

# Understanding the National Shortage of Auslan Interpreters

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# About Expression Australia

A leading service provider for Deaf and hard of hearing Australians, providing services and programs across all stages of life.

**VISION:** our clients and our community live in an accessible, inclusive society with equal opportunity in all areas of life.



# Auslan Connections

A joint venture between Expression Australia and Deaf Services Ltd., Auslan Connections is a national not-for-profit language access service providing quality Auslan interpreting, live captioning and notetaking services for Australians across all areas of life.



# Auslan

The recognised language of the Australian Deaf community.

A visual spatial language.

Unique to Australia and distinct to English.



# The Deaf Community

The concept of the Australian Deaf Community refers to people who are either born (severely to profoundly) deaf to Deaf families who use Auslan or people born with hearing loss into families where the parents hear, but who learn sign language.

Members of the Deaf community identify with other culturally and linguistically diverse communities.



# Interpreting

Interpreting is a complex task requiring fluency in both Auslan and English, understanding what is said in the source language, and then rebuilding lexical items, grammar and syntax to the target language.



# 2016 Census – Auslan Users

STATE/TERRITORY	2016	
	SIGN POPULATION	GENERAL POPULATION
New South Wales	3,158	7,480,230
Victoria	3,130	5,926,624
Queensland	2,844	4,703,192
Western Australia	1,096	2,474,414
South Australia	959	1,676,653
Tasmania	241	509,961
Australian Capital Territory	171	397,393
Northern Territory	86	228,838
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11,685</b>	<b>23,397,301</b>

# Benefits for Deaf people accessing interpreting support

- Improved access to education and employment
- Increased access to a greater range of services
- Opportunities to develop social bonds and friendships
- A sense of belonging, self-worth and identity
- Less reliance by Deaf people on family, friends and volunteers
- Increased community awareness, responsiveness and appreciation of Auslan

## No interpreters?

Without an interpreter, communication between Deaf individuals who use Auslan as their preferred language and others is compromised.

Using notes, lip-reading, or an unqualified interpreter means that a Deaf person receives less favourable service. At best, misunderstanding occurs and at worst, life threatening consequences may result.

# The Aspex Report (2018)

Partnership between  
Expression Australia and the  
Victorian State Government  
to analyse the  
supply/demand issue of  
Auslan interpreting

