



# BUILDING INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

An Employer's Guide to Supporting Deaf Employees

2025 Edition

**deaf  
connect**  
Serving our community.  
Sharing our culture.

## ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

### Building Inclusive Workplaces



## PREFACE

For this document, we have used “Deaf” when referring to all individuals with varying degrees of deafness. This includes members of the community who identify as Deaf, deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing, and members of the Deaf community who identify as culturally Deaf and primarily communicate in Auslan.

## DISCLAIMER

Please note that the information contained in this document is accurate as of the time of publication. Any errors or omissions are the sole responsibility of the author. Deaf Connect has undertaken a considerable effort to ensure that the information contained in this document is accurate and forms the basis of a best-practice approach to the employment of Deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing individuals. Deaf Connect will endeavour to update this document from time to time as methods, practices and referenced materials change. Should there be information contained in the handbook that is out of date, please contact Deaf Connect.

## FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Deaf Connect would also like to thank the Australian Government Department of Social Services for their commitment to supporting and funding this initiative through the Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program.

## RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

Deaf Connect would like to thank Deakin University for their invaluable contribution to the project. The research partnership between Deaf Connect and Deakin University has provided critical insights that have helped shape the content of this handbook and highlighted the challenges faced by employers across Australia in creating inclusive workplaces.

## Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, Deaf Connect acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

## Deaf Acknowledgement

Deaf Connect acknowledges and pays respect to the members of the Australian Deaf community, who preserve their rich heritage, culture and language Auslan (Australian Sign Language). Deaf Connect would also like to acknowledge the Australian Deaf community as the custodians of Auslan and for their work to promote awareness, equality and access through sign language. It is through Auslan that our future leaders are inspired to continue this legacy and preserve the rich culture, language and heritage of the Australian Deaf community.





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# ABOUT THE HANDBOOK

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deaf Connect is Australia's largest whole-of-life service provider and social impact organisation for Deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing Australians. As a not-for-profit organisation, we are committed to empowering individuals through accessible services, advocacy and resources that promote inclusion and independence.

Deaf Connect's services include Auslan interpreting, aged care support, casual and accredited training in sign language, NDIS plan management and support work, therapy and family support, as well as individual advocacy, including document translation and guidance. Additionally, Deaf Connect engages in community development and awareness initiatives aimed at increasing understanding and fostering inclusion of Deaf individuals across all areas of society.

To get in touch with Deaf Connect, please refer to the contact options below:

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## ABOUT THE PROJECT



This handbook forms part of a broader initiative that Deaf Connect has developed, funded by the Federal Government Department of Social Services' Information Linkages and Capacity Building Program. The broader initiative includes research commissioned by Deaf Connect in partnership with Deakin University and provides a holistic view of the experiences, challenges, and opportunities for Deaf people

within the workplace. The project also includes a series of short documentary interviews with various organisations across Australia, providing real-world examples of how these organisations, their inclusive practices and supportive leadership have successfully empowered Deaf individuals to pursue fulfilling careers.

For more information on this initiative, please visit the [project website](#).



# INTRODUCTION

## WHY THIS HANDBOOK MATTERS

Deaf Connect sincerely thanks you for taking the time to engage with this Employer Handbook. Creating an inclusive workplace not only opens doors for Deaf professionals but also enriches your organisation with diverse perspectives and skills.

Inclusive employment practices are vital for fostering a diverse, equitable, and productive workforce. By hiring and supporting Deaf employees, you gain access to a talented and dedicated pool of individuals who bring unique perspectives, skills, and value to the workplace.

It is common for employers to face uncertainty about how to create truly inclusive environments, provide effective accommodations, and ensure seamless communication with Deaf staff.

This handbook has been designed to address these challenges and empower employers to build workplaces where Deaf employees feel valued, supported, and equipped to thrive. By utilising this resource, employers can confidently implement accommodations, foster effective communication and create a culture that champions inclusivity and belonging.

## CREATING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

Creating an inclusive workplace begins with understanding. Open and honest communication is key, and taking the time to have a conversation with your Deaf employee can reveal their preferences, needs and expectations. Every person is different, and tailored support is essential for their success.

Below are some questions that you can ask to gain a better understanding of your employees' needs:

- How do you prefer we communicate in the workplace?
- What tools or adjustments would help you to perform your duties more effectively?
- Are there any specific accommodations that you require to ensure your safety and wellbeing in the workplace?

By involving your Deaf employee in the process, you show respect, a willingness to listen and a genuine commitment to fostering an inclusive environment. This collaborative approach not only benefits the employee but also enhances the overall culture and productivity of your workplace.

To help guide you through the key actions in creating an inclusive workplace, we have included additional resources to support you on this journey.

# OVERVIEW

The Building Inclusive Workplaces handbook is designed to address the knowledge gaps, misconceptions and uncertainties that employers face when hiring and supporting Deaf employees. Many employers are unsure about how to create inclusive workplaces, implement appropriate accommodations and effectively communicate with Deaf staff. This often results in missed opportunities for diverse talent and inclusive growth.

This handbook provides practical and accessible resources to empower employers with the confidence and knowledge to recruit, retain and support Deaf employees. It includes the best practices for workplace accessibility, communication strategies, legal obligations and technology solutions founded on evidence-based data. By addressing these challenges, the handbook promotes inclusive hiring practices, fosters diverse workplace cultures and ensures equal opportunities for Deaf individuals to thrive in their careers.

## PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK AND IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

In 2024, Deaf Connect commissioned Deakin University to conduct independent research to understand the experiences of Deaf people in the workplace from both an employee and employer perspective. The findings suggest that more inclusive recruitment practices and work environments are needed. The research indicates that employers' confidence in supervising Deaf employees increases by 54 per cent when reasonable adjustments are implemented.

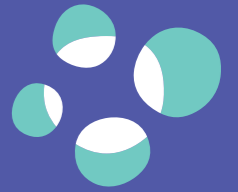
## UNDERSTANDING NEEDS: THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS WORKPLACE INCLUSION

Creating an inclusive workplace starts with open communication. Take the time to sit down with your Deaf employee to understand their preferences, needs and expectations. Every individual is different, and what works for one person may not work for another. Use this conversation as an opportunity to discuss the best communication methods in the workplace, the tools or adjustments that will help them thrive, and any specific accommodations that may be needed.

