

Submission
No 90

**INQUIRY INTO SERVICES PROVIDED OR FUNDED BY
THE DEPARTMENT OF AGEING, DISABILITY AND
HOME CARE**

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Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into services provided or funded by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care

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Executive Summary

The Deaf Society of New South Wales is a long-standing recipient of ADHC funding for services and programs for the deaf community in New South Wales. This funding has facilitated many positive developments in the lives of deaf people and of the deaf community as a whole.

We welcome this opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into services provided or funded by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

In particular, we would like to draw the committee's attention to the level of unmet need for case work for deaf people in regional areas and the looming problems of inadequate support for culturally deaf residents in residential aged care, particularly in regions with booming populations of deaf retirees.

Although we have focused on unmet need in this submission (as per the terms of reference), we wish it to be understood that ADHC's support continues to make a positive difference in the lives of deaf people.

Background

The Deaf Society of New South Wales (DSNSW) was founded in 1913 in response to the needs of Deaf people who used sign language as their primary means of communication. It was incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee in 1922 and is a registered charity.

DSNSW believes that Deaf people should enjoy the same political, civil and human rights as other members of the community and we work with the Deaf Community to secure these rights.

Vision

Equity for deaf people

Mission

We work in partnership with the Deaf Community to enhance the quality of life of deaf people, strengthen the community and advocate for changes that will ensure fundamental rights and freedoms.

DSNSW provides core services in the traditional areas of need; client and community support, community development, interpreting, education and training, employment and workplace support, advocacy and distribution of information. We provide support services to a wide range of deaf and hard of hearing clients, including those who may have additional needs due to blindness, vision impairment, physical disability and intellectual disability. We are the leading provider of specialist services for deaf people and their families in New South Wales, having extensive and proven expertise in the provision of services to the deaf community.

Scope

We will limit ourselves in this submission to discussing services to deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people, as this is our area of expertise. We will not discuss ADHC services generally as other groups will be better able to comment on services which are provided to people who do not have a hearing loss.

Terms

Throughout this document, the term 'deaf' will be used to refer to people who use Auslan as their primary or preferred language (this group is also referred to as 'culturally deaf', and is a small but significant minority of approximately 2000 people in NSW (Willoughby 2009)). The term 'hard of hearing' will be used to refer to those with a hearing loss who prefer to communicate using spoken English – a much larger group ("One in six Australians is affected by hearing loss" (Access Economics, 2006, p. 5)). These groups do overlap to some extent. Where we refer to both groups together, we use the term 'people with a hearing loss'.

Summary Recommendations

1. That ADHC increase funding for deaf-specific services in regional areas. Both the quantity and the range of services need to be expanded to meet the explosion in demand arising from the rapid movement of deaf retirees to regional centres.
2. That the criteria for the Attendant Care Program to be expanded to cover deaf people with extra disabilities such as blindness. Current funding is inadequate to provide for the attendant care needs of this group.
3. That ADHC establish a deaf-specific HACC service to provide domestic assistance, social support, and personal care to deaf people using workers fluent in Auslan.
4. That ADHC make it a priority to provide Auslan translations of complaints procedures and the Disability Service Standards on the ADHC website and that these be promoted to deaf people. This is in line with accessibility requirements under Article 9 of the UNCRPD which Australia has ratified.

Response to Terms of Reference

a) Historical and current level of funding

The level of funding and services at DSNSW in 2008/2009 compared to 2009/2010 can be seen in Table 1 below.

Office/Outreach	Walk In 2008-2009	Walk In 2009-2010	Walk In % increase	Client contact 2008-2009	Client contact 2009-2010	Client Contact % increase	Staff hours 2008-2009	Staff hours 2009-2010	Staff hours % increase
Parramatta	381	537	29%	699	738	5%	235 p.w	245 p.w	4%
Newcastle	895	1464	39%	48	55	13%	15 p.w	30 p.w	50%
Coffs Harbour	203	720	72%	20	21	5%	12 p.w	15 p.w	20%
Tamworth	99	426	77%	6	6	0%	10 p.w	10 p.w	0%
Lismore	228	607	62%	27	30	10%	45 p.w	50 p.w	10%
Wollongong	234	701	67%	41	49	16%	10 p.w	12 p.w	17%
Outreach – Port Macquarie	53	92	42%	0	0	0%	Included in CH hours	Included in CH hours	-
Outreach – Orange	Start in 2010	685	-	22	35	37%	Included in P'matta hours	Included in P'matta hours	-
Outreach – Tweed Heads	36	85	58%	0	0	0%	Included in Lismore hours	Included in Lismore hours	-
Outreach – Nowra	98	257	62%	0	0	0%	Included in WG hours	Included in WG hours	-
TOTAL:	2227	5574	60%	863	934	8%	327 p.w	362 p.w	10%

