

PROVISIONING OF ACCESSIBLE EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENT AND DISASTER SUPPORT

PURPOSE	Deaf Australia’s Position Statement on “ Provisioning of Accessible Emergency Announcement and Disaster Support ” aims to promote a clear and consistent use in accessing information and services through use of accessible communication resources and support for deaf and hard of hearing citizens.
OVERVIEW	<p>Emergencies and disasters affects every person in Australia every year. With over 13,000 Auslan (Australian Sign Language) users and 4 million people who have varying degree of hearing loss, their experience in obtaining up to date information and accessing to disaster recovery centres are faced with fraught and uncertainties when information and support are difficult to access.</p> <p>Local and state/ territory governments are generally responsible for communicating with the community the disasters and provide recovery efforts supported by federal government who has resources and expertise. These support and expertise is not intended to replace the local jurisdiction’s management of the disaster. This often creates confusion as to the responsibility of entity for dissemination of accessible information and services before, during and after disasters.</p> <p>All entities responsibility for emergency management and response are bound by several Commonwealth laws mandating emergency services to be accessible to all individuals, including deaf and hard of hearing individuals.</p>
POSITION STATEMENT	This Guidance provided in the Position Statement of Deaf Australia is intended to provide local emergency managers with tools and resources they can reference to provide access to emergency services for their deaf and hard of hearing residents.
SCOPE	Commonwealth, state and territory governments, Emergency Services, broadcasters and media, Auslan interpreters and relevant service providers.
RESOLUTIONS	<p>Optimal practice for including deaf and hard of hearing individuals in all public announcement (including emergency announcement) are provided here.</p> <p>This checklist is intended to provide guidance to federal, state and territory government agencies charged with providing access to information and disaster preparation and relief for deaf and hard of hearing people. This guideline promotes minimum standards and is not meant to be exhaustive.</p>

- Ensure that budget is sufficiently available to source interpreter/s to address accessibility, accommodation and training needs; Deaf Australia recommends that at least 10-15% of the total program budget be allocated for this purpose;
- Include representatives from the deaf community in all community planning meetings as well as internal agency preparation meetings and in the development of any policies and procedures affecting this community;
- Establish protocol for immediate securing of qualified Auslan interpreters during all emergency press briefings through a collaborative effort involving the Public Information Officer, a representative of the deaf community in your area, and broadcasters. For all emergencies, preparation should include assessing which interpreters in the area are appropriately skilled and trained to handle emergency management situations and terminologies;
- Ensure that the Auslan interpreter secured for the press conference is visible on television at all times during the broadcast. The Public Information Officer should monitor all broadcasts to ensure that on all stations broadcasting the press conference, the Auslan interpreter's face, body, arms and hands are visible on the television screen at all times. If a broadcaster needs to show any other graphics or video feed, the video with interpreter must remain visible on the screen at all times;
- Ensure that broadcasters are able to provide live captioning for all broadcasts of information and are quality assured;
- Ensure that all information provided online are fully accessible including with captioning and Auslan interpreting;
- Provide ongoing inclusive and accessible training to deaf community, interpreters and emergency management planners. Federal and state/ territory emergency management planners need to engage with representatives from the community to develop accessible training programs and to schedule such training at time and places likely to be attended by members of the community;
- Structure all Disaster Recovery Centres to be fully accessible to deaf and individuals, including training for staffs on how to obtain, provide and operate accessibility equipment/ technology for deaf and hard of hearing people. In addition, the Recovery Centre must have trained staff who know when and how to contact on-call interpreters; and
- Incorporate and implement text messaging capability in the affected areas to mobile phone users. This system is more accessible to deaf and hard of hearing people when not accessing television or internet at the time of announcement.

GUIDELINES

1. Effective Communication at Press Briefings

Please refer to: '*Broadcasting of Auslan Interpreted Announcement on Broadcast and Digital Networks*'.

2. Access to Emergency and Announcement Online

Issue:

More people are using smart phones and tablets to receive emergency and public information through livestreams through the internet. However, captioning for Internet livestreams have not always been reliable or accurate. When information is broadcast both on television and through the Internet, captions are not provided on the Internet streaming even though it is clearly captioned on the television broadcast.

Best Practices:

Given that all emergency information is critical to be shared with everyone, all partners in the Emergency Management Australia and broadcast community should voluntarily speed up adoption of captioning for this platform.

Failure to include captioning on such Internet video streaming constitutes failure to provide effective communication to the deaf and hard of hearing people, and ensuring the caption is provided immediately is recommended to avoid failure to warn the population of emergency information.

3. Improving Emergency Preparedness Training for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumers

Issue:

Results from recent disasters indicated that many members of the deaf and hard of hearing community remain unprepared to participate in their own emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. Furthermore, there is often confusion as to which agency has jurisdiction over specific services, particularly accessible services and information.

