



**Submission to the New South Wales Electoral Commission's
Technology Assisted Voting Review**

January 2023



Deaf Connect welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the New South Wales (NSW) Electoral Commission's Technology Assisted Voting Review. For the purposes of this submission, we will be using 'deaf' when referring to all individuals with varying degrees of deafness. This includes members of the community who identify as Deaf, deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing and members of the Deaf community who identify as culturally Deaf and primarily communicate in Auslan. This submission is in response to the Issue and Questions paper in relation to the needs of deaf voters in New South Wales.

The current settings for technology assisted voting in NSW is insufficient in addressing the needs of deaf voters in accessing Auslan to independently cast a secret and verifiable vote. Through ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD) in 2008, Australia enshrined deaf people's right to access their sign language in Australia (Auslan) through various disability discrimination legislations underpinned by the following CPRD articles:

- **CPRD Article 9:** Outlines the governments responsibility to provide sign language interpreters to access information and communication both including via online platforms
- **CPRD Article 21:** Allows deaf people to choose to give and receive official communications in the way they choose, including in sign languages.
- **CPRD Article 29:** Requires the governments to guarantee and promote the political rights to deaf people

Deaf Connect recommends that NSW Electoral Commission amends the current settings of technology assisted voting to include Auslan video relay interpreting to maintain the integrity of the electoral system through compliance with the CPRD and Disability Inclusion Act (2014) in NSW. This would demonstrate commitment to the access and inclusion to deaf voters in NSW where it is estimated that size of the Deaf community is at 30,000 people with New South Wales representing 27% of the population¹. Deaf Connect acknowledges that electoral commissions across Australia have faced and will continue to face practical implementation issues in providing access to Auslan interpreters across all voting centres for the entirety of election periods including the following:

- National shortage of Auslan interpreters
- Geographic distribution of Auslan interpreters
- Lack of deaf awareness by electoral commission staff and volunteers
- Disengagement of deaf voters as a disenfranchised cohort



Deaf Connect recognises the importance of contingency planning however does not believe pre-registration for those eligible voters to use technology assisted voting will resolve the practical implementation issues for the provision of Auslan interpreters. Deaf Connect recommends that the NSW Electoral Commission explores the feasibility of providing access to Auslan interpreters throughout the voting period both onsite at voting centres and remotely via personally networked devices. The delivery of the Auslan interpreting should be facilitated a tender process to maintain consistency and faith in the electoral system across federal, state/territory and council levels.

The access and inclusion of deaf voters should not be restricted to technology assisted voting alone, through the means of Auslan video relay interpreting. Deaf Connect recommends that the NSW Electoral Commission co-designs and implements a targeted engagement strategy with the Deaf community to ensure the electoral services are relevant, accessible and inclusive to ensure deaf voters can understand and participate in the democratic process.

Deaf Connect also wishes to take this opportunity to recognise deafblind people whose access and inclusion needs require further consideration such as their access to Auslan tactile interpreters which isn't available through video relay interpreting.

Summary of recommendations:

1. The NSW Electoral Commission amends the current settings of technology assisted voting to include Auslan video relay interpreting facilitated by a tender process.
2. The NSW electoral commission explores the feasibility of providing access to Auslan interpreters throughout the voting period both onsite at voting centres and remotely via personally networked devices.
3. The NSW Electoral Commission develops an engagement strategy with deaf citizens



References:

1. Deaf Connect. (2022) Our Culture, Our Value; The Social and Economic Benefits of Auslan.
https://deafconnect.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/SOCIAL_ECONOMIC_BENEFITS_OF-AUSLAN_v3_DIGITAL.pdf