



Submission to the NDIA: Protecting the Viability of the Auslan Interpreting Workforce

Submitted by Ryan Gook, CEO – Auslan Services

Introduction

Auslan Services is a nationally recognised provider of Auslan-English interpreting services, supporting thousands of Deaf Australians across education, health, employment, and community settings. We are writing to strongly advocate for the retention of the **120-minute minimum call-out fee** as part of any NDIS pricing and service delivery reforms related to interpreting services.

Why the 120-Minute Minimum Matters

The 2-hour minimum is not an arbitrary pricing strategy—it is a **critical structural safeguard** that underpins workforce stability, client choice, and equitable access to qualified interpreters. We urge the NDIA to **avoid repeating the policy failures seen in the spoken language interpreting sector**, where the removal of minimums led to widespread dissatisfaction, disengagement, and loss of talent.

1. Interpreter Conditions and Income Viability

Most Auslan interpreters are **casual workers** with no leave entitlements. The 120-minute minimum ensures:



- Fair compensation for travel, preparation, and availability
- A sustainable income model for skilled professionals
- Better continuity of service, especially for complex or high-needs clients

Without this safeguard, we risk losing interpreters from the sector—at a time when **demand is rising and supply is shrinking**.

2. Lessons from Spoken Language Sector Failures

The reduction of minimum fees in spoken language interpreting led to:

- **Interpreter attrition**
- Reduced service availability
- Professional dissatisfaction and collective union action

These consequences are well documented and should serve as a warning. We urge the NDIA to **learn from this precedent** rather than replicate it.

3. Impact on Access and Quality of Service

Shorter minimum bookings:

- Reduce interpreter willingness to accept short jobs
- Result in **last-minute gaps**, especially in rural and remote areas
- Lead to a drop in **interpreter preparation and quality**



Auslan Services prioritises participant choice and high-quality matches. Shorter minimums make that increasingly unviable.

4. Transparent and Fair Pricing Structure

Our current model charges a flat rate for up to 120 minutes, increasing in 15-minute blocks thereafter. This allows for:

- **Procurement consistency**
 - **Client budgeting confidence**
 - A fair deal for both interpreters and participants
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5. Backed by Sector Evidence

We refer the NDIA to the following key reports and submissions:

- **ASLIA's submission** to the NDIS Price Review, revealing widespread underemployment among interpreters
- **Deaf Australia's position**, which affirms the 2-hour minimum as a sector-wide expectation
- **Professionals Australia & TIA advocacy**, which shows the dangers of reducing minimums in other interpreting streams
- **Department of Health-commissioned review** into Auslan in primary care, highlighting workforce pressures and retention concerns



Each of these reinforces the need for stable and fair conditions to avoid long-term system failure.

Conclusion

We respectfully but firmly recommend that the NDIA:

- **Retain the 120-minute minimum call-out fee** for Auslan interpreting services
- Recognise the risks of reducing or removing this condition
- Work with sector leaders to ensure a sustainable, high-quality, and culturally appropriate interpreting workforce

Our sector is committed to delivering equitable communication access for Deaf Australians. This commitment must be supported by policies that protect the viability and dignity of the professionals who make it possible.

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