

Rod Chambers...: On Sunday at the Premier's press conference in New South Wales, Auslan interpreters were told to go home and that they would no longer be required. Up until now, all other important health and emergency press conferences had an Auslan interpreter in attendance. All other states and territories also use Auslan interpreters. Shirley Liu from Deaf Australia is deaf itself, and in this interview an Auslan interpreter is interpreting for her. I asked Shirley whether she was surprised at the New south Wales Government's move.

Shirley Liu: Unfortunately not [00:00:30] surprised, when we think about New South Wales announcements, if it's not related to COVID or health updates, we don't see interpreters. So in that situation on Sunday, that information wasn't accessible to the deaf community, which was really disappointing for the community. The community would like access just like every other New South Wales person to have access to the information, which is important from the Premier.

Rod Chambers...: But the previous conferences, the press conferences that have been held, particularly with [00:01:00] Gladys Berejiklian, they all had interpreters didn't they?

Shirley Liu: Yeah, that's right. Most of the time we would see an Auslan an interpreter with Gladys Berejiklian, along with the Minister of Health, and that's where key information was communicated to the community about COVID and how to manage COVID, following the health orders, how to prevent getting COVID. So all that information had been accessible previously. I would say a small handful of press conferences with Gladys Berejiklian when not interpreted, and [00:01:30] often that was because the location was moved at the last minute to there had been a miscommunication. Of recent times we have seen a really steady bookings process where interpreters have been booked ahead and always been present.

Rod Chambers...: Why is it so important for people with hearing disabilities to have this service? Why is Auslan so important to you?

Shirley Liu: Yeah, that's a really great question. A lot of deaf people, their primary language is not English, that's actually a secondary language, it could actually be [00:02:00] a third or fourth language. So when we look at Auslan and look at English, the grammatical and linguistical structure is very different. So it's really key to have an interpreter there at press conferences to know that that information is actually accessible in a person's first language, that their information is being interpreted and made accessible for people within the community. Within the spoken language, we see tone, we see affect, whether we can [00:02:30] convey them if a conversation or announcement is serious or there is a bit of jest in there, we match that along with the body language and facial expressions to see how key is this information, how serious is this information?

So a lot of people will say, "Well, isn't there captions? Isn't that enough?" Actually, it's really not, because you know with English, we've seen examples in

the past where captions haven't been captured correctly. We did see that in the bushfires, there was a specific [00:03:00] area that was spoken in English, but when it was related to captions, the wrong suburb was actually put into captions. So in order to make sure the information is not only accurate but accessible, we need sign language interpreters.

Rod Chambers...: And it's different in say England and America isn't it? And we think, "Oh, well, they're English speaking countries, so they probably would have the same sign language," but they don't do they?

Shirley Liu: Yeah, that is the case. We see [00:03:30] different sign languages, I would say over 200 sign languages across the world. We do see that over spoken languages as well. So, we need to consider that both the same, that where there is a spoken language, there'll be a specific sign language as well.

Rod Chambers...: And when you're using a sign language, it's very expressive, I noticed, and then a lot of people sort of who don't have any hearing problems are actually watching the interpreter because it's interesting to see the expressions [00:04:00] on their faces and the way they do things, and all interpreters are a little bit individual as well, aren't they? Do you have a favorite interpreter?

Shirley Liu: So, in saying that, yes Auslan is a very much expressive language, it's a very visual language. It's something that people can identify with very quickly, it's very visual. Interpreters have different levels of skills and specialize in different areas. So, some people specialize in legal or medical or family and socials. I find that all deaf people [00:04:30] would have their preferred interpreter for different areas of their life because understanding a person's articulation of sign language and being able to produce that in a way that another person understands, it's almost like having an accent. So each deaf person or each interpreter has an accent, and that can be based on where they've grown up, how they've learned sign language, where they work, who they interact with, and we don't always get to choose entrepreneur, but it's nice to have a selection.

Rod Chambers...: [00:05:00] And I suppose people are looking at news and just the television might be on, and so they might glance at it and they might have the captions. But I would guess that if there was an interpreter there, you'd think, "Oh, there's some announcement, there's something important, I should watch it."

Shirley Liu: Yes, that is the case. We often see interpreters there at important announcements. But what we're trying to say is that any New South Wales announcement from government should have a sign language interpreter there, [00:05:30] if that information is key or general information, to make that information not only accessible to people that can hear in the New South Wales public, but to people that are deaf. So when we're thinking about podcasts or interviews, we see barriers every day for deaf people, and that information is missing from deaf people's lives. So what we're trying to do is advocate to

create a solution for the New South Wales Government to become responsible for providing interpreters for all announcements.

Rod Chambers...:

Shirley Liu from Deaf Australia, using the services [00:06:00] of an Auslan interpreter speaking with me there. We approached a number of New South Wales departments to explain the change in press conference practice, but we received no explanation prior to going to air.