Best Practices:

Training by both federal and state/ territory agencies must be accessible and available on a regular basis for deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the community to become familiar with emergency preparedness, response and recovery. These training cannot be 'one-off' programs or 'special' programs, as such one-time trainings will not significantly improve outcomes for the community in an emergency or disaster.

A National Emergency Management Projects awarded Vicdeaf a project based grant in 2015-16 to establish guidelines to improve services for deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people who prefer Auslan for the preparatory, response and recovery stages of natural hazard emergencies. These guidelines, titled '*All Hands-on Deck: Preparing Auslan Signers for an Emergency*', are available online (<http://auslanemergency.com.au/index.php/broadcasters/>).

Emergency preparedness training for the deaf and hard of hearing community must include the following critical components:

- a. All trainings to deaf and hard of hearing individuals should be provided in the language and mode accessible and understandable to them.

- b. The training should include information from each city, council and state/ territory on their respective systems for responding to emergencies or disasters, including the role of Emergency Management Agency and when Emergency Management Agency is called in to assist.
- c. The training should include a full explanation of Incidental Command Systems and the National Incident Management System.
- d. The training should include provision of resources including but not limited to local and regional options to receive alerts, announcements, and information.
- e. The training should include provision of communication tools including but not limited to communication cards and resources for contacts within the relevant city, municipality, county, state, and federal.
- f. The training should include an explanation of which important documents should be collected prior to any emergency or disaster and how to keep them safe.
- g. The training should include first-hand sharing of how emergency preparedness is important from deaf and hard of hearing survivors of disasters and other events. Such sharing can be done either in-person or by video.
- h. The training should include interactive panels with emergency responders so they can describe their roles, responsibilities and priorities in responding to emergency/disaster.
- i. The training should include skill-building events where deaf and hard of hearing people can interact with emergency responders with hands-on activities such as basic CPR, receive information about essential activities (e.g., turning on/off water/electricity/gas), fire suppression, and communication resources.

4. Access to Disaster Recovery Centres (or Evacuation Centre)

Issue:

In recent disasters, there have been situations where state/ territory and federal agencies were unprepared to provide services that are accessible to deaf and hard of hearing individuals, including at Disaster Recovery Centres. As a result of services lacking accessible communications, many deaf and hard of hearing people have been left without information as to: where to go for assistance; how to reach services out of this area; how to obtain Disaster Recovery Centre information; where to get necessities such as food, clothing and personal items; and how to get support. This is especially problematic for those who were displaced or were not permitted to return to their homes.

Disaster Recovery Centres have experienced some challenges including: a lack of on-call service providers, such as qualified / certified sign language interpreters; a lack of appropriate signage about the availability of free communication and information access; and lack of appropriate assistive technology available in working conditions for deaf and hard of hearing people.

Best Practices:

Deaf Australia recommends that the responsible state and local emergency agencies provide communication and other access as follows:

- a. Establish local/state emergency preparedness for people with disabilities committees that include representatives from the deaf and hard of hearing community. The committees should contain discussion and preparations for communication and information access. This committee's goals should also focus on the availability of equipment and devices including an appropriate number of videophones, TTYs, iPads, captioned telephones, and amplified telephones in all DRCs. All DRC staff should be trained to use Video Remote Interpreting technology in the DRCs when in-person interpreters are not available.
- b. Create a directory of contracted on-call local certified and qualified interpreters.
- c. Procure for DRCs the appropriate number of needed communication access and technology such as videophones, TTYs, iPads, captioned telephones, and amplified telephones.
- d. Provide emergency management training to qualified certified interpreters in preparation, and maintaining a list of such interpreters who have completed such training to full satisfaction.

5. Access to Notification System and Emergency Services

Issue:

Access to emergency warnings and other related information is important for the general population, and is especially important for people with disabilities. People who are deaf and hard of hearing are often the last to receive such important information. It is critical that everyone, including people with disabilities, receive emergency warnings and messages at the same time without delay. This means that mass notifications before, during and after a disaster must include a variety of warning systems to be truly effective and reach everyone, rather than limited to radio and televised broadcasts.

KEY WORDS

Emergency Services, Broadcast Networks, Media, Interpreter.

REFERENCES

National Disability Strategy 2010-20 (Cth);

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (1998);

Disability Discrimination Act, 1992 (Cth);

The Broadcasting Services ACT 1992 (Cth) – Section 130ZZB: Emergency Warnings requires free-to-air television broadcasters to; (a) transmit the whole of emergency warning in: (i) the form of text, and (ii) the form of speech; and (b) if it is reasonably practicable to do so, provide a captioning service for the emergency warning.

National Auslan Communications for Emergencies (2016), <http://auslanemergency.com.au/index.php/emergency-services/>, accessed 2 January 2018.

SOURCE: *Position Statement on Accessible Emergency Management for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People* (National Association of the Deaf), <https://www.nad.org/about-us/position-statements/position-statement-on-accessible-emergency-management-for-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-people/>, accessed 2 January 2018.

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Policy Superseded by this Policy	None