## EMBRACE THE BENEFITS OF A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

A diverse workforce brings a wealth of perspectives, skills and experiences that drive innovation and creativity. By fostering an inclusive environment, you not only support Deaf employees but also enhance your organisation's overall culture and productivity. Embracing diversity leads to a more dynamic, innovative and successful workplace. You can unlock the full potential of your team by championing inclusivity and diversity!

# 7 STAGES OF EMPLOYMENT



- 1 ATTRACTION** This is where potential employees become aware of your company and are attracted to it as a place to work.
- 2 RECRUITMENT** The process of finding and hiring the right candidates for your organisation.
- 3 ONBOARDING** Integrating new hires into the company, helping them understand their roles, and setting them up for success.
- 4 ENGAGEMENT** Keeping employees motivated, satisfied, and committed to their work and the organisation.
- 5 DEVELOPMENT** Providing opportunities for employees to grow their skills and advance their careers.
- 6 RETENTION** Implementing strategies to keep valuable employees within the organisation.
- 7 OFFBOARDING** Managing the process when an employee leaves the company, ensuring a smooth transition and maintaining a positive relationship.

# CHAPTER 1: ATTRACTION

How to attract Deaf employees to your organisation.



## ATTRACTION

When you are considering recruiting Deaf employees, it is important to create an inclusive and appealing workplace environment. The attraction stage of the employment lifecycle is crucial as it sets the foundation for establishing a Deaf friendly workplace and attracting the right person to your organisation. Below are some considerations for this phase:

### INCLUSIVE JOB POSTINGS

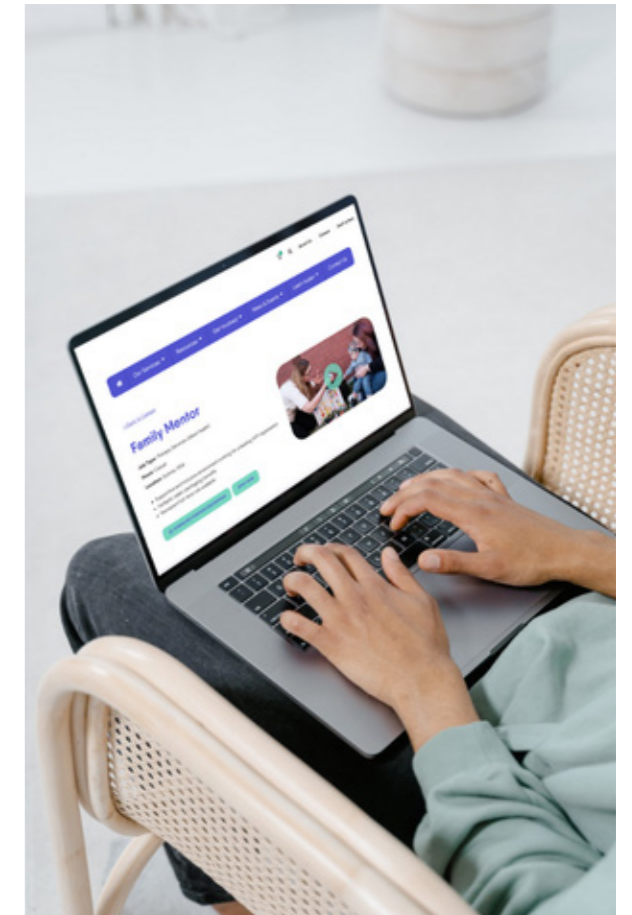
- Ensure job descriptions are clear and detailed, highlighting the availability of accommodations for Deaf applicants.
- Provide job postings in accessible formats, such as text-based documents and videos with captions or Auslan.

### EMPLOYER BRANDING

- Build a reputation as an employer of choice for inclusion through public relations, social media and employee testimonials.
- Communicate the benefits and opportunities that your organisation offers to potential employees (e.g. supporting staff to attend Deaf-specific events throughout the year and access to the Employment Assistance Fund).

### RECRUITMENT MARKETING

- Create and distribute job postings on various platforms, including job boards and social media, via Disability Employment Services (DES) providers and company websites. Social media groups, such as Facebook's Aussie Deaf Jobs, are good places to post job advertisements.
- Use Auslan accessible, vlogs, blogs and other content to showcase your company culture, values and employee experiences.



## ATTRACTION

### Building Inclusive Workplaces



## OUTREACH AND NETWORKING

- Participate in disability job fairs (e.g. [WorkAbility Expo](#)) and industry events as an opportunity to network with likeminded organisations.
- Collaborate with educational institutions, professional organisations and community groups to reach a broader audience.
- Liaise with a [National Disability Recruitment Coordinator \(NDRC\)](#) from [JobAccess](#), who can provide free assistance to your organisation to build its disability knowledge and skills, enabling access to the talents of people who are Deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing.



Events like the Australian Disability Network Expo (pictured) provide great opportunities to network.

## CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

- Ensure the application process is user-friendly, accessible and inclusive by using plain English and consider translating this information into Auslan. Maintain clear and timely communication with candidates throughout the recruitment process.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

- Implement strategies to attract a diverse pool of candidates, including those who are Deaf.
- Provide the necessary accommodations to ensure all candidates can participate fully in the recruitment process by asking about their preferred communication methods and ensuring these are met.

## EMPLOYEE REFERRALS

- Encourage current staff to refer potential candidates and consider offering incentives for successful hires.

## BUILDING INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

# CHAPTER 2: RECRUITMENT

The process of finding and hiring the right Deaf candidates for your organisation.



# RECRUITMENT

Following an inclusive recruitment process ensures that an organisation attracts and hires the right talent. By attracting the right talent and building a diverse talent pool, employers can improve team dynamics and foster more innovative and creative solutions. This approach enables organisations to leverage the unique skills and perspectives of Deaf individuals.

## SCREENING AND INITIAL INTERVIEWS

Provide accessible communication options to ensure all candidates have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their qualifications and skills (e.g. methods such as video calls with Auslan interpreters or captioning services). This ensures that Deaf candidates can fully participate.

## INTERVIEW PROCESS

- Contact [JobAccess](#) to seek funding for a free Auslan interpreter or captioning service for the interview process.
- Use a structured format with consistent questions. Consider providing candidates with questions in advance to ensure understanding.
- Provide interpreters with the interview questions in advance to ensure clear communication between yourself and the candidate.
- Before the interview, share the relevant materials with the interpreter (e.g. agenda, slides, key documents). Brief the interpreter on industry-specific terms and expectations.
- During the interview, speak directly to the candidate, not the interpreter.
- When using an interpreter during an interview, maintain eye contact with the candidate and speak at a moderate pace, allowing extra time for your words to be interpreted into Auslan and vice versa.
- Brief the interview panel on communicating effectively with Deaf candidates, ensuring everyone knows how to work with the interpreter.