Table 1: Client and Community Services at DSNSW in 2008-2009 compared to 2009-2010

Explanation of Table 1: Snapshots of Regional Deaf Communities

New England region (Tamworth Office)

Approximately 40 clients from Tamworth and 10 from Armidale regularly access Tamworth Walk In service. We know of six deaf senior citizens living in their own homes, and one deaf senior living in respite nursing home in Tamworth. Most people accessing Walk In need literacy support from the community worker in explaining and responding to forms, letters and bills.

Limitations of the service include the lack of time available for case work e.g. support/advocacy at medical appointments. This service is also unable to provide Walk In support to deaf consumers in Armidale and Dubbo, so deaf people travel to Tamworth for this support. There is a lack of services for deaf indigenous people as well as deaf youth. Numbers of available interpreters are low.

Far North NSW (Lismore/Tweed Heads)

Approximately 60 deaf people living in Northern Rivers region and 30 in Tweed Heads region regularly access Walk In services. Social and community functions in the area are well attended. We know of 22 seniors living in their own homes in the North Coast region, and one deaf senior living in a nursing home in Tweed Heads. Most people accessing Walk In need literacy support from the community worker in explaining and responding to forms, letters and bills.

Limitations of the service include lack of hours for case work e.g. support/advocacy at medical appointments. Providing Walk In support to deaf consumers in Tweed Heads once per month is not sufficient for the demand. There is a need for more support for deaf youth. Numbers of available interpreters are low. The community has indicated a need for community education programs in Auslan in this region, but very few are available.

We anticipate looming problems with deafblind and senior citizens in the area being unable to access services or to be catered for in culturally appropriate ways in residential care settings. There is already a growing need to provide Deaf Aware Training to nursing home staff when they have deaf residents.

Hunter/Central Coast region

Approximately 250 deaf people living in the Newcastle region and 400 in the Central Coast region regularly access our services. Social and community events are well-attended. We know of around 150 deaf seniors living in their own homes, and three deaf senior living in nursing homes in Newcastle. Most people accessing Walk In need literacy support from the community worker in explaining and responding to forms, letters and bills.

Limitations of the service include lack of hours for case work e.g. support/advocacy at medical appointments. There are some clients (e.g. deafblind) with high care needs (one of whom was refused ACP funding) but the Community Worker can only allocate minimal hours to case work with each client. We are unable to provide Walk In support to deaf consumers in the Forster/Taree region although there is demand for this support in that region. Interpreters are in desperately short supply. The community

has indicated a need for community education programs in Auslan in this region, but very few are available.

We anticipate that in a few years there will be dire problems with senior citizens in the area being unable to access services or to be catered for in culturally appropriate ways in residential care settings. The numbers of deaf seniors moving to the region make for a projection of need for widespread training programs for nursing home staff in the region.

Coffs Coast region

Approximately 30 deaf people living in Coffs Harbour region, 20 in Port Macquarie region and 10 in Grafton region regularly access our services. A small regular deaf social gathering is quite well-attended. We know of 15 seniors living in their own homes. Most people accessing Walk In need literacy support from the community worker in explaining and responding to forms, letters and bills.

Limitations of the service include the lack of time available for case work e.g. support/advocacy at medical appointments. We are unable to provide Walk In support to deaf consumers by visiting these people who live in remote regions but they do not have access to public transport to visit the Coffs Harbour office. Port Macquarie used to have monthly Walk In sessions, but now these are only quarterly. Numbers of available interpreters are low.

South Coast region

Approximately 150 deaf people living in the Wollongong region and 20 in the Nowra region regularly access our services. Social events in Wollongong and Nowra are well-attended. We know of approximately 70 seniors living in their own homes at the moment. Most people accessing Walk In need literacy support from the community worker in explaining and responding to forms, letters and bills.

Limitations of the service include the lack of time available for case work e.g. support/advocacy at medical appointments. We are unable to provide Walk In support to deaf consumers in Bega region and Queanbeyan region. The Walk In service has been reduced from monthly to quarterly for the Nowra region. Some consumers have mental health issues which need more support to meet their needs but at the moment we cannot support them as much as we would like to.

