

POLICY



The Portrayal of Deaf People in the Media

Purpose	<p>Seeing Deaf people and their sign language and unique culture reflected in the media is an important part of Australian Deaf life. People who are Deaf or hard of hearing, are not often fairly represented in the mainstream media. When stories about deaf people do appear, they often contain portrayals which are unhelpful because they show overly-dependent or underperforming characters.</p> <p>This Policy reflects Deaf Australia's concern that the portrayal of Deaf and hard of hearing people in the media has not always depicted them in a positive, dignified and respectful manner. Too often these portrayals have focussed on the negative impact in Deaf peoples' lives rather than the restrictive environmental and social barriers Deaf people face daily.</p> <p>This policy offers guidelines on accurate and positive portrayal of Deaf people in the media.</p>
Overview	<p>Deaf Australia is the only Australian peak body managed by deaf people representing deaf people and their communities. We work with Australian Governments and collaborate with key stakeholders to ensure that Australia complies with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.</p> <p>Deaf Australia welcomes opportunities for positive media representations of Deaf people, acknowledging it as one of the most effective ways of enhancing community awareness, respect and acceptance of Deaf people and their lives.</p> <p>Deaf Australia also appreciates the importance of providing journalists and other media professionals and media stakeholders with up-to-date information to assist them in making sure that the language they use and the images they convey are accurate and responsible.</p>
Scope	<p>Deaf Australia requests all agencies, organisations, media and governments to uphold the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and basic human rights to overcome discrimination and negative cultural and ethnic beliefs and practices; to educate the community by providing information and depicting Deaf people in a positive image through focussing on tolerance, respect, opportunity, independence, and achievement.</p>

The Policy

To ensure that Deaf and hard of hearing people are represented in a positive manner by the media, Deaf Australia:

1. Reaffirms its position that all Deaf and hard of hearing people, including deaf children must be fairly represented in the media.
2. Requests the correct use of terminology by the media:
 - A. Deaf (with a capital D) is used to describe those people who use Auslan (Australian Sign Language) to communicate, and identify themselves as members of the signing Deaf community. These people may also identify themselves as "Culturally Deaf." They are more likely to have been born deaf or become deaf early in life, are pre-lingually deaf and use sign language as a primary or preferred communication mode.
 - B. deaf (with a small letter, d) is a general term used to describe people who have a physical condition of hearing loss of varying degrees irrespective of which communication mode they use such as Auslan and lip reading for example.
 - C. Hard of hearing is the term used to describe those who have a hearing loss, usually acquired post-lingually and whose communication mode is usually by speech. This term also covers those people who have become deafened later in their life.
 - D. A hearing impairment (HI) is a full or partial decrease in the ability to understand sounds. The term "hearing impaired" is often used to refer to those who are deaf but it is viewed negatively by members of the Deaf community who prefer the terms "Deaf" and "hard of hearing". The "hearing impaired" term is incorrectly intended to cover Deaf and hard of hearing individuals under a single category. Deaf and hard of hearing persons in many countries reject this definition because it fails to recognise any distinction between these two groups. Deaf Australia uses the "hard of hearing" term in this case.
3. Requests that every effort be made to interview and/or seek information from those who are Deaf or hard of hearing themselves. This may mean media representatives will use Auslan interpreters to communicate with Deaf people. In such situations professional interpreters accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) must be used.
4. Requests that family members, co-workers, friends or other unqualified or inappropriate persons should not provide information about Deaf persons, or "speak" for or interpret for them.
5. States that the prior approval of all Deaf/hard of hearing individuals used in media pieces should be obtained. The privacy of individuals should be respected.

6. Calls upon individuals, employees, staff, organisations, agencies and media to monitor the news reporting, awareness campaigns, fundraising practices and policies of agencies, organisations, governments and media and if they break these principles to publicly broadcast against these practices.
7. Calls all upon agencies, organisations, governments and media to:
 - a. ensure that their media reporting, awareness campaigns and/or fundraising practices honour the principles set out in this policy;
 - b. ensure that all practices are age appropriate to the Deaf people directly affected. Where an agency or organisation provides services to or represents a wide age range, their general portrayal of Deaf people must be balanced to reflect positive images of all those Deaf people (i.e. Images of children should only be used to the percentage they are provided services; children should not be used to represent adults);
 - c. ensure movies, video clips and photographic exhibitions do not dwell on tragedy and are balanced and finish with positive images of how Deaf people are contributing to their communities;
 - d. ensure Deaf people are involved in every aspect of these activities as equal partners;
 - e. ensure only Deaf people be used to portray Deaf people in these activities;
 - f. enable and resource consumer reference groups that will monitor the development and implementation of fundraising, community awareness, media campaigns by agencies and government according to this policy;
 - g. ensure that "competition" between agencies to secure what they see as an appropriate "slice of the cake" is not detrimental to those whose needs are to be served, or to other agencies working in similar or related areas;
 - h. prepare and present all fundraising, promotional or educational material in such a way that it reinforces full human rights and promotes the basic truth that "Deaf people regardless of cultural background are individuals with the same right to dignity, respect and opportunity as all other members of society";
 - i. ensure all fundraising, promotional, educational and media material reinforces the cultural and linguistic diversity of Deaf people in Australia;
 - j. implement an accessible, informed consent strategy that enables individuals, families or groups to make an informed decision about their involvement in each specific project;
 - k. recognise and address the need to break down the myths,

misconceptions and negative images regarding Deaf people held by the community;