aspex consulting

VICDEAF

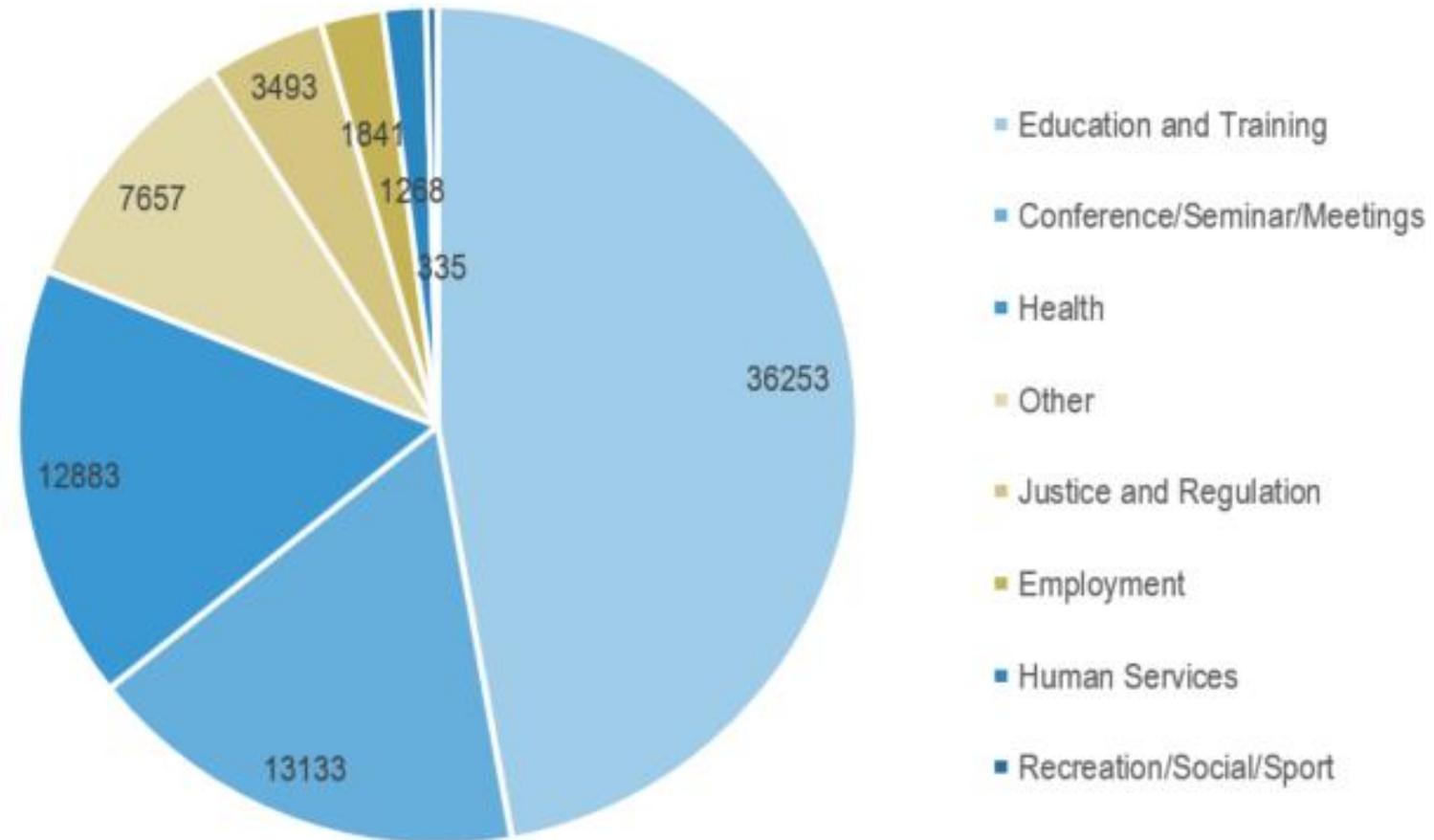
## Workforce Capacity Project

Final Report  
11 July 2018

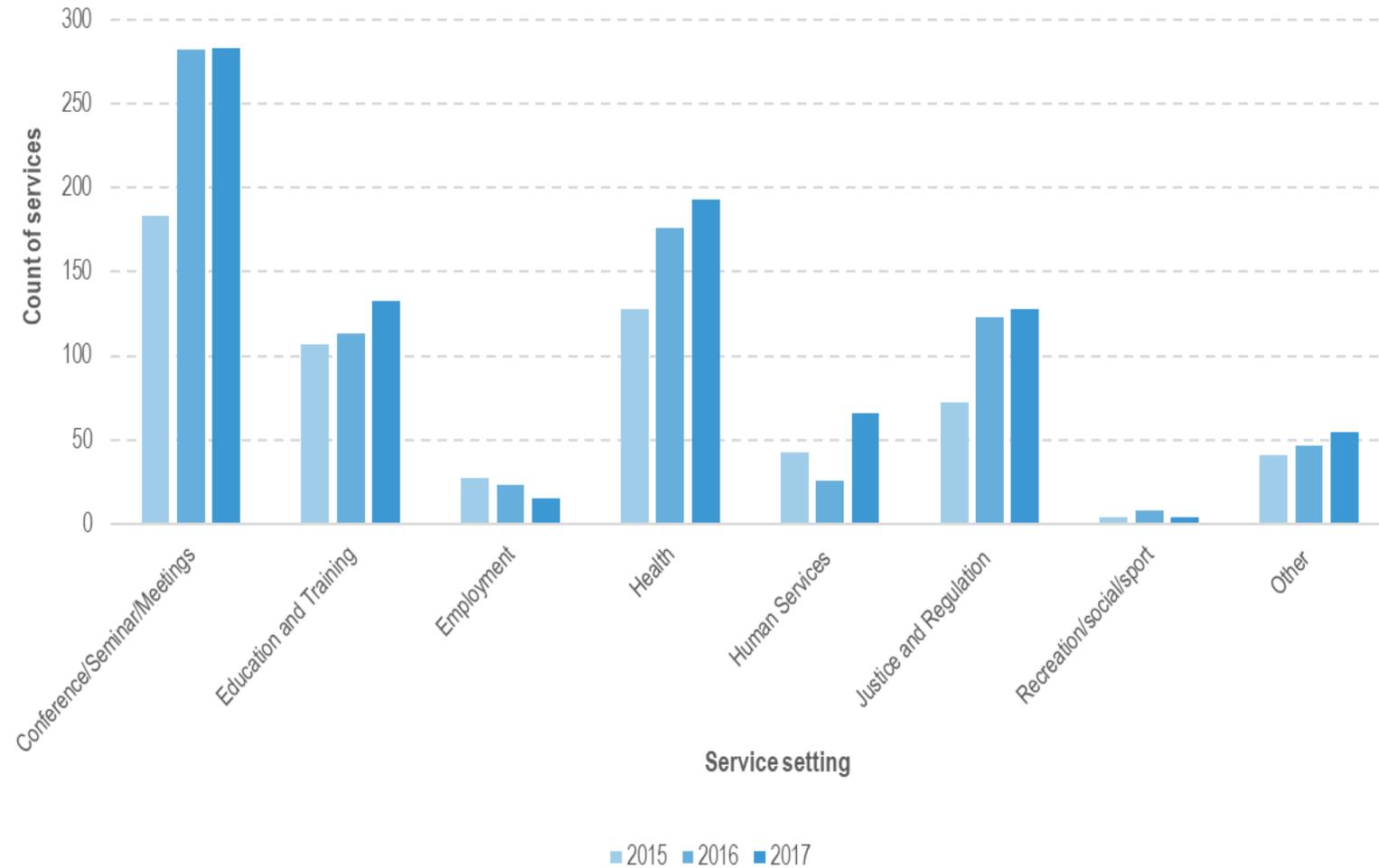