Level of Unmet Need

As can be seen from Table 1 and the snapshots of regional offices, the level of unmet need is of grave concern to DSNSW. Of our 5 regional office and 4 outreach programs, only one (Lismore) receives dedicated ADHC funding. The Parramatta service is running at full capacity, and also endeavours to meet needs for which we are not funded such as social support, support for deaf people in residential aged care, etc.

Against a background of increasing demand, ADHC funding for Deaf Society services had a 0% increase in dollar-figures from 2008/2009 to 2009/2010, and is slated to continue with a 0% yearly increased until 2012. DSNSW's Client and Community Services department total shortfall in funds is approximately

\$500,000 per year which is funded by DSNSW as a charitable activity. Even so, the unmet need remains high, especially in regional areas. This situation is not sustainable.

b) Variations in service delivery, waiting lists and program quality

At the moment services at all our offices including Parramatta have comparable waiting lists.

Only one of our regional services is funded, which means that ADHC services for deaf people are non-existent in all areas except Sydney and Lismore.

c) Flexibility in client funding arrangements and client focused service delivery

Within the programs we are funded for, there is scope for some flexibility to meet specific client needs, but in our view the degree of flexibility is inadequate.

DSNSW is perceived by the deaf community as a "one stop shop" – the expectation is that we will provide everything to support all the needs of deaf people. However, our funding is in fact for Accommodation and Tenancy Support, Family Peer Support Service, Community Access and Information Service, Community Education Program and Information/Advocacy. While we recognise this is a good range of services for one provider, there are still services that our clients request which we cannot provide. These include HACC-style programs (social support, domestic assistance, personal care) and support for deaf people in nursing homes and hostels.

We refer to other providers where we can, but general disability service providers are ill-equipped to deal with only the unique communication needs of deaf people. They can provide some services, but must do so at the additional expense of hiring Auslan interpreters and sometimes deaf relay interpreters as well. We could do it for half the cost and a tenth of the trouble. Often other providers (especially residential aged care facilities) refer to us, and we have to send them away with minimal information or offer to provide fee-for-service services such as deaf awareness training for their staff or Auslan interpreting (a cost they can be unwilling to bear).

In regional areas, the programs available are even more limited. We do not provide Accommodation & Tenancy Support Program to deaf consumers in regional areas. We only have Community Services support to these communities, and in one office (Tamworth) only Walk In services are available.

d) Compliance with Disability Service Standards

DSNSW seeks to serve our clients in a way that exceeds the requirements of the Disability Service Standards.

However, we do have concerns in two areas. Anecdotally it appears that other disability service providers are not well equipped to deal with deaf and deafblind clients. More training, and incentives for generic disability service organisations to hire deaf staff, are probably needed to improve this

situation. One major barrier is that other service providers can be unwilling to provide Auslan/ deafblind interpreting. This is a concern in terms of Standard 1.

Another concern is about complaints and feedback mechanisms to ADHC from deaf service users (see below, under complaint handling and grievance).

e) Complaint handling and grievance

As an organisation we are satisfied with the process ADHC uses to address our concerns. For clients, we can identify a serious problem in the accessibility of ADHC complaint mechanisms for deaf service users.

We are proud of our own feedback and complaints policy, training and practices, but if a client wants to approach ADHC to complain (especially if they wished to do so without our help) they would face significant barriers. We believe it would be helpful if ADHC were to provide Australian Sign Language (Auslan) translations of key policies and processes such as the complaints process and the Disability Service Standards on their website. This would allow clients better access to complaints mechanisms outside DSNSW, and would be in line with Australia's obligations under the UNCRPD.

f) Program evaluation and auditing

In general we are satisfied with ADHC processes for auditing and program evaluation.

The Minimum Data Set reporting process remains inaccessible for deaf staff at our organisation. If we need to contact MDS for any information, the phone generally reaches an answering machine, and MDS staff members call us back, but only using a voice call. It would be ideal if MDS were to install a TTY, publicise the TTY number, and train their staff in the use of the TTY and the NRS (National Relay Service).

g) Other matters

There are no other matters on which we would like to comment.

References

Access Economics, *Listen Hear! The Economic Impact and Cost of Hearing Loss in Australia*, (2006)

Louisa Willoughby, *The distribution of New South Wales' sign language users: Analysis from the 1996 and 2006 census*, (Deaf Society of NSW, 2009)

(http://www.deafsocietynsw.org.au/information/pdfs/distribution_of_signing_population-nsw.pdf)