- l. ensure strategies are in place for people from non-English speaking background to reflect positive images of Deaf people;
- m. accept the challenge to enhance community perceptions of Deaf people and their contribution to society;
- n. avoid negative, pitiful and patronising wording.

Inappropriate Statements about Deaf and hard of hearing people

Discriminatory, negative and inappropriate terms and statements are to be avoided such as:

- Deaf and dumb, deaf mute
- A victim of deafness
- Suffers from hearing impairment
- Is afflicted with deafness
- Abnormal

Appropriate terms include the following:

- A person is deaf
- A person is hard of hearing

Incorrect statements commonly used by the media and stakeholders, and Deaf Australia's corresponding corrections:

- a) Deaf / hearing impaired people are always unhappy about their deafness

Correction: For Deaf people to be deaf is just a part of who they are and they are not necessarily any more happy or unhappy than hearing people. While they may feel frustrated by discrimination and obstruction imposed by a society geared for hearing people, they can and do lead productive lives.

- b) Sign languages are mere compensatory systems which should be discarded in favour of speech wherever possible.

Correction: Research has shown sign languages to be real languages. Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is an officially recognised community language which meets the needs of the deaf community (Dawkins, 1991). The users are proud of their language and their unique cultural identity.

- c) Sign language is universal.

Correction: Many countries in the world have their own distinct sign language, which may be part of a family of related sign languages. Auslan is very similar to British Sign

Language for example but quite different from American Sign Language. International meetings and conferences will often use International Sign system but this is not a separate language that is used by Deaf people in their everyday lives.

- d) School programs which focus on teaching deaf children to speak are superior to those which teach sign language.

Correction: Educational programs for deaf and hard of hearing children use a variety of communication approaches, ranging from bilingual programs using Auslan and English to speech and amplification based programs. Current research now shows that the bilingual approach has the best outcomes for such children.

- e) Deaf and hard of hearing people are dependent on other people and need assistance with every day tasks and they cannot drive a car.

Correction: The majority of Deaf and hard of hearing people can function in daily activities with minimal or no assistance from other people. They are employable, raise families, participate in sports events and they can drive!

- f) Professionals help Deaf and hard of hearing people.

Correction: Professionals work with Deaf and hard of hearing people.

- g) Hearing aids and cochlear implants make a deaf person hear “normally”.

Correction: To date, these devices do not correct hearing loss and make the deaf person hear “normally”. They amplify or stimulate the perception of sounds to varying degrees but they do not have the ability to restore to a deaf person the clarity of full hearing.

- h) Deaf and hard of hearing people cannot hear or speak at all.

Correction: There is a huge variation in what a deaf person can hear with or without assistive devices. Deaf people’s vocal cords are the same of those of hearing people. While many deaf people can vocalise and speak, there are others who cannot speak clearly enough for everyday conversations.

- i) All Deaf and hard of hearing people can lip read.

Correction: Lip reading is an approximate process which depends heavily on knowledge of the patterns of the language being lip-read. Only about a third of English sounds are visible on people’s lips and not everyone speaks slowly

	<p>and clearly to assist with lip-reading. Relying on lip-reading for communication is at best unreliable and can lead to communication breakdowns and incorrect information being relayed.</p> <p>8. Ensure consultation and prior consent are made with Deaf Australia regarding correct description of deafness. That is, when opinions on issues relating to deafness are being sought, every attempt should be made to contact Deaf or hard of hearing people with special knowledge of the relevant issues. Media professionals and stakeholders and journalists are strongly encouraged to approach Deaf Australia for advice and assistance in this regard.</p>
Keywords	<i>Deaf, hard of hearing, hoh, portrayal, barrier, culture, Auslan, media, mainstream, stakeholders.</i>

Date Approved	<i>19/ 11/ 2010</i>
Date of Commencement	<i>19/ 11/ 2010</i>
Amendment Dates	<i>List the dates the policy has been amended (Day/Month/ Year)</i>
Date for Next Review	<i>November 2013</i>
Related Policy, Procedure and Guidelines	<i>Education, Cochlear Implants and Terminology policies</i>
Policies Superseded by this Policy	<i>Guidelines on the Portrayal of Deaf People in the Media</i>