## ONBOARDING PREPARATION

- Reach out to the new hire in advance to ask about their accessibility needs and communication preferences.
- Once the offer has been accepted by the candidate, set up the new hire's workspace with the necessary equipment and arrange the onboarding schedule.
- Organise [Deaf Awareness Training](#) for Management and for the new hire's department or team.

## BUILDING INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

# CHAPTER 3: ONBOARDING

Integrating Deaf employees into your organisation.



# ONBOARDING

Setting the foundation for an employee's successful integration into your organisation is a crucial step in the employee lifecycle. When onboarding Deaf employees, it is important to ensure that they feel welcomed and included from the start. Consider what changes should be implemented throughout the department or organisation by making accommodations for the following:

## PRE-ARRIVAL PREPARATIONS

- Inform the team about the new hire and provide them with basic training on effective and preferred communication strategies. This will reduce uncertainty within the team and allow the Deaf person to feel welcomed on their first day.
- Liaise with the new hire before their orientation to ensure any necessary assistive devices, such as captioning and video remote interpreting services, are ready to use.
- If the new hire uses an Auslan interpreter to communicate or requires captioning, ensure that it has been organised and booked for their onboarding and induction.



## ORIENTATION

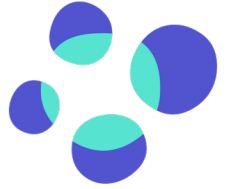
- Provide a comprehensive orientation on company policies, culture and team dynamics, ensuring materials are accessible (e.g. written, captioned video or interpreters).

## WORKPLACE SETUP

- Ensure the workspace is accessible, meeting any necessary access requirements or requested assistive technology. Provide training on tools and equipment with clear, accessible instructions for those who will use them to engage with the Deaf employee.
- Visit the [JobAccess](#) website to learn more about the funding for changes in the workplace via [Employment Assistance Fund \(EAF\)](#).
- Download the JobAccess [Making Workplace Adjustments Easy, Effective and Equitable: Conversation Guide](#).

## ONBOARDING

### Building Inclusive Workplaces



## TRAINING

- Offer training on company systems or specific tasks, using clear communication.
- Ensure that all the employee's preferred accommodations are in place (e.g. written instructions, note-taking or captioned videos).
- Assign a peer or mentor who is aware of the employee's accessibility needs and who can assist during the transition.

## TEAM INTEGRATION

- Provide Deaf Awareness Training (like in the photo below) to all employees to increase understanding of Deaf culture, language, communication strategies and workplace accessibility. The EAF can provide financial support to organisations to do this.
- Share information with your staff on how to book [Auslan interpreters](#) for meetings, interviews and workplace events.
- Pair the new hire with a buddy or mentor who can assist them with the transition and answer any questions.



### COMMUNICATION TIPS

Face, and speak directly to, the Deaf person (not their hearing aid). Speak and articulate clearly but at a normal level. Shouting is not beneficial. Ensure the environment is well-lit and your face is not silhouetted by bright lighting. Ensure a clear view of your mouth by keeping hands and other objects away.

# CHAPTER 4: ENGAGEMENT

Keeping Deaf employees motivated, satisfied and committed to their work and your organisation.



## ENGAGEMENT

Employment engagement impacts productivity, satisfaction and retention. Engaging Deaf employees effectively requires thoughtful consideration of their individual needs. Here are some key aspects employers should focus on:

### COMMUNICATION ACCESSIBILITY

- Provide [assistive technologies](#), such as captioning services, video remote interpreting (VRI), video relay services (VRS) and transcriptions.
- If requested, provide documents and information prior to meetings (e.g. PowerPoint presentations) to ensure that information is easily accessible.
- Offer Auslan interpreters or captioning for meetings and important conversations, as interpreters can be crucial in the workplace so that everyone is able to communicate effectively.

### INCLUSIVE MEETINGS

- Ensure visual access by arranging seating so that the Deaf person has clear sightlines for lip-reading and/or Auslan interpreters.
- Use video conferencing over audio calls to enhance communication during one-on-one or group meetings.

### WORKPLACE CULTURE

- Promote awareness and educate all employees about Deaf culture and communication strategies. This awareness can be facilitated through structured Deaf Awareness Training and is provided free to organisations via the [Employment Assistance Fund](#).
- Encourage social connections by including Deaf employees in social events and conversations, especially in communal areas like lunchrooms, to foster a sense of belonging.

### FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT

- Conduct regular check-ins to discuss challenges and gather feedback. This is also a good opportunity to ensure that employees have the necessary workplace accommodations to perform their jobs successfully.
- Provide training to all staff on the use of [assistive technologies](#) and effective communication methods.

# CHAPTER 5: DEVELOPMENT

Providing opportunities for Deaf employees to grow their skills and advance their careers.



## DEVELOPMENT

By implementing an employee development strategy, organisations can create a supportive and inclusive environment that fosters the growth, development and overall satisfaction of Deaf employees. This not only benefits the employees but also enhances overall organisational performance. Below are recommendations for implementing this strategy:

### INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

- Use a variety of communication strategies such as written communication and gestures to ensure clear and effective communication.
- Conduct Deaf Awareness Training sessions for all employees to raise awareness about Deaf culture and effective communication strategies.
- Consider providing Auslan classes to staff so that they can learn signs to communicate with your Deaf employees.
- The [Employment Assistance Fund](#) can financially support organisations to provide staff with Deaf Awareness Training and Auslan classes in the workplace.

### TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- Ensure all training materials are available in an accessible format, such as captions for videos, transcripts and visual aids.
- Provide Auslan interpreters during training sessions and meetings to facilitate effective communication.
- Utilise assistive listening devices and other technology to support learning and communication.

### MENTORING AND COACHING

- Pair new Deaf employees with mentors who can provide guidance and support. This can include both hearing and/or Deaf mentors.
- Schedule regular one-on-one meetings to discuss progress, address challenges and set developmental goals.

### CAREER ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- Ensure that personalised development plans are accessible so that career goals and steps to achieve them is clearly documented.
- Offer workshops and courses that focus on both technical skills and soft skills, ensuring that they are accessible to all employees.

## DEVELOPMENT

### Building Inclusive Workplaces

- Ensure that all opportunities for career advancement, both formal (training) and informal (team social events), are equitable and accessible to all.
- Look to provide opportunities for experienced Deaf staff to become mentors to other Deaf or hearing employees.