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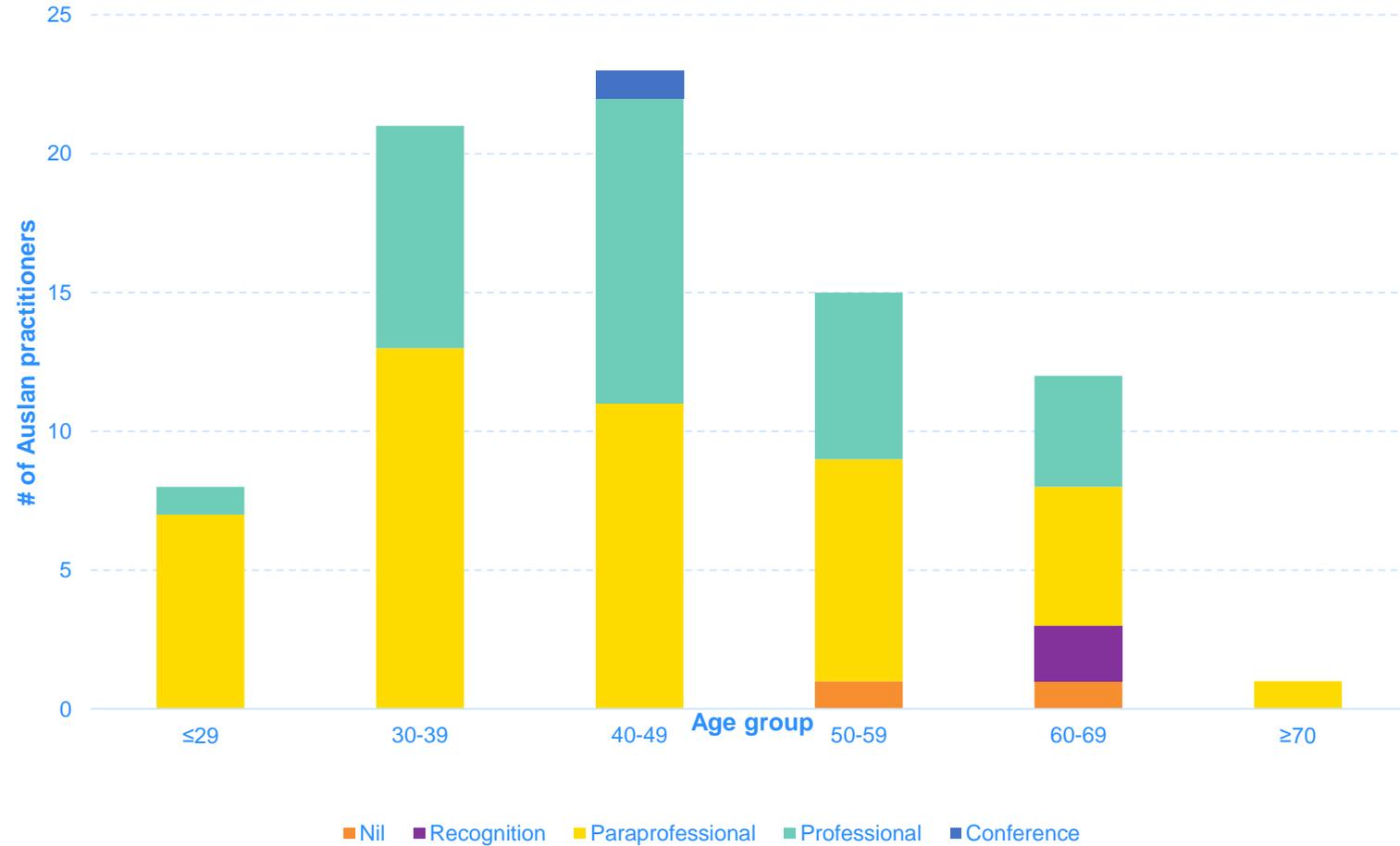
# Educational settings make up almost 50% of all interpreting assignments



