example of the difference between SMS and voice costs are shown below:

SMS Conversation	Voice Conversation
Andrew: Hi how are you? Can we meet today for coffee at 3pm? John: Hi there mate! Yes can meet at 3pm. Where? Andrew: Great! Meet at Gloria Jeans on Oxford Street, City? John: No problem! See you there and have a good day! Andrew: See u soon. Cheers	Andrew: Hi how are you? Can we meet today for coffee at 3pm? John: Hi there mate! Yes can meet at 3pm. Where? Andrew: Great! Meet at Gloria Jeans on Oxford Street, City? John: No problem! See you there and have a good day! Andrew: See u soon. Cheers
SMS Conversation Cost	Voice Conversation Cost
Andrew sends 3 SMS messages @ 25c = 75c John sends 2 SMS messages @ 25c = 50c Total Call Cost: \$1.25	Andrew calls John: 1 minute call Andrew pays 25c connection fee and approximately 30c for 1 minute call (some plans provide free first 5 mins) John pays nothing. Total Call Cost: 25c or 55c (if no free calls)

QUESTIONS:

- 5.1 Do we need carrier networks to improve their SMS technology to ensure that SMS are received quickly without delay?
- 5.2 Do we need better access to information about mobile phone services and contracts in the bush?
- 5.3 Does your area receive adequate mobile coverage?
- 5.4 Do you have to travel a long way to your mobile phone shop?
- 5.5 If you have problems with your mobile phone, how do you usually try and fix the problem?
- 5.6 Do you think SMS Relay would be useful?
- 5.7 Do you pay high mobile phone charges when you use SMS only?
- 5.8 Can you tell us more about any other problems you experience with mobile phones in the bush? What do you think should be improved?

SECTION 6 – Emergency Service Access

Australian Communication Exchange (ACE) provide a Text Emergency Service access for Deaf people who wish to access emergency services for example, Police, Ambulance and Fire services. The number for this is 106 and Deaf people only need to dial 106 before you are automatically connected to the NRS to speak to either the Police, Ambulance or Fire services. AAD is interested to know whether Deaf people in the bush have been successfully using this service and whether you are happy with the services provided.

As SMS messaging is now the most commonly used telecommunications service amongst Deaf people in capital cities, some new services have been introduced recently, for example SMS Assist by WA Police to assist those who rely on SMS in situations where police are required. This service is only available for people who live in Western Australia.

Also some Automobile Associations, eg RACV in Victoria, provide emergency roadside assistance by SMS. This service is growing but as mentioned earlier, Australian Communications Authority (ACA) is not keen for SMS services to be accepted in emergency situations because they are not reliable. If your State Automobile Association does not have SMS facility, AAD can work with your State Branch to lobby for this.

- 6.1 Have you used the Emergency Services number 106, provided by ACE?
- 6.2 Do you think emergency services, like SMS Assist, should provide SMS access numbers?
- 6.3 Do you think emergency road services should have SMS access numbers?
- 6.4 Have you been in a situation where you only had a mobile phone and you required emergency services?

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 Thursday 30 September 2004.

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

1. Fill out the questionnaire form and fax to:

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

2. Fill out the questionnaire 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 and email to:

Andrew Wiltshire
Email: andrew.wiltshire@aad.org.au

4. Visit AAD's website, go into DTAN Discussion page and type your comments on www.aad.org.au

Your feedback and comments are very important for us because we need to know what the Deaf community feels so that we can 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.

Andrew Wiltshire
Community Liaison and Projects Officer

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