### FEEDBACK AND PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

- Provide regular, constructive feedback in a manner that is accessible and understandable. Providing feedback with specific examples can help ensure that the feedback is understood.
- Ensure that performance metrics to assist employees to track their progress and identify areas for improvement are accessible and clearly explained.



#### COMMUNICATION TIPS WITH AN INTERPRETER

When working with an Auslan interpreter, always speak directly to the Deaf person – not the interpreter. The interpreter is there to support the conversation, and when they say “I” or “me”, they’re voicing the Deaf person’s words, not their own. Speak at a natural pace; if the interpreter needs you to slow down, they’ll let you know. Allow time for interpretation, as Auslan has a different structure to English. The interpreter will wait until they understand the full meaning before signing or speaking, so there may be short pauses in the conversation.



## BUILDING INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

# CHAPTER 6: RETENTION

Implementing strategies to keep Deaf employees within your organisation.



# RETENTION

Retention is a critical aspect of the employee lifecycle, ensuring that employees remain engaged, satisfied and committed to your organisation. By implementing the following strategies, organisations can create a supportive and inclusive environment that helps retain Deaf employees, ensuring they feel valued and engaged.

## INCLUSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

- Conduct regular Auslan and Deaf Awareness Training sessions for all employees to raise awareness about Deaf culture, language and effective communication strategies.
- Ensure all communication methods are accessible, such as providing Auslan interpreters, captioning services and visual aids.
- Several organisations can assist you with services, such as Deaf Awareness Training, Auslan interpreting and captioning services.

## ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND ACCOMMODATIONS

- If requested, provide [assistive listening devices](#) to support communication.
- Prioritise making necessary workplace adjustments to the work environment, such as visual alarm systems. These adjustments can be provided free of charge under the [Employment Assistance Fund](#).

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- Offer accessible training programs and workshops to help employees develop their skills and advance their careers.
- Consider supporting your Deaf employees to seek Deaf mentors from within or outside of your organisation or industry to develop or strengthen their skills to benefit your organisation.



Assistive devices like flashing fire alarms or devices with haptic feedback (as shown) can be invaluable accommodations for Deaf employees.



## RETENTION

### Building Inclusive Workplaces

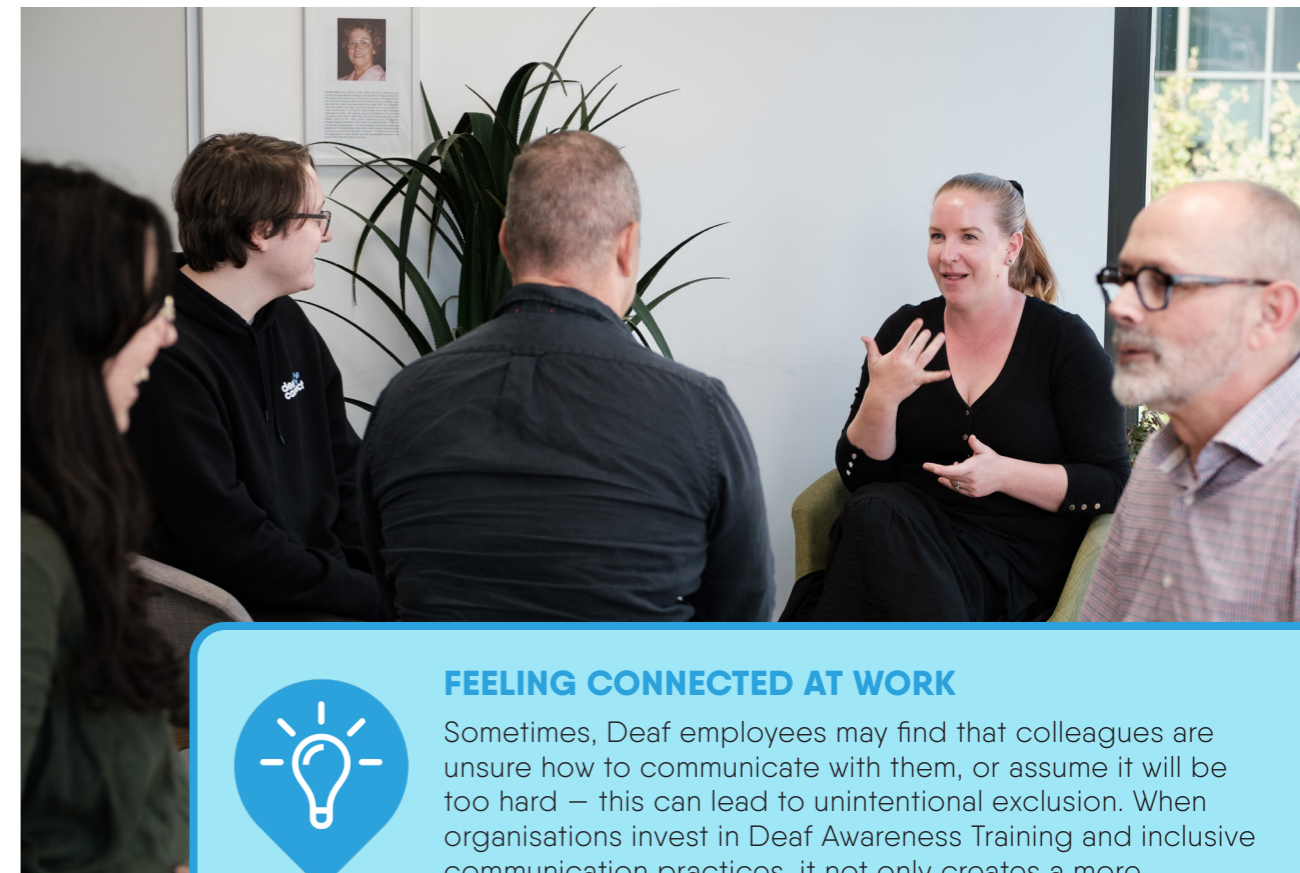


## REGULAR FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT

- Conduct regular performance reviews and provide constructive feedback in a clear and accessible format.
- Establish support networks or employee resource groups for Deaf employees to share experiences and/or resources.

## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

- Organise inclusive social events and team-building activities that consider the needs of Deaf employees. This could include celebrating [key cultural days recognised by the Deaf community](#).
- Recognise and celebrate the achievements of Deaf employees to boost their morale and engagement.
- Ensure that all formal and informal information is clearly relayed to your Deaf employees to avoid isolation and so that they can fully participate in the workplace and its culture.