# Unable To Service data shows a significant and concerning trend



# An Ageing Workforce



# Retention is increasingly challenging

- **40% intend to leave the workforce within 1-6 years**
- **In the Victorian context, this would mean losing 16 interpreters per annum**
- **Attributed to:**
  - Lack of job security
  - Physical health risks related to Occupational Overuse Syndrome
  - Professional isolation
  - Exposure to sensitive subject matters
  - Limited career opportunities
  - Lack of reward and recognition

# Impact of the National Disability Insurance Scheme

A social insurance scheme providing Australians with disability access to funding and supports to enable participation in society.

Auslan users are receiving NDIS packages that include funding for social interpreting, ranging from 10 to 1,000+ hours per annum.



## So, is the future bleak?

**Yes and no.**

**It is an extremely challenging time, and will continue to be so over the coming years as the NDIS rolls out nationally.**

**But there are plans and actions underway, short, medium and long term, that will require a collaborative approach.**

# What is being done to address this?

- **Delivery of a pilot Native Auslan Users Interpreting Course (partnership between SA & VIC) – endorsed by NAATI**
- **Flexible and varied employment models**
- **Specialisation – higher education, mental health, justice, etc.**
- **Promotion of Auslan interpreting as a genuine career pathway & study stream, and not an add-on after studying Auslan**
- **Retention of current workforce through targeted professional development, competitive remuneration and career flexibility**

# Leveraging the high level of interest in Auslan

- **In Victoria, Auslan is the 5<sup>th</sup> most taught language in Victorian schools, out of 51 languages**
- **The prevalence of Auslan interpreters on TV has also led to an increase in public awareness and appreciation of Auslan and the importance of providing access**
- **Expression Australia has experienced a 450% increase in the number of enrolments in our community courses over the last three years, on top of a 200% in interpreting bookings**
- **Significant strategic & collaborative work is being put into creating sustainable, attractive career pathways for people interested in Auslan – from kindergarten throughout to university**

# Considerations for Universities & TAFEs

- **Play an active role in promoting Auslan within your institution – deliver Auslan classes, awareness sessions, celebrate key days and events such as International Day of Signed Languages, National Week of Deaf People**
- **As a main employment option for Auslan interpreters, consider what role you can play in supporting and investing in the interpreting industry collaboratively to ensure sustainability, retention and attraction – you are key stakeholders**
- **Put the student at the centre of all decision making – and create a safe space for students to share their learning experiences – do this from the start**

# Considerations for Universities & TAFEs

- **Note the importance of consistency across the full subject – increases quality, confidence, understanding, rapport**
- **Understand that Deaf people can be fussy and choosy – this relates to our need to have the best possible match**
- **Recognise the crucial role the Booking Office/Agency play – they are your ally**
- **Access is not inclusion – the mere presence of an interpreter does not achieve full access. Understand the importance of awareness training for teaching staff and students, and lesson planning noting it'll be delivered in two languages**
- **Understand that tertiary interpreting is quite different to other sectors – there are interpreters who love and hate interpreting in higher education settings**

# Considerations for Universities & TAFEs

- **Encourage your teachers and tutors to work as a team alongside interpreters**
- **Planning well in advance – not always feasible, but critical if possible**
- **Viable alternatives should interpreters not be available include:**
  - Live captioning
  - Notetaking
  - Recording the lecture/tutorial
  - 1:1 session with the teaching team
- **Maintain a strong, respectful relationship with the student throughout and touch base regularly about the quality of interpreting**

# Questions ...

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