### FEELING CONNECTED AT WORK

Sometimes, Deaf employees may find that colleagues are unsure how to communicate with them, or assume it will be too hard – this can lead to unintentional exclusion. When organisations invest in Deaf Awareness Training and inclusive communication practices, it not only creates a more welcoming workplace, but opens up more opportunities for everyone to connect, collaborate and grow – even just for a chat over lunch!

# CHAPTER 7: OFFBOARDING

Managing the process when a Deaf employee leaves your organisation.



## OFFBOARDING

The offboarding process ensures a smooth and respectful transition when an employee leaves the organisation. Here is an overview of the employee lifecycle with a focus on offboarding and why it is particularly important for Deaf employees.

### CLEAR COMMUNICATION

- Ensure that exit interviews are conducted in a manner that is accessible to the employee. This may involve providing an Auslan interpreter or captioning. Use accessible methods to collect feedback from the departing employee about their experience and record any suggestions for improvement.
- Offer your Deaf employee support by writing letters of recommendation, references or referrals.
- In the event of a redundancy, ensure that all information is clearly communicated to the Deaf employee in their preferred communication method.

### DOCUMENTATION AND RESOURCES

- Provide all necessary offboarding documentation in accessible formats.
- Should a role become redundant, offer information about resources and support services available to Deaf individuals. This can include outplacement services or community services and advocacy offered by Deaf organisations.

### RESPECT AND SENSITIVITY

- Ensure that all discussions and documentation related to the offboarding process are handled with confidentiality and respect.
- Approach the offboarding process with empathy, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by Deaf employees, and offer support throughout the transition.
- Use the offboarding process as an opportunity for your organisation to assess how it can further support Deaf employees in the workplace and set actions to implement these improvements.



# RESOURCES

The tools you can use to succeed at building inclusive workplaces.



## COMMON MYTHS



**Myth:** All Deaf people use sign language.

**Fact:** Communication preferences vary. Some use Auslan (Australian Sign Language), while others rely on spoken language, lip-reading or assistive devices. It's always best to ask how someone prefers to communicate.



**Myth:** Hearing aids or cochlear implants restore normal hearing.

**Fact:** These devices enhance hearing but do not replicate the natural hearing process. The level of benefit varies from individual to individual.



**Myth:** Writing back and forth is enough for effective communication.

**Fact:** While writing can be helpful, it's not always efficient. Providing interpreters, captions or accessible technology can significantly enhance understanding, communication and inclusion.



**Myth:** Deaf people cannot work effectively in noisy environments.

**Fact:** Deaf employees can thrive in any workplace with the right accommodations, such as visual alerts, captioning or communication support.



**Myth:** Deaf people cannot hear anything.

**Fact:** Hearing levels vary widely. Some individuals may hear certain sounds or frequencies, while others may not hear anything at all.



**Myth:** Auslan is more basic than English.

**Fact:** Auslan is a rich language with its own syntax and grammar. Auslan can convey complex concepts. However, it does not share the same vocabulary structure as English.

# COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

The following are some of communication preferences often used by the Deaf community. Always ask your Deaf employees what their preferred communication method is and make the necessary accommodations.



Auslan



Lip-reading



Auslan interpreters



Written communication



Voice to text



Real-time captioning

# ESSENTIAL TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Creating an inclusive and respectful workplace for Deaf employees involves adopting strategies that ensure clear, accessible communication. Below are some of the essential elements of this communication. By focusing on these key areas, organisations can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment where Deaf employees can thrive, feel included and contribute fully to the workplace.

## Use clear and simple communication

- Be direct and concise. If using jargon or acronyms, ensure employees have knowledge of their meaning prior to introducing them into the conversation.
- Supplement verbal communication with written instructions or summaries, especially for complex information.

## Ensure visibility and accessibility

- Face the employee directly, maintain eye contact and ensure good lighting for lip-reading.
- Provide access to Auslan interpreters and assistive technologies such as real-time captioning, Video Relay Interpreting (VRI) and Video Relay Services (VRS).

## Provide visual support

- Use diagrams, charts and demonstrations to support verbal and written communication.
- Share meeting materials in advance to allow preparation (this can include items such as slides or agendas).

## Encourage feedback and check understanding

- Confirm comprehension after discussions and invite employees to ask questions or provide feedback.

## Adapt to individual preferences

- Respect each employee's preferred communication method, whether it is sign language, text or assistive devices.

## Foster an inclusive environment

- Minimise background noise and distractions in the workplace.
- Provide Deaf Awareness Training for all non-deaf employees to increase their understanding of communication barriers and promote inclusivity.

# ABOUT AUSLAN

## What is Auslan?

Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the primary language of the Deaf community in Australia. It has its own grammar and structure, distinct from English, and relies on hand shapes, facial expressions and body movements to convey meaning.

## Why is Auslan important at work?

Supporting Auslan in the workplace promotes equal opportunities, better communication and a more inclusive culture.

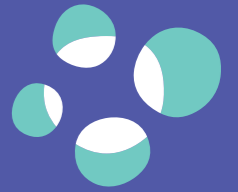
|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>Inclusive workplaces</b>    | Learning basic Auslan fosters a supportive environment where Deaf employees feel valued.  |
| <b>Effective communication</b> | Auslan enables Deaf employees to participate in meetings and workplace discussions fully. |
| <b>Better customer service</b> | Auslan skills enhance the service for Deaf clients, fostering trust and loyalty.          |
| <b>Fewer barriers</b>          | Using Auslan or interpreters reduces misunderstandings and strengthens teamwork.          |

## Tips for communicating in Auslan

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Learn Auslan</b>       | Start with greetings and common phrases.         |
| <b>Use visual cues</b>    | Face the person directly in well-lit areas.      |
| <b>Be patient</b>         | Allow time for clarification when needed.        |
| <b>Offer interpreters</b> | Use Auslan interpreters for complex discussions. |

For further information on Auslan classes, please contact organisations that employ Deaf trainers to teach the language in a culturally affirming manner.

# HOW TO BOOK AUSLAN INTERPRETERS FOR THE WORKPLACE



## STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE NEED

- Determine if an interpreter is required for interviews, meetings, training sessions, reviews or events.
- Contact JobAccess to apply for free interpreting under the Employment Assistance Fund.
- Confirm the Deaf employee's preferred communication method. If they use Auslan, ask them if they have preferred interpreters that they use.

## STEP 2: SELECT A PROVIDER

- Select a reputable agency that provides NAATI-certified interpreters with experience in workplace settings.

## STEP 3: BOOK IN ADVANCE

- Provide details of the date, time, location (or virtual link), duration, purpose and any special requirements or information to the organisation through which you are booking the interpreter.

## STEP 4: CONFIRM ACCESSIBILITY

- Share agendas or materials with the interpreter before the meeting.

## STEP 5: VERIFY THE BOOKING

- Confirm the interpreter's availability and inform the Deaf employee of the arrangements.

## STEP 6: MANAGE CHANGES

- Notify the agency of any changes or cancellations.
- Arrange a replacement if needed.

### IMPORTANT!

As the employer, it is your responsibility to book the interpreter for your Deaf employees unless they specify otherwise. Booking early and providing clear details ensures effective and inclusive communication.

# BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH AUSLAN INTERPRETERS

## Before the meeting

- Share agendas slides, and key documents with the interpreter.
- Brief them on the meeting's purpose, participant roles and any technical terms.

## During the meeting

- Speak directly to the Deaf employee, not the interpreter.
- Maintain a steady pace and make eye contact with the Deaf employee.
- Ensure good lighting and clear sightlines for effective communication.
- Provide breaks for interpreters, especially in sessions lasting over an hour.

## After the meeting

- Ask the Deaf employee for feedback to improve future sessions.
- Respect the interpreter's role as a facilitator – avoid asking for opinions or extra tasks.
- Trust interpreters to maintain confidentiality.

## Additional considerations

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Flexibility</b>       | Be open to adjusting the setup or pacing if needed.                |
| <b>Professionalism</b>   | Treat interpreters with respect as equal participants.             |
| <b>Deaf interpreters</b> | Interpreters may be required for complex communication needs.      |
| <b>Deafblind access</b>  | Arrange appropriate interpreting services for Deafblind employees. |
| <b>Events</b>            | Plan for interpreters in conferences and webinars.                 |

Following these practices ensures clear, inclusive communication for everyone involved.

# DEAF AWARENESS TRAINING

Deaf Awareness Training (DAT) equips staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to communicate effectively with Deaf individuals, thereby fostering an inclusive and accessible workplace.

## Key areas covered

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Understanding deafness</b>   | Overview of hearing loss types, causes and the impact of deafness on daily work and communication.  |
| <b>Communication strategies</b> | Clear speaking techniques, use of visual aids, basic Auslan introduction, and guidance on using interpreters and Video Remote Interpreting (VRI). |
| <b>Cultural awareness</b>       | Insight into Deaf culture, challenging stereotypes and promoting respectful interactions.   |
| <b>Workplace accessibility</b>  | Guidance on reasonable adjustments (e.g. assistive devices, visual alarms) and creating accessible spaces.  |
| <b>Legal responsibilities</b>   | Understanding employer obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and promoting equal opportunities.                               |

## Benefits

DAT enhances communication, promotes inclusion, ensures legal compliance and improves customer service by fostering a supportive environment for Deaf employees and clients. Deaf organisations offer DAT courses for organisations.

## How to Book

For more information on Deaf Awareness Training contact [Deaf Connect](#).

# WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS

## What is JobAccess?

JobAccess is a federally funded program for people with disability, employers and service providers. JobAccess provides free and confidential advice delivered by a team of experts who can direct you to support services and answer your questions on matters relating to disability employment. JobAccess also coordinates workplace adjustments and modifications through the Employment Assistance Fund (EAF).

## What is the Employment Assistance Fund (EAF)?

The Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) is an Australian Government initiative that supports employers in creating inclusive workplaces for employees with disabilities, including those who are Deaf. It provides financial support and practical assistance to make workplaces more accessible and inclusive.

The EAF offers funding to employers from the interview stage onwards and can provide funding for workplace modifications, Auslan classes and services that support employees with disabilities. This includes customised solutions for Deaf employees to ensure they can work effectively and comfortably.

## Benefits of the EAF

The EAF can help employers cover the costs of:

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Communication supports | Funding for Auslan interpreters, captioning services and other communication aids for meetings, training and events. |
| Assistive technology   | Financial support for specialised equipment, such as captioning software or communication applications.              |
| Workplace adjustments  | Funding for changes to the physical workspace, such as improved lighting or signage, to increase accessibility.      |
| Training               | Support for DAT or Auslan classes to improve understanding and communication in the workplace.                       |

## How to apply

Employers can seek advice and apply for funding through the [JobAccess](#) website or by contacting the JobAccess helpline for guidance. The service offers free expert advice and assistance to help employers navigate the process and make the necessary changes.

# ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Below is a list of the best-known apps or services designed to enhance communication and support for Deaf employees in the workplace. Always ensure you ask the Deaf person for their accessibility and service provider preferences:

## Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs)

Assistive Listening Devices amplify sound to enhance hearing in various environments, such as meetings, classrooms or public spaces.

[ALDS Australia](#)

## Assistive technologies for Deafblind

Deafblind individuals use a range of communication methods tailored to their needs, including tactile interpreting, braille and adaptive technologies.

[Deaf Connect](#)

[Able Australia](#)

[Vision Australia](#)

[Deafblind Information Australia](#)

## Captioning services

Captioning service providers provide real-time captioning for live events and closed captioning for recorded media. Popular organisations that provide these services include:

[Deaf Connect](#)

[Bradley Reporting](#)

[Ai Media](#)

## Video Relay Services (VRS)

Video Relay Service, also known as VRS, is a service that allows Deaf individuals to connect with an interpreter via video, who will in turn establish a telephone call to the telephone user (or vice versa). Once the telephone call has been established, communication between the Deaf individual and the telephone user is facilitated with the interpreter online.

[National Relay Service \(NRS\)](#)

[Convo Australia](#)

## Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)

Video Remote Interpreting, also known as VRI, is a service that provides real-time, remote interpreters via video conferencing technology so that Auslan users and non-Auslan users can communicate with each other without the need for an interpreter to be physically located at the same location.

[Deaf Connect](#)

[Convo Australia](#)

[Auslan Services](#)

[Expression Australia](#)

# ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES CONTINUED

## Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) platforms

Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) allows access to Auslan interpreters over the internet. Online platforms that are commonly used for VRI include:



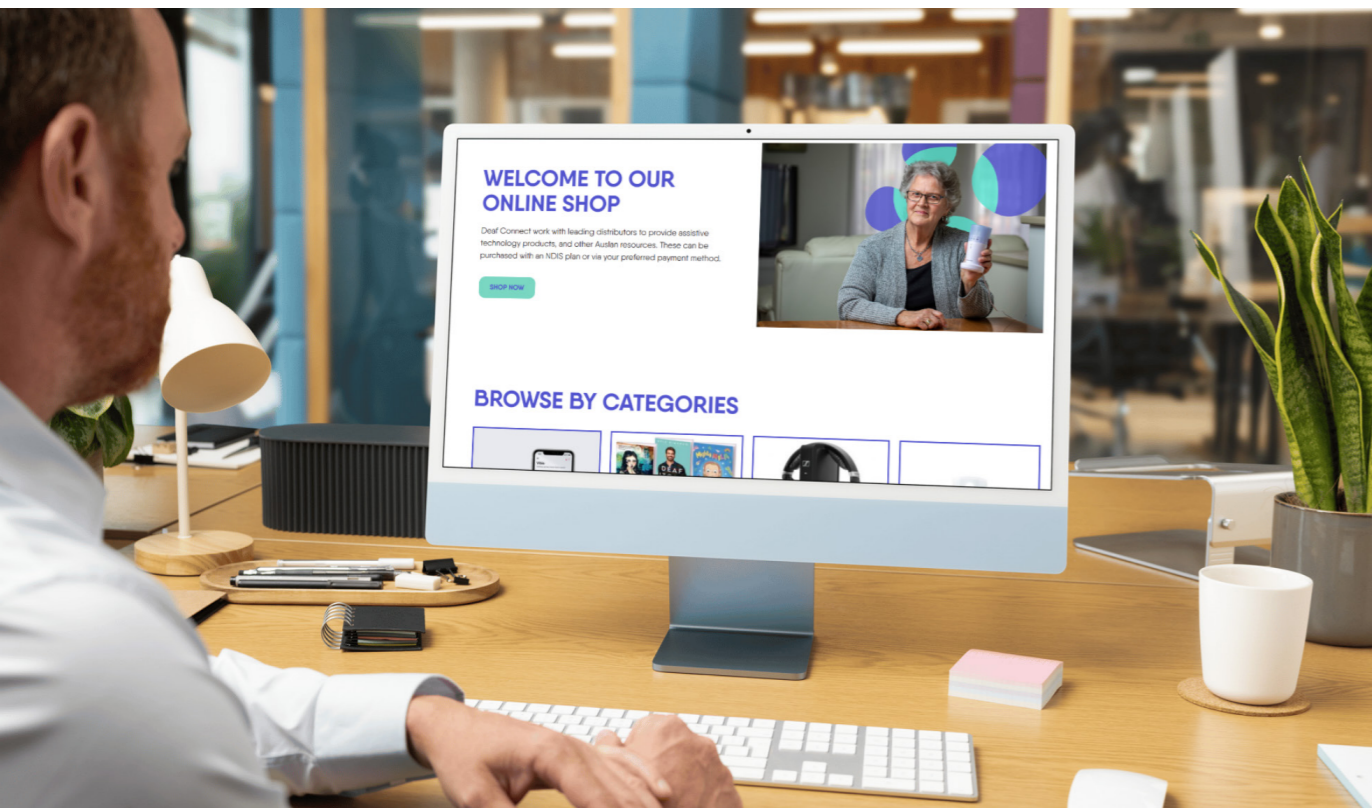
## Visual notification systems

Visual notification systems provide Deaf alerts for doorbells, alarms or phones using lights or visual signals to indicate that they're being contacted.



## Voice-to-text technology

Voice-to-text technology converts spoken words into written text in real time, such as during meetings or lectures.



# PROMOTING AWARENESS OF INCLUSION

Fostering an inclusive workplace starts with building awareness and understanding. Organisations can:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Offer Auslan classes</b>                  | Encourage staff to learn basic Auslan to improve communication with Deaf colleagues.             |
| <b>Host voice-off lunches</b>                | Create opportunities for employees to communicate non-verbally, promoting empathy and awareness. |
| <b>Provide Deaf Awareness Training (DAT)</b> | Educate staff on Deaf culture and best practices for communication.                              |
| <b>Use inclusive communication tools</b>     | Implement visual aids, captioned videos and accessible technology to support Deaf employees.     |

## Celebrating with the Deaf community

Participating in Deaf community events strengthens workplace inclusivity and demonstrates your support and awareness. Key events among the Deaf community include:

| What                                       | When                | Why   |
|--|---------------------|---|
| <b>Auslan Day</b>                          | <b>13 April</b>     | Auslan Day celebrates the recognition of Auslan as a language of the Australian Deaf community and the date on which the Auslan dictionary was first published.   |
| <b>National Week of Deaf People (NWDP)</b> | <b>September</b>    | The National Week of Deaf People (NWDP) is a week-long celebration within the Australian Deaf community, typically coinciding with the International Day of Sign Languages. The NWDP celebrates the Australian Deaf community, its language (Auslan), culture and history, and raises awareness while showcasing the Deaf community's achievements. |
| <b>International Day of Sign Languages</b> | <b>23 September</b> | The International Day of Sign Languages is celebrated annually around the world to recognise and raise awareness of the importance of sign language and the rights of people who are Deaf.  |

By promoting awareness and celebrating with the Deaf community, organisations can create a more inclusive and supportive workplace.

# ABOUT DEAF CONNECT'S SERVICES

Deaf Connect is a national whole-of-life service provider and not-for-profit organisation committed to delivering services to Deaf Australians. Below is a summary of some of the services offered by Deaf Connect that can help your organisation create an inclusive workspace for your Deaf employees.

## TRANSLATIONS SERVICE

Deaf Connect's Auslan Translations Service collaborates with a range of government and non-government organisations to produce high-quality video content in Auslan, translating written or spoken English into accessible videos for individuals who use Auslan as their primary language.



## AUSLAN INTERPRETING

Deaf Connect is the leading interpreting agency in Australia. With interpreters accredited through the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), Deaf Connect's interpreting team will be able to identify the right interpreter for your employee and your organisation and can provide organisations with onsite or Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) services.

## AUSLAN AND DEAF AWARENESS TRAINING

Deaf Connect's team of experienced Auslan trainers delivers a broad range of community classes and accredited courses in Auslan, as well as workplace DAT, tailored to your organisation.



## BUILDING INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

# GLOSSARY

Unpacking the terms used in this Toolkit.



# GLOSSARY

## Accommodations

Accommodations are workplace modifications that ensure equal access and inclusion, such as assistive technologies, Auslan interpreters and modified communication methods.

## Adjustments

Adjustments are changes to the work environment, processes, or tasks to support effective role performance (e.g. communication methods, workplace setup modifications).

## Assistive Devices

Assistive devices are tools or technologies that support communication, safety and accessibility (e.g. hearing aids, captioning services, flashing fire alarms, video relay services).

## Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs)

Assistive listening devices, also known as ALDs, are tools that amplify sound to help individuals with hearing loss in various settings (e.g. personal amplifiers, FM systems, induction loops).

## Assistive Technologies (AT)

Assistive technologies are devices, software, or systems that enhance accessibility (e.g. captioning software, video relay services, speech-to-text apps, hearing aids).

## Auslan (Australian Sign Language)

Auslan is derived from 'Australian Sign Language'. Auslan is the primary visual language of the Australian Deaf community and uses hand shapes, facial expressions and body movements. Auslan has its own grammar and syntax, making it distinct from English.

## Auslan Interpreter

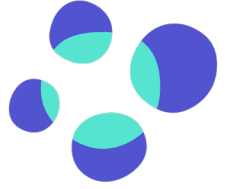
An Auslan Interpreter is a person who interprets between Auslan and spoken language or vice versa, enabling communication between Deaf, deafblind and or hard-of-hearing individuals and non-signers.

## Auslan Translator

An Auslan Translator is a person who converts written English into Auslan or vice versa, typically through video or written formats, to ensure accessibility for Deaf individuals.

## GLOSSARY

### Building Inclusive Workplaces



## Blog

A blog is a social media or website post that contains a short, written description and/or comments. Often, blogs also contain links or videos to provide additional information.

## Captioning

Captioning is the process of displaying text on a screen that provides a visual representation of spoken dialogue and sounds, ensuring that Deaf individuals have access to conversations.

## deaf / Deaf

'deaf' (lowercase) refers to the audiological condition of hearing loss, while 'Deaf' (uppercase) refers to individuals who identify as part of the Deaf community and use Auslan as their primary language.

## Deafblind

Deafblind refers to individuals with combined vision and hearing loss who utilise various communication methods, including tactile signing, braille and assistive technologies. Deafblind refers to individuals with combined vision and hearing loss who utilise various communication methods, including tactile signing, braille and assistive technologies.

## Deaf Awareness Training (DAT)

Deaf Awareness Training, also known as DAT, is training that educates individuals and organisations on the needs and communication methods of Deaf employees to promote inclusive and effective interactions.

## Disability Employment Service (DES)

The Disability Employment Service (DES) is an initiative of the Australian Government designed to assist people with disabilities, injuries or health conditions in preparing for, finding or retaining employment.

## Disability Employment Service (DES) Providers

Disability Employment Service (DES) Providers support employees in finding a job and keeping people in their jobs. Their role also connects employers with employees seeking employment.



## Employment Assistance Fund (EAF)

The Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) is an Australian Government initiative that supports employers in creating inclusive workplaces for employees with disabilities, including Deaf people. It provides financial support and practical assistance to make workplaces more accessible. The EAF offers funding to employers for workplace modifications and services that support employees with disabilities. This includes customised solutions for Deaf employees to ensure they can work effectively and comfortably.

## Interpreting

Interpreting is the process of converting spoken language to sign language (e.g., Auslan) or vice versa, enabling communication between Deaf individuals and non-sign language users.

## Interpreter

An interpreter is a trained and qualified professional who facilitates communication by translating spoken language into sign language (e.g. Auslan) and vice versa. In Australia, qualified interpreters are registered under NAATI (the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters).

## JobAccess

JobAccess is a federally funded program for people with disability, employers and service providers. Their services include a dedicated advice service delivered by a team of frontline experts, providing free and confidential advice. They can answer your questions on matters related to disability employment or direct you to other support services. JobAccess also coordinates workplace adjustments and modifications through the Employment Assistance Fund (EAF).

## Lip-reading

Lip-reading is a technique that individuals use to interpret the mouth patterns on another person's lips to understand what the other person is saying. It is estimated that only about 30 to 40 per cent of English sounds can be accurately read on the lips.

## Live captioning

See real-time captioning.

## Note-taking

Note-taking provides a written record of a meeting or discussion, making it accessible for those who rely on visual information. This ensures that they do not miss any important points discussed in the meeting and allows them to follow along more easily, contributing to the discussion.

## Real Time Captioning

Real-time captioning also known as live captioning is the immediate conversion of spoken language into text, displayed live on screens (e.g. tablet devices or laptops) during meetings, presentations or broadcasts, to ensure accessibility.

## Transcripts/Transcriptions

Transcripts or transcriptions are written records of spoken language created either in real time or from audio recordings to provide a text version of verbal communication for accessibility and reference. Transcriptions are generally used among the Deaf community in addition to Auslan interpreters so that users who rely on interpreters do not need to take their eyes off the interpreter to take notes.

## Translating

Translating is the process of converting written or spoken content in one language (e.g. English) into another language (e.g. Auslan) to ensure effective understanding. For the Deaf community, translations into Auslan are vital to ensure that information is provided to them in their first language – Auslan.

## Translator

A translator is a trained professional who converts written content from one language (e.g. English) into another (e.g. Auslan) to ensure clarity and understanding.

## Video Conferencing

Video conferencing is a technology that allows individuals to communicate in real time via video and audio over the internet.

### Building Inclusive Workplaces



#### Video Relay Service (VRS)

Video Relay Service, also known as VRS, is a service that allows Deaf individuals to connect with an interpreter via video, who will, in turn, establish a telephone call to the telephone user (or vice versa). Once the telephone call has been established, communication between the Deaf individual and the telephone user is facilitated by the online interpreter.

#### Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)

Video Remote Interpreting, also known as VRI, is a service that provides real-time remote interpreters via video conferencing technology, allowing Auslan users and non-Auslan users to communicate with each other without the need for an interpreter to be physically present at the same location.

#### Visual Aids

Visual aids, such as images, charts, or diagrams, are tools used to enhance communication and understanding, particularly for individuals with reduced hearing or vision.

#### Vlog

Vlogs are short videos (in Auslan) that can be used to post on social media platforms or websites.

#### Workplace Accommodations/Adjustments/Modifications

These are accommodations, adjustments or modifications to the work environment or processes that support employees with disabilities, including Deaf individuals, to ensure equal access and inclusion.



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<https://deafconnect.org.au/signs-of-success>

**deaf**   
**connect**

Serving our community.  
Sharing our culture.